Research Report

The RurAction Network

Social Enterprises in Structurally Weak Rural Regions: Innovative Troubleshooters in Action

Handbook for Practitioners

IRS Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space

RurAction

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

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Content

1. Introduction

by Gabriela Christmann

Structurally weak rural regions are faced with major economic and social challenges. In comparison to predominantly urban regions, they are economically less productive. They provide fewer desired goods and services and the labour market offers few career opportunities. 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. Against this background, the respective regions have experienced considerable declines in populations and, in particular, a brain drain of the young. Downward spirals have been set in motion that have further reduced the number of economic opportunities.

Social enterprises are expected to help tackle problems in rural areas (Pless 2012, Schwarz 2014). They are renowned for their achievements in trying new things, finding new solutions, and choosing different methods. Social enterprises consider themselves partners of all who welcome improved conditions in structurally weak rural regions. The people who run these social enterprises have embarked on a mission to support residents when it comes to thinking "outside the box". Social enterprises can be defined as visionary, as they adopt an entrepreneurial approach to develop and implement innovative solutions to social problems (Christmann 2014, 45). An important feature of social enterprises is, thus, their ability to generate and implement social innovations. Typically, these activities are not oriented towards producing a profit, but instead focus on the production of additional social value in a specific community or society.

Interestingly, there is no unique concept of social innovation, rather there are two different research streams. The first stream highlights the fact that social innovations address existing problems by developing more collaborative and cohesive social relations, empowering the citizens, developing bottom-up initiatives, and encouraging the existence of more democratic governance systems (MacCallum 2009, Moulaert and Mehmood 2011). The other stream reflects interest in the actual structure of innovation processes and the lessons to be learnt from successful and unsuccessful initiatives alike (Gillwald 2000, Howaldt et al. 2018a, Christmann et al. 2018). In this way, researchers aim to understand how social innovations work. In most cases, novelties are acknowledged as not "absolute" but rather "relative" innovations since they often rely on already existing elements that are combined in a creative way.

In the following, we will report on results from a research project entitled "Social Entrepreneurship in Structurally Weak Rural Regions: Analysing Innovative Troubleshooters in Action (RurAction)" where the two streams of understanding related to social innovation were combined. Of importance to us is both an understanding of socially innovative processes and how more socially cohesive relations can be forged.

Meanwhile social actors build their hopes on the "transformative power" of social entrepreneurship and socially innovative solutions (Harris and Albury 2009, Osborne and Brown 2011, Jessop et al. 2013, Moulaert et al. 2017, Nyseth and Hamdouch 2019, Nyseth et al. 2019). Additionally, policy makers make use of the concept of social innovation. The European Commission, in particular, aims to empower people and drive change through social innovations (Bureau of European Policy Advisers 2010, see also Jenson and Harrison 2013, Visvizi et al. 2019). There are, however, still many questions about the conditions in which social innovation emerges and spreads in rural areas, how its potential

can be developed, what support strategies can be used to assist it, and what impacts it has on rural development.

The RurAction project aimed to tackle these questions by empirically analysing social enterprises and innovative initiatives in structurally weak rural areas in Europe and by understanding critical junctures that could pose a threat to their further progress, as well as favourable factors that are needed for the creation, implementation, and spatial spread of innovative solutions.

For the selection of the rural regions, we referred to the EU definition of a region on the NUTS 3 level.[1] These are the smallest units of the territorial nomenclature of the EU, with a population size between 150,000 and 800,000 inhabitants. The regions were selected according to the following criteria: they had to be predominantly rural, with a low population density of less than 300 inhabitants per square kilometre and lack an urban centre with more than 200,000 residents (European Commission 2019, 49f.). They are regarded as being structurally weak in their respective countries because their infrastructures are in decline, with consequences for the quality of life of the people who live there. Compared to other regions in the respective countries, they are faced with significant deficits in the provision of desirable goods and services. The regions show activities of social entrepreneurship, whereby, one of the focuses of the social entrepreneurial activity was regional development. In this contribution, we will refer to three of the selected regions[2] and their social enterprises as examples of the way in which social enterprises work: ADC Moura in Baixo Alentejo (Portugal), Otelo in the Mühlviertel (Austria), and Ballyhoura Development in the Mid-West region of Ireland. Thus, the presentation of our analyses and findings will not remain abstract, but will be illustrated with examples from concrete practices observed.

The contribution is meant to be a "Handbook for Practitioners". It is part of the dissemination strategy of the RurAction project and addresses the target group of social enterprises, as well as of other practitioners active in problem solving in the context of structurally weak rural regions. The main aim of the handbook is to help practitioners – both on the basis of our own empirical research and a literature review – to reflect with greater awareness on rural conditions with their specific challenges; potentials; dynamics; organisational forms and the hybridity of social enterprises; and their ways of doing things, i.e. of problem solving and innovating, while particularly looking at social innovation processes, helpful and impeding factors in the creation and the spatial spread of social innovations, and at different kinds of impact their actions may have. The handbook is not meant to be a toolbox with a list of recommendations.

Against this background, the RurAction "Handbook for Practitioners" is structured as follows:

in Chapter 2, the "Challenges and dynamics of structurally weak rural regions" are outlined. There, we analyse the specific economic, political, and cultural 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 entrepreneurship. We will focus on the development of specific regions, looking at the changes that may occur and future prospects, along with challenges and potentials for action. In Chapter 3, entitled "On a mission for the

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[1] See http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/nuts_nomenclature/introduction. [14.09.2020].
[2] All in all, seven European regions were selected: the Phthiotis region in Greece, the Baixo Alentejo region in Portugal, the Mühlviertel in Austria, the Uckermark in Germany, the Pilski region in Poland, Sjælland in Denmark, and the Mid-West region in Ireland.

region. How social entrepreneurial actors tackle problems in structurally weak rural regions," it is discussed how social entrepreneurial initiatives institutionally organise their work, how they collaborate with others, and how the sustainability of problem solving is ensured. In Chapter 4, we examine "The emergence, spread, and impact of social innovations in rural regions". Only little is known about the conditions of creating and implementing innovations in the countryside. We sketch how social innovations emerge and how they spread spatially. A neglected topic that we look at is how impacts on regional development can be tracked more systematically as an effect of socially innovative initiatives. The contribution is rounded off by the conclusions, where the main insights are summarised.

2. Challenges and dynamics of structurally weak rural regions
by Georgios Chatzichristos, Barraí Hennebry, and Sune W. Stoustrup

In the era of identifications and categorisations, characterising a region as "structurally weak" might be a redeeming means of obtaining subsidies or a condemnatory status that might perpetuate a rural decline. At the same time, defining social entrepreneurs as innovative troubleshooters might raise expectations too high. In this respect, a social entrepreneur can gain the status of a social hero or that of a failed agent that doesn't deliver. Identifications, in the end, do matter.

As the global financial crisis and neoliberal austerity precipitated various manifestations of socio-economic decline, orthodox planning and policymaking were exposed as being systematically negligent towards disadvantaged rural regions (Leick and Lang 2018). Social innovation breaks through this rural marginalisation (Bock 2016) by institutionalising novelty (Christmann et al. 2020) and anchoring alternative planning agendas (Moulaert et al. 2007). Along these lines, rural regions can re-attract interest by being linked with innovation and solidarity (Bock 2013). In this regard, the present section explores how rural residents can change their self-image and perception of their own role in providing answers to the challenges their region is facing, and by this allow for innovations to halt the rural decline.

We start this section by defining a structurally weak region, focusing on two implications of this weakness: the reduced ability of the region to withstand or recover from external shocks, such as economic crises – what has been termed "resilience" – and and from the negative discursive portrayal of the regions. We then present insights from our research in the regions of Baixo Alentejo in Portugal and Mühlviertel in Austria. We focus on the Mühlviertel as an example of changing 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 existing structures (Richter 2017). We draw 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 informative to understand the role that social enterprises can play in this process.

2.1. Structurally weak rural regions: Resilience and portraits

2.1.1. Rural Resilience

Rural regions are generally characterised as being less productive than urban regions, with the largest productivity gap being between remote rural regions and urban regions (OECD 2019). This lower

productivity can result in out-migration, as the younger population leave for better opportunities in urban regions. It is estimated that by 2050, the population of rural regions in the 28 European Union (EU) countries will fall by 7.9 million (Eurostat 2016). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has labelled this phenomenon as a "circle of decline" (OECD 2006). This refers to the long-term trend in rural regions, whereby a low population density means a lack of critical mass for services and infrastructure, low rates of business creation, and fewer job opportunities. While many rural regions find themselves locked in this "circle of decline", it is not true for all rural regions. Some rural regions are thriving, with an increasing population and investments. The task is to understand which rural regions are locked in the "circle of decline", why some are locked in decline while others are thriving, and how the regions have developed over time.

Figure 1: Circle of Decline
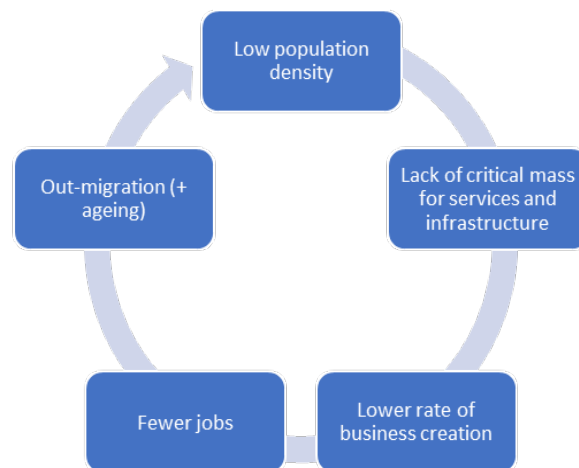
(Own representation)

The main characteristics of structurally weak rural regions can be gleaned from the "circle of decline" provided in figure 1. A rural region in decline is characterised by lower rates of business creation and out-migration. These are two facets that can be countered by active rural residents. That is to say, structurally strong rural regions are the ones that see increased business creation and in-migration. A look at the data for net business creation and migration rates can provide us with an understanding of the "circle of decline" in practice. This will be shown for two very different European rural regions later in this chapter.

Since the great recession of 2008-2009, there has been a surge of interest in the notions of "resilience" and "vulnerability" within the economic context (Fröhlich and Hassink 2018), but there is some confusion as to exactly what these concepts mean. When used in a regional economics context, Martin and Sunley (2015, 13) provide the following definition:

> *The capacity of a regional or local economy to withstand or recover from market, competitive and environmental shocks to its developmental growth path, if necessary by undergoing adaptive changes to its economic structures and its social and institutional arrangements, so as to maintain or restore its previous developmental path, or transit to a new sustainable path characterised by a fuller and more productive use of its physical, human and environmental resources.*

Put simply, resilience refers to how well an economy can absorb, adapt, and recover following a shock. These are short-term shocks (such as a recession), but they can produce long-term consequences. A resilient region is one that absorbs the shock and returns to its growth path or a higher growth path. A vulnerable economy is one that experiences a severe economic fall from the shock and results in a lower growth path.

2.1.2. Perceptions of rural areas

Rural areas are often associated with romanticised narratives of offering pure, simple, "authentic" lifestyles, as well as inhabiting national values and traditions. There are cases where the image of rural areas are Janus-faced; meaning that they are often simultaneously perceived as encompassing images of "rural idyll" and "rural decline": in this regard, the two counterposing images are not mutually exclusive, but exist at the same time, although to a greater or lesser extent. For example, in a Portuguese survey among urban residents (de Silva et al. 2016), almost half of the sample (46.9%) used words that refer to the rural as disadvantaged, backward, or deprived, when asked to provide three words to describe rural areas. 34.4% identified the rural as idyllic and 33.9% as a place of wellbeing.

Nonetheless, structurally weak rural areas most often are associated with geographical remoteness, primary sector dominance, insufficient infrastructure in terms of roads and public services, population decline, and, furthermore, with unemployment, out-migration, and an ageing population (Copus et al. 2011 referenced in Bock 2016, 5). This is also mirrored in the media, where rural regions face reoccurring negative discourses (Christmann 2016). These can further reduce economic opportunities by framing the regions as a less rewarding place for both economic development and living, thus, making them" spaces without any future prospects, spaces that are abandoned by society" (Christmann 2016, 365).

In general, we find similar patterns of how European rural areas are portrayed. Studies covering Estonia (Cf. Plüschke-Althof 2017, 2019), Sweden (Cf. Eriksson 2010), Denmark (Cf. Winther and Svendsen 2012), and Germany (Cf. Christmann 2016) all find that rural areas face negative associations. Examples of this include, being perceived as backwards and an unattractive place that is only inhabited by those "left behind" – the untalented, mainly old, and uncreative people (Eriksson 2010, 117; Cf. also Meyer 2017). They are often depicted as lagging behind, institutionally thin, empty, remote and inaccessible, economically and socially problematic, and politically dependent (e.g. on subsidiaries) (Plüschke-Althof 2016, 2018). Even more "colourful" ascriptions have also been used, such as being "rotten" (Winther and Svendsen 2012) or "dying out" (Christmann 2016).

Facing these negative portrayals of rural areas, the question of who has the responsibility for finding solutions and taking action to counter these developments is contested. While the rural residents are in some narratives portrayed as being "to blame", i.e. because they "cling to traditional lifestyles" instead of being "willing to change" (Eriksson 2010), the opposite can also be found where rural residents are portrayed as "active coping agents" coming up with solutions and taking action (Plüschke-Althof 2018). In this, we can see a distinction that is important for rural development: there are two positions that either push local actors to take responsibility or push for state responsibility (Plüschke-Althof 2019, 5).

2.2. Two faces of rurality: Baixo Alentejo and Mühlviertel

2.2.1. Rural resilience

Our two case regions have very different socio-economic statistical outlooks, see table 1. The Baixo Alentejo has a relatively low Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita (adjusted for current market prices) of 18,600 euros per inhabitant, only 62% of the EU average. On the other hand, Mühlviertel has a relatively higher Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of 28,000 euros, 93% of the European Union average (EU 28; latest available data from 2017). At the same time, the unemployment rate of Mühlviertel lies at 4.8%, while Baixo Alentejo has a significantly higher unemployment rate of 7.8%, though this is still lower than the EU average. Not least, the population density of Baixo Alentejo appears critically low, at 14.1 inhabitants per square kilometre, while that of Mühlviertel starts at 79.2.

The current statistical outlook indicates that we are talking about two different regions with significantly different economic resources. Nonetheless, in order to categorise the two regions as structurally non-weak and structurally weak, respectively, we have to explore their resilience. Looking specifically at the parameters that characterise a region as structurally weak or structurally vulnerable, the Net Business Creation[3] per thousand inhabitants has been calculated using data from Eurostat for both rural regions. The trend from 2008 to 2015 is represented in figure 2. The rates for both countries have also been included to provide a sense of the national contexts.

Table 1: Regional Economic Outlooks

Economic outlook (2017)/Regions	Mühlviertel	Baixo Alentejo	EU (28)
GDP per inhabitant	28,000	18,600	30,100
GDP per inhabitant as a percentage of the EU average	93%	62%	100%
Unemployment rate	4.8% (est.)	7.9%	8.2%
Population density per square kilometre	79.2	14.1	117.7

(Own representation based on https://www.pordata.pt/, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat)

As can be seen from the graph in figure 2, Portugal, and consequently Baixo Alentejo, has suffered since the great recession. Throughout the period, Baixo Alentejo has witnessed a net loss in terms of business creation, meaning that more enterprises were closing than opening. Since 2008, Mühlviertel, in a similar trend to Austria as a whole, experienced a slowing down of business creation; however, the rate remained positive, meaning that there have been more businesses opening than closing. From observing the "circle of declining rural regions", and noting the significantly lower population density in Baixo Alentejo compared to Mühlviertel, this is to be expected i.e. low population density leads to lower business creation.

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[3] Births of enterprises minus deaths of enterprises.

Figure 2: Net Business Creation.
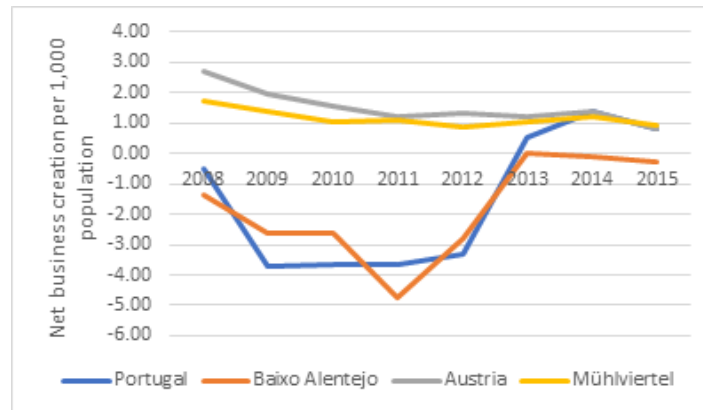
(Own representation based on Eurostat)

Additionally, net migration measures the difference between people moving in and out of a region. A negative rate of migration can be viewed as there being a lack of job opportunities for people within the region. Figure 3 shows the net migration for both regions and their respective countries from 2008 to 2015. The trend for Mühlviertel has generally been improving, while Baixo Alentejo has been showing signs of decline.

Figure 3: Net Migration.
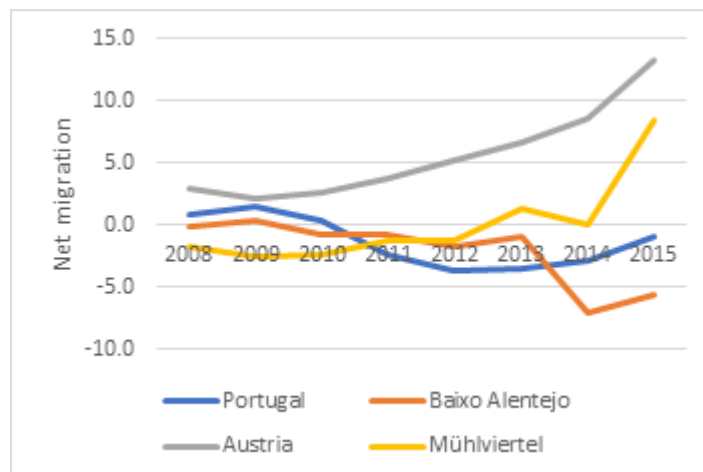
(Own representation based on Eurostat)

Statistical data show that Baixo Alentejo and Mühlviertel have been experiencing very different development situations in recent years, with both reflecting their countries respective trends. Mühlviertel has been witnessing positive net business creation and in-migration, while Baixo Alentejo has been confronted with negative net business creation and out-migration.

2.2.2. Changing the negative portrait

In our research in the Austrian region of Mühlviertel, we found a rural framing that was developed against a cultural background of networking and cooperation, reflected in the emblematic quote of one of the pioneers of the Mühlviertel region: not against each other, not beside each other, but only with each other. This has not always been the case; Mühlviertel had to go through an innovative process of re-framing its rural image. We experienced how the locals changed from "waiting for help from the outside" or "being inactive," to how they got together, not only as a local community, but also connecting and collaborating with other communities. This "self-help ethos" (Kroehn, Maude, and

Beer 2010) promoted a sense of responsibility for local development that covered organisational issues like setting up and funding local development offices, coming up with projects, and applying for funding.

While the process of animating the local residents to action that started slowly, with only a few residents taking part in the beginning, the idea of the community taking action grew into something that mobilised more and more of the residents. The idea of working together, not only as one village community but as a regional community across village borders arose, and from this, collaborations with other neighbouring villages were started. This enabled a pooling of resources, for example, for marketing the region together for attracting tourism or setting up a local development office with paid staff to support the communities in project management, lobbying and applying for funding.

Similarly, changing the perception of residents so they feel, and are aware, that they have something useful to contribute (and that their contributions are welcome) to the development of the area is an important foundation stone for future progress (Edwards-Schachter, Matti, and Alcántara 2012). Ideas about "self-help" can in some cases develop into even more radical perception changes of "self-responsibility". With this, we mean not only coming up with new projects (to be funded), but also implies a change in the general behaviour and practices of the local residents.

Another example from Mühlviertel, is how the perception and habits of grocery shopping changed toward using and, thus, supporting the local shops. The residents came to the realisation that by shopping in the large supermarkets outside the nearest city (Linz), they were putting the local shops in a precarious situation, with closure (if it hadn't already happened) not far in the future. Ideas about "shopping local" were, therefore, promoted, and in one village where the local grocery store had already closed, the residents established a community run store as a non-profit business. In this "innovative strategy" (Moulaert and Nussbaumer 2004, 255) to solve the problems the (rural) communities face (i.e. population decline, lack or closing of local shops, shopping practices, etc.), these different dimensions are "knit together", combining awareness building, communication, and social mobilisation towards a specific change in local practices: "shopping local".

This idea of changing practices is also how local development processes are carried out. While stakeholders in many cases have traditionally been middle-aged or older men, recent projects have been implemented to explicitly target women and young people to take part in local development. They are invited to participate in the general processes, and they are supported in formulating their own ideas separately. Even more so, the process of local development, therefore, means building an idea of community culture and "working together", and by stressing the importance of collective identities and community solidarity culture for social mobilisation. These constitute aspects of active rural residency.

Furthermore, this can cause a change in the residents' perceptions, from being ashamed of coming from a rural area to being proud of where they are from. Success stories and efforts to turn the image of rural areas around can stimulate feelings of pride in their local area for residents (Cf. also Valk and Särg 2014; Plüschke-Althof 2017). While negative portrayals of rural decline and living at the periphery can make the future look bleak, taking active part in changing this can be a tool to build a more positive outlook, which furthermore supports the development of more activities.

The "can do" approach (Bryden and Hart 2004 in Shucksmith, Talbot and Lee 2011, 32), which we experienced in Mühlviertel should be one pillar of rural development policies. By this, we mean the

change in "self-identity" from being passive "recipients" of rural change, to the creation of a shared community identity (Cf. Baker and Mehmood 2015) of being active "participants" in rural development (i.e. of the possibility of local action to turn around negative development trajectories) and finding innovative solutions to local problems (e.g. losing local shops). These constitute aspects of what we call "active rural residency".

In some cases, these "counter-narratives" to rural decline can resurrect the idea of rural areas as the best place to live among rural residents (and maybe among urban residents too). Ideas about life in close knit communities, exchanging stressful and polluted cities for the clean, nature filled countryside permeate many narratives and imaginations of the future of rural areas. While the rural residents recognise that rural regions are facing many challenges, those who participate in rural development (in some cases) develop the perception that rural areas are better able to cope with the future, e.g. when it comes to economic or environmental crises through the development of high levels of local engagement and community spirit. Ideas of a "rural renaissance" and the reversal of the rural-to-urban migration patterns is something that, to some extent, can be found among both rural residents and in the public media – if not in the statistics.

Under the adverse conditions that many rural areas find themselves in, changing the development path often means changing the perception of internal – and external – actors towards hope for a new positive development trajectory for rural areas and imagining what the new possibilities and opportunities for making change happen. Ideas about new ways of collaborative action, both when it comes to working with each other in the community, across (local administrative) borders, and linking these practices to the surrounding administrative framework and institutions are an important part of establishing a sustainable future for rural areas.

BOX: Social Entrepreneurs as Institutional Entrepreneurs

Seeds of discursive transformation are often found in the activities of social enterprises. By challenging perceptions and strategically using symbols and discourses, social entrepreneurs leverage resources to create new institutions or to transform existing ones (Maguire et al. 2004), a process that has been identified as "institutional entrepreneurship" (DiMaggio 1988). Social enterprises have the ability to become embedded in the institutional structure and to question the dominant systemic closure (Chatzichristos and Nagopoulos 2020). Social entrepreneurs can, thus, be seen as active rural residents who often manage to create fundamental social change (Dey and Steyaeart 2010), as well as to increase the resilience of rural regions (Apostolopoulos et al. 2019). By exploring two social enterprises of our case regions, we try to illustrate some of the dynamics and the potentialities of this process.

ADC MOURA

ADC MOURA is a social enterprise in the region of Baixo Alentejo, Portugal. It works for the integrated development of the territory and facilitates national and European programs. The organisation acts complementary to the national and local public authorities, which have a sectoral focus, while ADC MOURA tries to promote integrated approaches of rural development. Often, ADC MOURA is approached with skepticism by the local political authorities for its different perspective and the fact that it tries to remain autonomous and distanced from political parties. The social enterprise tries to bypass local barriers by cooperating directly with national and European institutions. This leads to the paradox that a staff member described: ADC MOURA has a higher recognition outside its own field of intervention.

At the same time, the integrated, innovative approaches and tools that ADC MOURA use often appear alien to the local, path-dependent community. An ADC MOURA staff member attributes this phenomenon to the high standards that the EU sets for its programs, without taking into consideration the local resources and specifications. Relevant literature underlines that for the Portuguese context, innovation has always been considered an imported principle that is implemented via top-down procedures by European and international agents (Dargan and Shucksmith 2008). Along these lines, there is an identifiable gap between the innovation-driven European programs and the path-dependent local community; ADC MOURA tries to bridge this gap.

Within this context, although the organisation has made a significant and long-term contribution in bottom-up initiatives and local empowerment, its innovative activities and means often remain unanchored: on the one hand, they lack the necessary institutional support and embeddedness and, on the other hand, they struggle to become established within a traditional social fabric. The organisation tries to balance between the two tendencies by acting locally, while thinking and networking at the national and European level.

OTELO

OTELO is a social enterprise that is located in Mühlviertel and other Austrian regions, as well as in one German and one Spanish region. The OTELO project is a network of open technology laboratories. OTELO provides "open spaces" and "open technology labs" for civic participation in order to create inspirational environments for innovation and to attract and support young and innovative people to live in rural areas.

The OTELO social enterprise is an embedded project that was developed by former regional development stakeholders in order to address the deficiencies of the hitherto regional development process. The OTELO initiative came to fill the void that the mainstreaming of the LEADER processes left behind, in terms of participatory, innovative, local, and regional development. In this respect, as one of the OTELO founders claims, by using the traditional materials of community building and enriching them with technological initiatives, OTELO managed to establish a way of "doing something completely new in the system". Eventually, the organisation managed to manipulate the institutional structure in which it found itself "embedded" (Cf. Garud et al. 2002).
Unequivocally, the rather decentralised and innovation-friendly Austrian structure has been a fruitful field for such a venture to flourish, in contrast to the rather centralised Portuguese framework. Nonetheless, another major aspect is the success of OTELO in introducing a counter-narrative of "open spaces" and disseminating its discursive elements in the institutional framework. During the field research in Mühlviertel, we realised that the OTELO terminology, with references to "open spaces" for experimentation and innovation, seems to have penetrated the institutional structure. In that sense, OTELO has managed to influence the institutional setting by running a campaign under the banner of "open spaces;" its success is reflected by its inclusive planning of the Mühlviertel region.

These two examples showcase how connecting new ways of doing things with existing frameworks can be a challenge, and how the successful implementation of new initiatives should not be taken for granted. As any skills or capacities local communities are equipped with can only be mobilised if permitted by the local institutional environment (Moulaert and Nussbaumer 2005, 53), the (lack of) ability to align attitudes and behaviours to already existing socio-political systems can be a hindrance to innovation in rural development. This is both the case when it comes to local actor groups working in bottom-up processes that attempt to connect to institutional frameworks and in top-down processes where attempts are made to make local actors act in certain ways. Well-connectedness and (a good) working relationship between active rural residents and the local governmental system are, therefore, criteria for being successful (Cf. also Cheshire 2006). Rural social enterprises can facilitate this as they work to link less connected groups, e.g. rural communities, to other groups, e.g. public support schemes. However, to fulfil this role as an "embedded intermediary" (Richter 2019), their position as being both locally embedded in rural communities and anchored within regional networks of policy must be ensured and supported.

2.3. Intermediate conclusion: Dealing with economic, political, and cultural framework conditions for social entrepreneurial acting

When looking at two different regions within the RurAction project, we can provide clear examples of what it means to be "resilient". The vulnerability of some regions (i.e. "structural weakness") to changes in national or global developments (e.g. financial crisis) pushes the implementations of specific economic policies and support schemes to alleviate this. The perceptions of rural areas among the rural residents are two-sided: one of decline and one of idyll. While ideas of decline should spur action from stakeholders, perceptions about a countryside idyll encompass ideas about unchanging

and enduring mental images that can hinder the promotion of innovative ideas and new ways of doing things. Changing the perception of rural residents and stakeholders raises two questions: how to allocate the responsibility between the state and the community and how to change perceptions of agency from passive to active. With what we call "active rural residency", we cover how these changes in perception can instigate new transformative endeavours in rural areas, and how the changes are connected to social economy and social enterprises. The question that arises from this is how regional the interaction between regional resilience (or lack hereof) and changes in perceptions of rural development (i.e. emerging agency of rural residents) in the local institutional environment is, and if this lead to adjustments, adaptations, or rejection.

It might be objected, that the replicability of those examples in radically different rural contexts is questionable. That seems a fair claim. We, thus, underline that we are not aiming to prove an easy negative causality between structural weakness and innovation.

With this in mind, we summarise the arguments with the following conclusions related to rural development processes:

- Active rural residents have the potential to tackle issues of structural weakness and vulnerability in rural regions. The "circle of decline" can be broken for rural regions if business creation and in-migration are promoted.
- Promoting projects and processes that instigate a change in perceptions of residents in rural regions towards feeling responsible and have agency is a major foundation stone for development processes.
- While social innovation, social movements, and social entrepreneurship seem like obvious and clear ways to promote this, it is unfortunately not a position taken by all stakeholders in rural development in Europe.
- As such, the aim of policies moving forward should, therefore, not only be to target rural residents and promote changes in their perception, but also to target other stakeholders (politicians, public institutions, or other actors with influence) who might hinder the promotion of "progressive" rural development schemes and their integration into local institutional frameworks.

3. On a mission for the region. How social entrepreneurial actors tackle problems in structurally weak rural regions
by Mara van Twuijver, Lucas Olmedo, and Sunna Kovanen

In the previous chapter, social enterprises were identified as one of the main actors fostering socially innovative practises and mind-sets; in this chapter we focus on their work in more detail. The chapter discusses the resources and organising practises that rural social enterprises use to develop basic services, infrastructures, and social networks in their areas and to facilitate learning and empowering citizenship within multi-scalar networks. Rural social enterprises have been defined by Nyssens (2006) as organisations guided by social, economic, and/or environmental missions that pursue their goals using entrepreneurial means. Due to their ability to provide socially innovative solutions to some of the challenges that (structurally weak) rural areas face, rural social enterprises have increasingly attracted the attention of researchers and policymakers. Social enterprises are seen as potential partners for actors, such as the state and (local) for-profit businesses, to work together towards sustainable regional development.

The heterogeneity of European regions and diversity of rural social enterprises is well documented. In terms of their activities, rural social enterprises are found in a wide range of fields. Some rural social enterprises are related to agriculture, including social enterprises producing sustainable and/or organic agricultural goods, community supported agriculture projects, and social farms. Rural social enterprises are also engaged in the development of social services, e.g. social enterprises offering health/home care services for hard-to-reach populations and social enterprises working towards the de-stigmatisation of ethnic minorities such as the Roma. Furthermore, some rural social enterprises focus on cultural aspects, such as social enterprises that work towards the valorisation of cultural heritage, whereas other social enterprises have taken a more holistic approach towards the broader development of their territory.

This diversity of rural social enterprise activity also applies to the size and budgets of such enterprises, with staff numbers ranging from a few individuals to hundreds, and budgets from a few thousand euros to millions. Due to the fact that there is no single specific legal structure for social enterprises across the European Union, social enterprises are characterised by a variety of legal structures such as associations, foundations, (social) cooperatives, companies limited by guarantee, community interest companies, mutuals and even private limited liability companies with "public benefit" status, depending on their national jurisdictions (see the European Commission reports on social enterprises, e.g. EC 2015; EC 2020). Within this "galaxy" of rural social enterprises, some are closer to the public sector, such as spin-offs from public institutions. Others, in turn, are closer to for-profit business such as social businesses, or to civil society, including entrepreneurial non-profits or charities with trading arms (Defourny and Nyssens 2017).

In spite of this diversity, (rural) social enterprises share common features, such as their concurrent focus on social, economic, and/or environmental aspects. Moreover, rural social enterprises have shown their ability to leverage and combine a wide range of resources from their relations with stakeholders and partners from different sectors to pursue their aims and create sustainable services. This hybrid nature presents complex challenges for these organisations, but also provides creative and sustainable possibilities that can potentially contribute to addressing some of the contemporary problems faced by rural areas. Rural social enterprises can be promoted as partners in fostering regional development in rural regions precisely because of this demonstrated social and ecological innovativeness in fostering inclusive governance relations and in providing goods and/or services to meet community needs.

Based on research conducted across Europe that utilised interviews with different stakeholders, participant observations, document analysis, and systematic literature reviews, this chapter presents how rural social enterprises work to develop innovative solutions that tackle some of the challenges that rural areas and their populations face.

In order to do so, this chapter addresses three different but interrelated themes. The first section explores the different socio-economic relations that rural social enterprises tend to engage in as a way to mobilise resources when pursuing their goals. The second section explores the concept of organisational hybridity in relation to rural social enterprises, presenting some of the challenges and potentials of rural social enterprises' engagement with stakeholders from different sectors and backgrounds. The third section discusses how the resource mobilisation and hybridity of rural social enterprises interrelate with their long-term sustainability, understanding this sustainability in terms of material and social wellbeing, as well as an ability to innovate and foster systemic transformation. The chapter concludes with some key observations, an invitation to the reader to engage with the

information through specific case study material, and practical ways to engage with the key concepts explored in this chapter**.**

3.1. Resource mobilisation in rural social enterprises

Research on social enterprises carried out in different rural areas of Europe shows that one of the main characteristics of these organisations is their ability to combine different types of resources as a means to achieve organisational sustainability and fulfil their mission (van Twuijver et al. 2020). These resources refer to material artefacts such as buildings, tools, or land; to financial means such as direct market selling and purchases, grants, or sponsorships; to labour such as volunteers and directly paid and subsidised staff; and, finally, to other "intangible" resources including ideas, networks, and trust. The combination of many of these resources in complex ways characterises the daily work of rural social enterprises.

As stated in the introduction, one of the main characteristics of rural social enterprises is the interrelation between their "economic" and "social" dimensions. In this regard, rural social enterprises are interesting actors that remind us that the economy is embedded within the wider society and not a separate sphere from it. This aligns with a broader perspective towards the economy, the "substantive economy"[4] (Polanyi 1957) that describes three different forms through which the economy is integrated into society and social relations. These three forms of integration are market, redistribution, and reciprocity, and they tend to co-exist to different degrees within each context. Each form of economic integration entails different relations between the social enterprises and other actors. For example, market relations prevail in the case of a rural social enterprise selling consultancy services to a client at a competitive rate. When a social enterprise receives a subsidy from the government to set up a childcare facility in a disadvantaged rural area, redistribution comes into play. Finally, a reciprocal relation can be observed when, for example, a social enterprise leverages donations from the local population to establish an environmental conservation project within their locality. This substantive perspective towards the economy enables us to provide a more nuanced insight into the complexity of social enterprises. In the following section, these three different forms of economic integration will be explained and discussed in greater detail.

3.1.1. Rural social enterprises and different forms of economic integration

3.1.1.1. Market

As enterprises that sell and buy goods and/or services, rural social enterprises mobilise resources for and from the market. In order to allocate their goods and services, rural social enterprises tend to focus on local and regional markets, developing a greater (geographical and social) proximity to their customers/users. On the one hand, this implies a limitation to their expansion; on the other hand, this supports the development of greater trust with their users/customers and other stakeholders, which usually translates into greater loyalty and in the mobilisation of other economic (but non-market and/or monetary) resources, namely donations, co-working, and/or volunteering (see below). Nevertheless, the great variety of social enterprises that can be found in rural areas also shows that

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[4] Other related terms such as the "social and solidarity economy" share their roots with this approach to the economy. The term "substantive" has been chosen over the others because it refers more clearly to the types of integration that are discussed in relation to the resources mobilised by rural social enterprises.

some rural social enterprises, especially those focusing on tourism and (organic) agriculture, have also engaged in national and international market relations.

A strategy through which some rural social enterprises address the most disadvantaged users/customers is by providing price differentiations depending on their socio-economic situation. These price differentiations are realised via formal mechanisms, e.g. rural social enterprises providing services such as childcare or elder care, in which the users pay different, pre-established rates according to their income. However, price differentiation mechanisms have also been observed in more informal ways. Due to their detailed knowledge of the local population, some rural social enterprises informally charge lower prices for their services to individuals or groups that face greater economic hardship. In order to be able to apply such a differentiated price system, some of the services and/or products offered by rural social enterprises are partly subsidised either by the state or by other resources leveraged by the rural social enterprises from these or other activities.

3.1.1.2. Redistribution

Rural social enterprises also tend to mobilise resources through their relations with different redistributive institutions, such as local, regional, and national governments and/or international bodies. The most well-known of this type of resources are grants, either from general (sectoral) programmes or from rural development specific programmes such as LEADER[5].

Due to the highly competitive nature of these grants, the combination of three features has been identified as key for successfully leveraging this type of resource: skills in writing detailed applications; trust built with the funding body, usually via a track record of delivery; and the presence of a clear project that matches with the overall plan of the organisation and with the aims of the funding programme. However, it is common that grants only partially fund an activity or project; this fact pushes rural social enterprises to combine these grants with match funding that usually comes from loans, fundraisings, and/or their own reserves, depending on the nature of the activity or project.

Furthermore, (some) rural social enterprises rely on activation labour market programmes (ALMPs) as an important source of "subsidised labour", especially in the case of Working Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs). Nevertheless, the extent and nature of these programmes varies greatly among member states of the European Union (see the European Commission reports on social enterprises, e.g. EC 2015; EC 2020).

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[5] Liaisons Entre Actions de Developpement de l'Economie Rurale ('Links between the rural economy and development actions').

> **BOX: Rural Social Enterprises and ALMPs in Ireland: A key redistributive resource in terms of labour**
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> Different ALMPs, such as the Community Employment Scheme, Rural Social Scheme, Tús, or Community Service Programme play a key role in providing staff for rural social enterprises in Ireland. The basic feature of this collaboration between rural social enterprises and a redistributive central authority (in this case, the Irish Department of Social Protection) is that the salaries of the workers are paid by the government and the rural social enterprises host the workers, providing the material means and guidance for them to fulfil their tasks. These programmes fulfil a double role: first, they provide employment to people distant from the labour market and, second, the work of the participants often relates to basic services that are usually present in bigger towns and cities but lacking in many Irish villages, such as the maintenance of community/public spaces, administrative services, and public transportation.

Another aspect of the mobilisation of redistributive resources by rural social enterprises is the transfer and/or "right to use" of material assets owned by public bodies, especially buildings, and in some cases also land and/or tools. Rural social enterprises tend to own some assets, but they often also operate partially or totally from spaces transferred from local or national public institutions. The utilisation of these spaces is usually free of charge or with a nominal fee, thus, reducing the operational costs of these rural social enterprises. On the other hand, the utilisation of these public assets also entails some liabilities, which can limit the expansion, range of activities, and/or long-term planning of rural social enterprises.

Photo 1: Colette Ryan, General Manager of CareBright, Ireland's first purpose-built community for people living with dementia, presents the improvements to the local environment that the construction of the dementia facility on an abandoned factory site have brought about (Photo by: Paweł Kosicki; Copyright: RurAction)

3.1.1.3. Reciprocity

A third mode of integration is reciprocity. Many social enterprises engage local residents, hence, strengthening the connection of the organisation to the locality and a sense of collective responsibility. Such sense of collective responsibility can also emerge via common work in conjunction with participants from other rural areas and urban regions, if social enterprises are able to engage participants from beyond their locality. This can foster the mobilisation of some market and redistributive resources; however, it acquires its main importance when mobilising reciprocity resources.

Through their work, rural social enterprises often enhance and/or reinforce a sense of community and mutual self-help that are traditional to many rural areas. This has been used by rural social enterprises to work cooperatively/collaboratively with other similar organisations, local businesses, and other stakeholders such as farmers and private individuals, resembling the process of collective mobilisation described in the case of the Mühlviertel region described in Chapter 2. These collaborations foster the mobilisation of (in-kind and monetary) donations and sponsorship and the lending and sharing of machinery, tools, spaces, and/or other assets.

In this sense, it is not uncommon for some rural social enterprises to organise joint activities/projects and fundraisings events; to borrow/lend (micro-)loans with no interest and/or to share premises with other rural social enterprises or community organisations. Moreover, the collaboration of rural social enterprises with other (local) private stakeholders, such as local small and medium enterprises (SMEs), for example, can allow them to buy some supplies at cost or to ask local farmers and contractors for

machinery to borrow landscaping or construction. All of the former contribute to reducing the operational costs of rural social enterprises.

Finally, the mobilisation of volunteer labour is a resource usually utilised by rural social enterprises. The level of involvement of these volunteers varies greatly. Some rural social enterprises are mainly formed by volunteers, while there are others in which volunteers play a less central role. Moreover, their role also varies from being involved in decision-making and strategic planning to implementation of specific projects, services, and tasks. Volunteering in rural social enterprises can entail several complex and often contradictory processes due to the hybrid "logics" of these organisations (see the next section). In this sense, volunteer labour can be a necessary element for the functioning of some rural social enterprises, while at the same time, it can hinder their expansion. Furthermore, it can be a key element of fostering wellbeing and upskilling individuals and (re-)enforcing the abovementioned sense of community. However, rural social enterprises that engage volunteers are often confronted with a risk of volunteer-burnout and/or tensions between paid and non-paid employees.

Photo 2: Bingo night at the Croom Community Development Association. This social enterprise provides a space for the local community to socialise and engage in sports and recreational activities, and it supports other community and voluntary organisations in the direct surroundings. It cooperates with a wide group of stakeholders and agencies in order to achieve social, environmental and cultural development of the area. (Photo by: Paweł Kosicki; Copyright: RurAction)

3.1.2. Looking beyond the market to understand rural social enterprises

The previous paragraphs have presented a non-exhaustive list of resources mobilised by rural social enterprises. For clarity, each type of resource has been considered separately, but in practise rural social enterprises combine the resources leveraged through different types of socio-economic relations in order to develop socially innovative solutions to some of the challenges that they face

within the rural areas in which they are based and operate (see "Narrative Module 1" for an illustration of how different types of resources are combined).

The importance of each type of resource varies depending on the context and nature of the activity of specific rural social enterprises. Moreover, it remains an open question to what extent rural social enterprises can proactively design their resource mobilisation process or whether this is imposed by the context in which they are embedded. As described in the previous chapter (see Chapter 2), the broad presence of public institutions in rural areas, their proactive interest in supporting socially entrepreneurial and innovative grassroots efforts, and adequate public funding can provide major support for local enterprises in comparison to austerity-driven contexts. However, what this section demonstrates is the creativity and complexity of rural social enterprises when mixing resources. Therefore, the need to take a broad approach towards the economy that includes, but goes beyond, the market to understand how rural social enterprises work has been stressed. The following section presents how rural social enterprises blur boundaries between different sectors and how they align their stakeholders' diverse aims in order to achieve their missions.

3.2. Rural social enterprises as hybrid organisations

Rural social enterprises use various forms of economic integration in order to mobilise the resources they need to achieve their objectives. In drawing on this broad range of resources, they also have to deal with a wide range of different stakeholders that provide these resources. It is not uncommon that these stakeholders have very different backgrounds and, therefore, have different expectations of the organisation.

In this section, we will use the concept of a "hybrid organisation" to look at the influence of these different resource types, and the involvement of different stakeholders in the organisations. Social enterprises are so-called "hybrid organisations," meaning that they blur the boundaries between different sectors (Doherty, Haugh, and Lyon 2014). According to Billis (2010), the concept of a hybrid organisation is based on the idea that organisations in the private, public, and third sector all have different ideal principles that they follow in order to realise their goals. In the private sector, it is common to follow a rational of profit maximisation for shareholders, where profits are generated through revenue from sales and fees. Work is mainly conducted by paid employees. Governance is based upon the size of a shareholder's share of ownership (e.g. relative to the number of shares held by a person). The public sector can be characterised by following principles of collective choice and public services that are resourced by taxation. The governance structure is arranged around public elections, and ownership is ultimately in the hands of citizens (even though often via elected representatives). Work is mainly conducted by paid public servants. In the third sector, social and environmental goals prevail. Revenue is generated through membership fees, legacies, and donations; governance is arranged through private election; and ownership is in the hands of the members. The work is mainly conducted by members and volunteers.

These different ideal principles, which we can also call "logics," are a collective idea about appropriate organisational objectives and ways in which these can be achieved. They provide the formal and informal "rules of the game" of a sector (Pache and Santos 2011). For example, it would be considered a malfunction of the public sector if profit maximisation became the main goal of public organisations, however, for the private sector, this is seen as an appropriate organisational strategy. So, these guiding principles are made up of the assumptions, beliefs, values, and practices that people (consciously and unconsciously) use in making decisions and undertaking day-to-day activities within an organisation.

However, rural social enterprises combine different "logics" within their organisation. We call organisations that do this "hybrid organisations". As shown in the previous section, rural social enterprises mix income generated through the sales of products and services with state-funding and/or fundraising. In doing so, they combine the principles followed in economic market transactions with that of public service delivery. For rural social enterprises, this is an important way of dealing with the opportunities and challenges provided by the rural environment they operate in. In the following, this idea of a hybrid organisation will be explored in more depth.

3.2.1. Challenges of hybridity

The hybrid nature of social enterprises can pose challenges to the organisations. It has already been highlighted that rural social enterprises combine "logics" from different sectors. This means that (possibly contradictory) objectives and values have to be combined. This can be complex for those involved in the organisation. For example, trying to combine objectives of financial sustainability and social impact can cause individuals involved within the organisation to become uncertain about the organisational identity. Individuals can feel confused about which objective to strive for and, therefore, experience tension in their day-to-day work. This can result in internal conflict between different individuals or groups within the organisation (Jay 2013). It can also cause one of the organisational goals to become dominant over the other, for example, the financial goal overshadows the social mission. This is called "mission drift" (Aiken, Taylor, and Moran 2016; Battilana and Lee 2014; Cornforth 2014) and leads an organisation away from the purpose it was established for. As described further in Chapter 4, the "stickiness" of diverging or conservative "logics" may also remarkably slow down an enterprise's innovative efforts.

Another challenge is that rural social enterprises, as hybrid organisations, have to deal with a lot of different stakeholders. The shareholders all have their own perspective on the organisation and their own expectations of what the organisation should do and how the organisation should do it. Examples of internal stakeholders can include employees, management, and board members. In the case of rural social enterprises, these can be either paid or voluntary positions. Of course, depending on the product or service offered by the rural social enterprise, the customers, clients, and/or beneficiaries can be important stakeholder groups as well. Other stakeholders can include different funders, e.g. banks or other financial institutions; commercial investors; a local, regional, and/or national government; philanthropic organisations; other social enterprises or third sector organisations; or local residents (in the case of local fundraising activities). Policymakers and politicians, local development organisations, and/or other support organisations can also be considered as external stakeholders.

3.2.2. The importance of aligning key stakeholders

In managing the different stakeholders and the various points of view involved in an organisation, the collective ideas about appropriate organisational objectives and ways in which these can be achieved become important (the "logics", as explained above). Each stakeholder is involved in the organisation from the point of view of their own objectives and their own assumptions and values in mind. In other words, every stakeholder brings in their own set of "logics". If these different "logics" are aligned, an organisation can move forward. If these "logics" are not aligned, it is likely to result in misunderstandings and conflict, which can hinder organisational development and become a threat to long-term sustainability. This can also have a negative impact on the contribution of rural social enterprises to local and/or regional development.

Alignment of key stakeholders requires a proactive effort from an organisation's management and board members, both internal to the organisation, and externally. Internally, for example, in rural social enterprises that evolve from volunteer groups, it can be a big shift in the dynamics within an organisation when the first paid employees are hired. Volunteers who have built a strong emotional bond with the organisation can feel unheard and not appreciated when paid employees have a different view on how certain activities should be run. It can take time and effort to build the mutual understanding that is needed to find a balance in which all involved in the rural social enterprise feel they have a satisfactory level of input in the running of the organisation. Building clear procedures for decision-making can aid in establishing clarity and transparency.

Another example when different points of view can collide is when a rural social enterprise makes a strategic shift. For example, when a rural visitation service decided to move to a more income-generating model to be less dependent upon (uncertain) government funding, some of the voluntary board members no longer recognised themselves in the mission and goals of the organisation. They felt very strongly connected to the original social mission of the organisation but did not agree with the way in which a change in business model would put more focus on income generating activities. This resulted in some board members stepping back from the board because they felt they could not support this new development. This is an example of how different perspectives can sometimes cause opposing views of how an organisation should move forward in order to stay sustainable. Having these opposing views is inherent in running a rural social enterprise. In order to deal with this, time needs to be spent discussing different points of view and their meaning for the future of the organisation. When different individuals are challenged to make their expectations of the organisation explicit, it becomes easier for the board, management, and employees to manage expectations and to explain the choices they make.

Besides internal stakeholders, external stakeholders also require careful management. In the case of rural social enterprises, different funders and resource-providers might judge the success of an organisation very differently. A bank that provides a business loan for the refurbishment of a day-care service for elderly people will judge the success of their investment on different criteria than the local authority that provides funds for a bus taking the elderly to and from a facility. Where the bank is looking for certainty of getting its money back when assessing the business model and financial situation of the organisation, the local authority might be more interested in the need for the day-care service in the local area and the number of people that are reached with the service.

We can conclude that the hybrid nature of rural social enterprises provides advantages and disadvantages at an organisational level. Maintaining a healthy balance between the different values and "logics" involved is an ongoing and dynamic process, which needs attention over the lifetime of an organisation. Due to their hybrid nature and their different forms of economic integration, rural social enterprises become complex organisations that place economic transactions into a broader frame of societal interactions. This enables rural social enterprises to deliver socially innovative solutions to local needs. The establishment of rural social enterprises can reinvigorate a locality with a positive spirit. To understand the contribution of these organisations to local and/or regional development, it is important to develop an understanding of the long-term sustainability of these organisations. Therefore, in the next section we reflect on how resource mobilisation and hybridity attribute to the long-term sustainability of rural social enterprises.

> **BOX: Hybridity as a way to deal with resource constraints**
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> The hybrid nature of rural social enterprises allows them to draw on a wide resource base, and it can help them overcome the resource constraints of the rural areas they operate in. An example of this can be provided by a heritage centre in a small rural village in Ireland. The heritage centre is situated in an area with interesting remains of thousands of years of human settlement and is run by local residents who wish to make more people aware of these sites. The heritage centre is run as a social enterprise with a voluntary board (comprised of local residents) and some paid employees. After operating for several years, the centre reached a plateau in the number of visitors it had and was looking for ways to expand this number. Their paid manager decided that a new organisational strategy was needed in order to focus the efforts of the organisation and realise more growth. In order to devise this strategy, she was looking for a way to expand the business orientation present in the voluntary board of the social enterprise. She managed to mobilise a group of residents, including some successful business owners, a senior consultant, and members from the local authority, among others, to participate in a temporary, external strategy team. The goal of this team was to analyse the current situation of the organisation and come up with a future-oriented strategy. An important motivation for most of the members of the strategy team to volunteer their time was that they recognised the historical importance of the site and they were supportive of the mission of the heritage centre to make that better known and more available to a wider public. Hiring a strategy consultant at a market price would not have been feasible for the social enterprise, but because of its mission of preserving and promoting the history in and around the locality, it managed to find a different way to mobilise this knowledge. In this sense, hybridity is an important way in which rural social enterprises deal with the challenges and resource constraints they are presented with.

3.3. Long-term sustainability of rural social enterprises

In previous sections of this chapter, we have presented the diverse mix of resources and relationships that rural social enterprises are reliant on, as well as the opportunities and challenges related to the different "logics" and values implied in these relationships. Now we address the question of how these concepts relate to the long-term sustainability of rural social enterprises.

Sustainability is usually understood narrowly either as an ecological or economic phenomenon, and the ability of social enterprises to increase their impact is seen as dependent on profit-generation in conventional markets (Jenner and Oprescu 2016; Moizer and Tracey 2010). In this light, the task of social enterprises is to do "business as usual" in an economically effective manner, while also benefitting the environment, service users, and residents with the profits generated. Individuals are seen as driven by their "rational", economic interests to maximise their own gains, which ultimately pushes them to collaborate on the side. However, in this chapter we consider an opposing, holistic understanding of sustainability and agency. Individual agency in social entrepreneurship and innovation is fundamentally embodied and sensible; it can only emerge in constant connection with other people and the natural and material world (see Chapter 3 for more detail).

In a similar manner, as was implied in the previous sections, economic, social, and environmental aspects are not opposing or competing spheres of reality. Participants in social enterprises do not strive for funding or market exchange primarily for any individual, competitive interest, but instead, as one means, among others, to improve their living conditions, and services and to change unjust structures

collectively (Matthies et al. 2019). Therefore, long-term sustainability in this chapter is understood as practises and relations that enhance the *wellbeing* of people and environments, both for present and future generations (Connelly, Markey, and Roseland 2011, 311). It is comprised of three elements:

- Material wellbeing, in the sense of safe and stable livelihoods and environment;
- Social wellbeing, in the sense of meaningful, dignified, and constructive social relations; and
- Ongoing innovative process of learning from the changing context and their own ways of working in order to transform the contexts to better serve the needs of the people and the environment.

Social and material wellbeing provide the necessary stability for rural social enterprises. With adequate, diverse resources, as described in the first section of this chapter, and careful management of hybrid "logics", described above, both material and socially stable working conditions are ensured and the costs of the services can be covered. However, social enterprises would not be able to tackle and solve societal problems if they operated only to maintain the status quo and stay as they are; therefore, they must balance the stability of their organisations with constant, innovative learning processes within their teams and externally. This learning with diverse participants, new practises, and new materials may become a transformative power when spreading across broader networks and institutions, as described in Chapter 3. Thus, evaluation of the success of rural social enterprises based solely on their organisational form, officially formulated goals, or individual leaders can bring only shallow knowledge of the quality, ethics, or durability of the complex relations discussed in this chapter so far. The tension in rural social enterprises lies not so much in bridging economic and social spheres, but in reaching both stability and change in all spheres they operate in (Paech, Rommel and Sperling 2019).

3.3.1. Stability from social and material sustainability

Rural social enterprises provide stability to their regions and participants, especially by creating new livelihoods, meaningful relations, and regenerating their environmental base. Employment as a means of income is relevant especially for the local, less mobile, and less formally educated population. However, as the examples on subsidising labour previously discussed in this chapter have highlighted, rural social enterprises are rarely able to provide a notable number of paid jobs, contrary to the expectations often voiced in policymaking. Many rural social enterprises function with just a few paid positions and small salaries for years, even decades. However, the research conducted for this handbook implies that organisations with diverse and locally embedded funding relations may be able to maintain jobs even during times of abrupt crises, when other funding sources are reduced. They can rely on their networks to provide diverse means of ad-hoc support. Therefore, even though business creation was shown to be relevant for regional resilience in chapter 1 of this handbook, the quality of informal, social relations between entrepreneurs, workers, residents, and further participants are also relevant for resilience. Nevertheless, it remains a challenge in social enterprises to provide an adequate salary for those who need it and reduce the risk of job insecurity.

Further interviews with workers and volunteers confirm that at least equally important for long-term sustainability is the meaningfulness, impact, and good team spirit of the work of a social enterprise. Firstly, democratic decision-making practises improve the quality of work and satisfaction of the participants because they empower everyone to take responsibility for their contribution and for the consequences of their decisions. Harnessing constructive work relations and organising celebrations in teams, including neighbours and partners, balances the more challenging sides of the work and strengthens both the informal bonds and learning across the whole network. Some rural social

enterprises studied by the authors are able to attract young people from cities, or even internationally, who would otherwise not come to live or work in the rural region. However, this was not the case in those enterprises where the transformative mission remained very strongly locally focused and did not actively seek contacts with larger networks or societal problems.

Some enterprises make overarching ethics and transparency their strengths even in economically difficult conditions. In a community-supported farm in Portugal, for example, all payments and wages are made transparent for the whole team. When the enterprise was forced to reduce jobs due to the lack of sales and rising costs, the owners first negotiated the resignation of high-educated, non-local workers, while trying to keep the positions of the local, low-educated residents active as long as possible. This is because for the former it is much easier to move out and find other working opportunities elsewhere. On a farm in Germany, not only have prices been lowered for those who need it, but well-off customers have been requested to consider paying more, in order to allow the economic solidarity measures for others. These ethical negotiation practises make economic sustainability a common concern and, thus, enhance the commitment of their participants even in difficult times.

As described in the first section of this chapter, redistributive relations with the public sector are especially relevant for the sustainability of labour-intensive basic social services. Public institutions are, however, often not eager or able to join in reciprocal negotiations. They may set strict and even dysfunctional conditions on the terms of funding, practise centralised control or simply reduce funding without negotiation (Borzaga and Galera 2016; Salemink, Strijker, and Bosworth 2017, see also Chapter 4). In this case, lobbying skills, support networks, and diversity in the resource base are crucial to tackling the risk of one-sided dependency on public support, producing unintended negative consequences.

Finally, ecological sustainability is especially relevant for enterprises that work with and gain their income directly from natural resources. For example, enterprises in the fields of ecological agriculture and tourism run the risk of short-term precarity while building up resilient production systems that take years to grow. Production with ecological standards often leads to higher costs than conventional production, which some organisations cover with sales to affluent urban areas. Locally oriented service enterprises, however, often cannot use so much money to achieve ecological standards if they wish to keep their services affordable and inclusive. This was the case, for example, at a day care centre in Portugal that prepares meals for the public schools in the municipality. In order to fully integrate ecological and social sustainability, more collaboration between the two domains would be desirable. Small enterprises require flexible support from the public sector and advisory networks to build up collaborative infrastructures across domains. A regional intermediary could, for example, organise regional processing units for small, organic producers so local service enterprises could have easy access to local, pre-processed ecological products, or support agricultural enterprises in providing environmental education at schools and day care centres.

3.3.2. Adapting to changing conditions and transforming them in a process of joint learning

Social enterprises are sometimes criticised for simply addressing the symptoms of unjust, capitalist systems instead of tackling their root causes, and, thus, maintaining the system as it is (Dey and Steyaert 2012). Many initiatives studied here, instead, proactively attempt to criticise and challenge injustice and ecological devastation caused by current market and governance models. Therefore, the long-term sustainability of rural social enterprises implies not only stabilising their organisational basis,

but also the transformation of the structures they are enmeshed in. This transformation involves a constant learning process amongst the participants and stakeholders of the social enterprises, and the spreading of this learning process within established institutions. Chapter 4 highlights some examples how new infrastructures of collaboration and solidarity can emerge out of such reflexive, critical networking between and beyond social enterprises. This is, however, easier said than done. One core challenge is the question of who carries and advocates for the change, and with what risks. We see leading figures and teams, sometimes outsiders, moving (back) into the rural location who aim to change their regions radically through their enterprises. Such visionary leaders may, however, easily become blind to scepticism towards their ideas and lack the patience to provide space for other suggestions. If they are themselves ready to give everything for their cause, they may overlook that some others cannot maintain the same pace of work. If the leaders and opposing participants do not find enough time and means to respect and compromise each other's positions and privileges, this may lead to a clash and resignations. In rural areas, it may be extremely difficult to (continuously) find people with the right skills and the willingness to carry central leading positions. Furthermore, yet another collapse of a crucial service in an already deprived area may be detrimental for the future perspective of the participants (Haunstein 2019, Kasabov 2016). Therefore, it is relevant to remember that the objection to new and innovative practises amongst local residents may not be the result of different traditions and norms only, as will be explained in more detail in Chapter 4. People living in rural areas might have justified, material concerns for their livelihoods and job insecurity, which often is the reality in innovative social enterprises, especially in their starting phase.

Photo 3: Meeting of the EPAM-network whose members are farmers of herbal and medicinal plants in Alentejo, Portugal. EPAM stands for "Empreender na Fileira das Plantas Aromáticas e Medicinais em Portugal" [Entrepreneurship in the Aromatic and Medicinal Plants Sector in Portugal]. The open network helps its members to learn from each other, combine strengths and resources in common projects and gain a stronger voice for the sector in policy-making. (Photo by: Sunna Kovanen; Copyright: RurAction)

Nevertheless, rural social enterprises usually try to rely on diverse learning relations, either with similar organisations in their surrounding region or with social movements and networks at multiple scales. Especially for social enterprises where local institutions are persistently troublesome or local markets too poor, urban and international contacts may provide necessary extra income and support. Sometimes such diverse contacts tend to be concentrated among a few mobile and privileged members, increasing the risk of a centralised leadership. Therefore, learning not only comprises better production methods, but ways of taking and sharing responsibility in a diverse team, understanding complexity, and respecting and enhancing different capacities for engagement.

In the previous section of this chapter, mission drift was mentioned as one risk of hybridity. It can also affect the long-term sustainability of rural social enterprises. For example, in the agricultural sector, rural social enterprises might achieve a bigger market and, thereby, impact on scale when selling their products to supermarkets or public institutions, but it often forces them to compromise their ecological standards (Huybrechts, Nicholls and Edinger 2017). Compromises might also imply shrinking when needed: reducing paid positions into subsidised labour or giving up land, buildings, and services. Deciding to shrink is a difficult process, but often a necessary adaptation to the existing capacities of managing the business. Economic growth, especially with external capital, is therefore not always the most appropriate survival strategy.

BOX: Solutions and challenges of long-term sustainability on an Alentejan CSA farm

An example of an enterprise that combines all aspects of long-term sustainability in its work is a 500ha farm producing cork, pork meat, vegetables, and processed products in Alentejo, Portugal. Organic farms all over Europe are facing strong pressure to grow in size and to decrease biodiversity in order to survive market competition. However, the farm in question has diversified its production with tourism, renting their land to other producers and starting a community-supported agriculture program (CSA), which all provide extra income to cover the higher costs of ecological production. In the CSA-model, a group of customers commits to buy a share of production from one farm on a long-term basis, usually a year. This allows the farm to produce more ecologically and plan for the long-term because they don´t need to compete for price in the private market. Furthermore, it provides a pool of committed supporters and volunteers. Usually the model is dependent on having decent connection to customers in affluent urban areas. The farm tries to support the disadvantaged region, as well, by providing employment for the residents. Besides the residents, the team consists of highly educated workers, trainees, and long-term volunteers from all over Portugal and internationally. They practise sociocratic decision-making, in which representatives of all working areas of the farm meet bi-weekly to make central strategic decisions and discuss the main topics of the business. Everyone sits in a circle in order to reduce hierarchies between a presenter and the audience. Decisions are not made by majority voting but by discussing and clarifying obstacles, until nobody strongly opposes the decision. Taking and delegating responsibility and increasing transparency in communication across a diverse and large team with experience in hierarchical systems is a very slow learning process and not without its frustrations. However, in the long-term and with patient moderation by some workers with expertise in these practises, the sociocratic model has improved the working climate and increased the commitment of the team to live and work in the remote area.

3.4. Intermediate conclusions

As entrepreneurial organisations guided by a social, economic, and/or environmental mission, rural social enterprises are increasingly recognised for their potential to contribute towards sustainable local and regional development. There is a great diversity of social enterprises operating in rural areas. Rural social enterprises may be locally embedded or urban-oriented, deliver public services or be radically critical, professionally organised or purely voluntary. In this chapter, we have focused on a common element of these organisations, namely, their ability to leverage and combine a wide range of resources through their relations with stakeholders and partners from different sectors. Often these relations are fostered with innovative practises or they result from innovative combinations of existing skills and resources, solving persistent problems in new ways. In this chapter, this capacity was explored in more depth with the use of different concepts in relation to the different forms of economic integration, hybridity, and the long-term sustainability of these organisations.

This chapter shows that rural social enterprises place economic transactions into a broader societal framework by combining market integration and the redistribution of public resources, as well as reciprocal relations. In their work, economic principles do not have primacy on their own, but resources are exchanged, prices differentiated, and assistance given based on the commitment, relations, and different financial means and capacities of the stakeholders and participants. Due to this, the work of rural social enterprises transcends the economic sphere and integrates different forms of economic transactions and social relations, creating an organisational structure that relies on a wide and diverse base of resources and relations.

This wide resource base does carry with it different expectations and visions for operational and strategic decision-making in the organisation, something which was explored in this chapter using the concept of organisational hybridity. On the one hand, the different "logics" and principles represented by the different backgrounds and visions of participants are a source of creativity and problem solving capacity, but, on the other hand, it might be difficult to balance or integrate the different "logics" with one another. Interests and ideas may clash both internally, as well as between external stakeholders and key resource providers. Creating mutual understanding requires active management by those involved in a rural social enterprise. Transparent communication and adequate time and resources for learning to deal with tensions help create a way forward. Such internal processes may be supported by advice and resources from multi-scalar peer-networks. When there is an interest to solve disagreements arising from different "logics" in a constructive way, social relations are strengthened and participants are bound to the enterprise. These working practises foster the positive experiences of collective strength and agency, which Chapter 4 will explore in more depth as elements of (social) innovation and the development of rural areas as a whole. It was also proposed in this chapter that because of the complex resource base and accompanying social relations, the long-term sustainability of rural social enterprises should not be judged solely on the economic outcome of an organisation, but a more holistic approach towards sustainability should be adopted. By fostering social wellbeing, ecological regeneration, and the capacities to learn and develop joint working practises and the context, social enterprises are able to counteract paralysing discourses of rural decline.

The rising attention being paid to rural social enterprises is often related to expectations around the creation of structural change in rural areas. Through this chapter, it has been shown that part of the social innovative capacity of rural social enterprises is related to the way in which these organisations actively combine different forms of economic integration and intertwine economic and social

resources within the organisational situations. This provides rural social enterprises with the ability to design location-specific solutions for rural challenges and mobilise underutilised resources, both from a material (e.g. underutilised buildings) and social perspective (e.g. human capital). From this perspective, rural social enterprises can indeed contribute to structural change in rural areas. However, expectations around the potential to create change are unrealistic when change is attributed to the works of a single rural enterprise. It is unlikely that individual rural social enterprises have adequate resources to single-handedly counteract negative developments in rural areas. In order to realise the potential of rural social enterprises to contribute to local and regional development, adequate support is necessary. Given that rural social enterprises, as well as the countries, regions, and villages in which they operate, are very diverse; there are no simple one-size-fits-all solutions for supporting rural social enterprises. Both policy measures and support structures should ideally reflect the local context, target groups addressed, and be adapted accordingly to experiences on the ground. Untapped potential exists, especially in supporting collaboration between different small, sustainable initiatives across sectors, thus, strengthening a regional, self-organised, and resilient production and service infrastructure.

BOX: Serendipity Development Group. Resource mobilisation in an Irish rural social enterprise

Operating in a small Irish village (less than 500 inhabitants) within a structurally weak rural area, Serendipity Development Group[6] saw how a decline in the population and services was putting the locality at risk of losing one of its most precious assets, its primary school.

In operation since the mid-1990s, Serendipity Development Group's main aim is to fight rural decline in their village by developing the facilities and services that retain and attract people in the community and fostering social cohesion and inclusion. Among other projects, the members of this social enterprise decided to establish a community childcare service that has been in operation since 2016. It is divided into three sub-services: a breakfast club, a crèche-playschool, and an afterschool. It provides childcare from 8 am until 6 pm weekdays.

How is it possible to operate this service within a small rural locality?

After the economic crash, police stations were closed in small rural localities all around Ireland. Despite the loss of this basic service, Serendipity Development Group saw an opportunity to keep the building of the former police station for the use of the community, thus, negotiated with the national body in charge of the building. Serendipity Development Group obtained the right to use and manage the premises (a main building and outdoor spaces) at a nominal cost of 1€/year, but also had the responsibility of renovating and maintaining the building with its own resources.

Nowadays, the premises host an Activation Labour Market Programme, a recreational public space with an indoor seating area, an outdoor area with a garden and small horticulture space, a public toilet, and the mentioned childcare facility. The horticulture space is used by school children and the elderly of a local Active Age Group. The overall idea was to use the premises to create an intergenerational place to be used by diverse local individuals and groups.

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[6] For reasons of anonymisation, a fictious name has been used.

The materials needed to set up the childcare services (e.g. tables, chairs, board, swing, fridge) were funded partially by grants and by the organisation´s own resources generated from other activities, mainly fundraising events.

Serendipity Development Group leases the premises to a private trader that operates the crèche-playschool service, whereas the breakfast club and afterschool are managed directly by the social enterprise, which pays the salary of two part-time staff members with the income generated through the fees from service users. The families using the services can pay either directly or through government cheques, depending on their socio-economic situation. Moreover, the voluntary board of directors of Serendipity Development Group is responsible for coordinating and supervising the services, although the staff have the freedom to operate the services within the legal/regulatory framework.

Due to low numbers of children, the level of income generated during the first years (2016-2017) was insufficient to cover the salaries and operational costs of the services provided. Hence, the services have been subsidised by a combination of resources from the state and from other activities developed by Serendipity Development Group. However, from 2018 onwards, and especially in 2019, the number of children attending the playschool has grown. The playschool service has a waiting list and the person leasing the premises pays for the running costs previously subsidised by the social enterprise. The afterschool service also saw an increase in the number of children enrolled and a second person, already working part time for another service provided by Serendipity Development Group, has been hired with them. This service has also become financially self-sustainable and is even generating a small (surplus) profit for the social enterprise, which is reinvested in other activities.

The provision of this service has created three (part-time) jobs and has reactivated an otherwise derelict building and underutilised land, it is generating a circulation of local money, and, more recently, is providing a small profit to Serendipity Development Group that is reinvested in other activities. Furthermore, the services bring more than 30 children and their parent(s) to the village and, as a ripple effect, the primary school has increased the number of students enrolled, reversing a trend of more than 40 years of decline. Finally, these services enhance the sense of community of the inhabitants of this locality and provide some hope for its future; it helps bring people into the community and creates vibrancy in the small village.

This example shows how Serendipity Development Group has combined redistributive, market, and reciprocity resources into one of its services and how economic and social goals can be integrated, putting the former at the service of the latter. The actual work of this rural social enterprise has shown that combining these different resources is fundamental to the way in which this essential service could be implemented and survive in this specific locality.

BOX: Applying the concepts of this chapter to your organisation

In order to help you start thinking about how the concepts discussed in this chapter relate to your own organisation, we have provided some key prompts and questions below.

(1) Resource mobilisation:

- Create a list of the main resources that your social enterprise currently mobilises. Do you recognise different forms of economic integration (market, redistribution, and reciprocity)? Do you think that a mixed balance among resources representing the three forms of integration is beneficial to your organisation? Why or why not?

- What practical steps could you undertake to mobilise the missing but needed resources within your organisation?

(2) Managing different logics:

- Who are the key stakeholders in your organisation? (Tip: start with the list of resources posed in Question 1 and write down who supplies these resources to your organisation)

- What do these key stakeholders expect from your organisation?

- How do the expectations of different stakeholders align with each other? Which practical steps can you undertake to better align these expectations?

(3) Long-term sustainability:

- Take the list of material resources created in Question 1. Now look at it from the perspective of risk:
  - Which resources can you rely on long-term?
  - What happens if the resources were reduced abruptly?
  - How could you diversify your resource base or apply "dormant" resources? (e.g. renting out spaces, volunteers from outside the immediate locality, reducing and concentrating activities)

- Think about the wellbeing in your organisation:
  - Do you know whether people engaged in your organisation are feeling well with their work and team?
  - Do you see a lot of fluctuation in engagement with the organisation? Are active participants (e.g. volunteers or staff) quitting? If yes, do you know why?
  - Do you know whether people around you consider the division of work and payments justified? If not, how could you facilitate a discussion about this?
  - Are there people who you would consider "irreplaceable" in your organisation? Could they be replaced? Are there others who could perhaps be encouraged to take on new responsibilities?

Make a mind-map of other organisations and initiatives in your locality, region, and accessible urban centres. Whose work do you find interesting, regardless of whether it is connected to your work or not? Brainstorm about it with others. Are there contacts which could help you, but you have perhaps overseen? Are there people or contacts critical of, and problematic to, your work? If yes, with which arguments, activities, and partners could you approach them?

4. The emergence, spread, and impact of social innovations in rural regions

by Anna Umantseva, Jamie-Scott Baxter, and Marina Novikova

The following chapter examines the emergence, spread, and impacts of social innovation across rural territories in two regional cases: Upper Austria (Austria) and Alentejo (Portugal). We take a deeply relational and practice-oriented view on social innovation as part of an on-going spatialising process enfolded into situated historical events. However, the questions looked at in the following three sections aim to gather a better understanding of how these territorial processes and practices connect to other locations, events, actors, and discourses crossing spatial, social, cultural, and institutional boundaries. We are curious to gain a deeper insight into what happens when these material and symbolic boundaries are traversed, when novel combinations of practices emerge and spread and socio-natural relations are reconfigured, and to what extent such novel combinations can affect, and contribute to, the development of rural areas.

In the first section, we flesh out this procedural and practice-oriented position on social innovation through a close examination of recent literature. Through findings stemming from fieldwork in Alentejo, we illustrate how the components of social practices are reorganised, leading to the emergence of new ways of farming. There, we conclude that grassroots, socially innovative processes are accompanied by struggles over constructing the symbolic legitimacy of new practices and a re-organisation of materiality. These dynamic, socially innovative assemblages are a significant and, as yet, under-researched aspect of social innovation.

In the second section, we pick up this thread and, through a focused cross-case comparison, we map the redistribution of matter and meaning in practices through two such assemblages, which we refer to as "social innovative infrastructures" in Portugal and Austria. Illustrated through the cases, we introduce the concept of "practices of spread," composed of "material-discursive circulations" and "relational dynamics" spread as a generative act leading to the (re)materialisation of bodies, objects, spaces, and meaning in social innovation processes.

Both sections highlight the interplay of power relations that are at work as practices spread and emerge, not least between what are considered existing or traditional ways of doing things in relation to novelty and innovation as they compete for legitimacy, validity, and acceptance.

In the last section, we provide insights into how the work of local development initiatives in the field of social innovation contributes to neo-endogenous development in rural Alentejo, as well as the potential impacts that such socially innovative approaches have had on the development of the region. Our research into the potential impact assessment of social innovation highlights how the discursive articulation of social innovation is significant to its ability to be measured and evaluated and, therefore, to communicate social impact and validity. This observation concurs with our findings that ambiguous descriptions of social innovations can be hard to grasp for stakeholders and, therefore, undermine their acceptance and spread. It might be concluded that social innovation practices and processes are in reality fluid and complex and they often cross given lines. Their extension may be better served with well-articulated edges and clear communication patterns, yet crucially, without resorting to overly simplistic language, buzzwords, and jargon.

4.1. Emergence of social innovation

The processes of social innovation emergence are not easily grasped because of their complexity and intangibility, the variety of actors involved, and the varying degrees of structural and cultural resistance to novelty. Interactions between the local rootedness and global connectedness of societal challenges and initiatives that aim to address them also plays a role in how emergence processes unfold (Ruijsink et al. 2017). In the context of the emergence of social innovation in rural areas, with the aim of contributing to knowledge on the well-being of rural regions, it is crucial to focus on how social innovations interact with broader societal processes of social change. Recently, there has been a tendency to approach social innovation as a part of broader societal processes and transformations (Howaldt et al. 2015; Pel et al. 2017; Haxeltine et al. 2016). Avelino et al. (2019) underscore that socially innovative initiatives contribute to adjustments in societal values, behaviours, routines, and the broader social system by interacting with other societal processes and changes.

4.1.1. Socially innovative practices

Howaldt, Domanski, and Kaletka, (2016) define social innovation within social practice approaches as a "new combination or configuration of practices in areas of social action, prompted by certain actors or constellations of actors with the ultimate goal of coping better with needs and problems than is possible by using existing practices" (p.27). Paying attention to practices in social innovation research also allows us to explore and track how innovative practices develop through re-configuring, re-thinking, and giving new meanings to elements that already exist. Schumpeter (2008) notes that in many cases novelty in innovation is a new combination of elements that have existed, but not in such particular combinations. The focus on social practices enacted by social innovation initiatives helps us understand confrontations between social innovation and dominant institutions and prevailing societal norms, and allows us to capture the creative processes of coexistence and clashes between conflicting norms and practices (Bartels 2017).

4.1.2. Elements of socially innovative practices

To understand the processes of social innovation emergence in rural areas, I focus on exploring new social practices (such as new socially and environmentally beneficial farming sectors) and the role of different types of social innovation initiatives (social entrepreneurs, social enterprises, and innovative cooperatives) in supporting these practices. Basing this analysis on practice theory allows for an exploration of how elements such as changing materiality, new competences and intangible meanings, images, and symbolic dimensions affect the emergence of new social practices and how practices are formed by changing and breaking the links between their elements (Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012). The materiality of innovative practices is an integral part of social innovation (Rabadjieva and Butzin 2019). As will be illustrated by the case study below, social innovations such as empowering rural residents to become involved in new agro-entrepreneurial activities, novel organisational structures, and new types of collaboration imply interaction with, and transformation of, materiality as a natural part of these practices. In the domain of meanings of social innovation, its symbolic and socio-cultural aspects, cultural clashes provoked by new practices are often mentioned, but vaguely researched in social innovation literature (ibid). Nevertheless, aspects related to social trends and the socio-cultural milieu of social innovation are crucial for understanding the emergence processes (ibid). The socio-cultural dimension of social innovation is strongly related to the interaction between local roots of social innovation, such as responses to the local issues of unemployment or out-migration, and global trends, such as questioning the neoliberal market or the promotion of a "sharing economy" (Ruijsink

et al. 2017). The level of support and legitimacy of social innovations among local residents can be related to the level of understanding, acceptance, or resistance to meanings produced by these interactions.

4.1.3. Social innovation, prevailing norms, and legitimacy

Howaldt et al. (2014) emphasise that social practice theories allow us to include heterogeneous types of elements and actors in the analysis of social innovation processes, and not just individuals who propose and implement particular innovative ideas. For instance, potential elements and actors such as organisations, laws, documents, and technologies are not always directly involved in a specific socially innovative initiative, but serve as indirect participants of a newly emerging practice by either enabling or impeding them. Thus, social innovations are changes in social practices based partly on purposeful intervention (ibid) but are also shaped through already existing practices and their resistance to change. Actions and strategies of social innovators only partially shape the processes of social innovation emergence, as resistance to innovative practices also plays a great role in how these processes unfold. Resistance to SI predominantly stems from a conflict between the culture of the context and the new culture that SI brings with it (Kaletka, Markmann, and Pelka 2016). Besides roles that social innovators take up, such as their political and social attitudes, motivations, capabilities, and skills, and functions they introduce, such as novel management procedures and governance models, the context of the structures and norms greatly influences social innovation emergence processes (ibid). The development of socially innovative practices is interlinked with path dependencies related to existing institutions and economic, political, and technological factors.

In terms of formal institutional resistance, Newth and Woods (2014) point out that since socially innovative initiatives such as social entrepreneurship do not fit with mainstream organisational "logics" because of its mixture of commercial and social elements, its legitimacy is challenged. Newth and Woods (2014) note that although the collective social values are shifting towards more acceptance of such hybrid organisations, it is still very problematic to acquire legitimacy, appropriate legal recognition, and secure resources because it does not fit into the institutional logic. The normative context that is based on historical and legal conditions, codes, and other accepted social standards is entangled in social innovation processes (ibid). Legitimacy and acceptance of social innovation in terms of social norms, which can also be characterised as informal institutional resistance, refers to how stakeholders perceive the value provided by the organisation to them, the common understanding of what is proper according to societal norms, and what society perceives as appropriate (ibid).

4.1.4. Case study: Socially innovative farming in Alentejo, Portugal

Throughout European rural areas we can observe the emergence of civil society initiatives that strive to address the needs of communities by implementing new practices and constructing new social relations. Collective action and the capacity to create alliances and the transformation of social roles are key for successful novel rural development practices (Brunori, Galli, and Rossi 2004). New forms of social organisation, combined with environmentally sustainable agricultural practices such as environmental cooperatives, play a significant role in facilitating the processes of re-embedding farming and enabling the development of new networks to construct a sustainable agriculture and rural development in their locality (Renting and Van Der Ploeg 2001).

The region of Alentejo in Southern Portugal is also witnessing the emergence of organisations that strive to transform rural systems through participatory and collective processes. Minga is an innovative

cooperative based in the municipality of Montemor-o-Novo in Central Alentejo. Turning to the new practices that the cooperative is working on introducing, we focus on the agricultural section of the cooperative, through which they are working towards transforming the practice of agricultural production in the area. One of the new practices that the cooperative aims to support is small-scale agricultural entrepreneurship – organic vegetable production. Among various strategies they are using are the creation of new cooperative-based sales channels; serving as an intermediary entity between local producers and public authorities to create additional sales channels and facilitate bureaucratic procedures; encouraging solidarity economy-based practices of agricultural certification; constructing space for discussions and participatory decision-making for agro-stakeholders; and holding workshops and farm working days to disseminate knowledge on organic agriculture and agro-forestry. The cooperative aims to achieve several objectives. The first is to bring more income-generating activities into the area. The cooperative founders explain that they would like to provide an opportunity for residents who do not have access to large agricultural plots and who do not have enough resources to start and run agricultural businesses. The cooperative aims to create new income opportunities because there is a trend of a decreasing population, particularly of youth, and a lack of employment opportunities, especially in farming, which is dominated by large scale meat production that does not create many jobs. Secondly, the cooperative is working on introducing more sustainable agricultural practices through a focus on organic production, agro-forestry, and resilient agricultural systems.

4.1.5. The degree of novelty of emerging practices

Observing various types of socially entrepreneurial organisations and arrangements in the sector of agriculture suggests that temporal aspects of the new practices these organisations aim to support play a great role in what kind of strategies can be most successful, including the degree of novelty or institutionalisation of the practice. In the area where the cooperative is situated, practices of organic commercial small-scale farming are at the very initial stage of development. Alentejo has vast agricultural land with crops such as cereals, vines and olives, fruit, cattle, and pigs, as well as forestry (cork oak cultivation and cork extraction) (the European Job Mobility Portal 2020). The *montado* is the predominant agro-silvo-pastoral system in the region that combines forestry (cork and holm oak) with cereal and livestock production (Pinto-Correia, Ribeiro, and Sá-Sousa 2011). In Alentejo, the agricultural sector is largely influenced by the heritage of the *latifundia* agrarian and land-ownership system that existed until the end of the dictatorial regime in 1974. These historical and geographic factors, together with the fact that the organic farming sector and organic product consumption are still relatively new in the country, lead to the rarity of small-scale commercial agro-businesses in the area. It has been emphasised that new trends in agricultural management, such as transitioning towards more diversified practices in production, consumption, and protection goals in farm management are needed in the region (Teresa Pinto-Correia, Menezes, and Barroso 2014). The activities in the agricultural section of the cooperative are progressing slower than, for instance, the services section because it is challenging to assemble the resources, infrastructure, and know-how needed for successful organic vegetable production in the area. There are very few producers of vegetables, and many of them are elderly people who are not interested in new means of agricultural entrepreneurship and increasing production. In terms of the socio-cultural norms that affect the level of participation in innovative practices, the cooperative, similar to many other cooperatives in rural areas with environmental objectives, is often associated with young urban people. These so-called "new rurals" can sometimes be alienating to the local population and might be an obstacle to achieving broad engagement. The environmental ideas and promotion of organic practices also frequently clashes with agriculture traditions and raises concerns about productivity vs. organic production.

Moreover, vegetable production in the area is currently mostly associated with informal gardens, rather than with obtaining a formal income. The successful engagement of participants also highly depends on changing these perceptions and demonstrating that these activities can be a source of income and can provide the farmers with some social security.

4.1.6. Focusing on different elements of practices to support the SI emergence

The high degree of novelty of the practice largely defines the strategies that the cooperative applies in generating social innovation. These strategies can be categorised into three types: the particular format of the cooperative (1) and the types of community engagement (2) and collaborations (3) it engages in. The particular type of initiative chosen – creation of the innovative legal format – plays a role in how it is able to support new agricultural practices. This is strongly related to the way the cooperative engages with the aspect of materiality: what new material or immaterial elements and arrangements work better to support different new practices? As noted by Shove et al. (2012), the emergence of novel social practices can be triggered by a change in any of the elements that make up existing practices. In the case of an innovative cooperative format, such as Minga, the process was launched with the immaterial construction of new meanings, values, and general understandings that serve as the basis for emerging new social practices. The ideas of local mobilisation, local entrepreneurship, and empowerment were translated into the creation of a novel legal cooperative structure. In contrast to some other agricultural social entrepreneurship initiatives, where the primary focus is the creation of a novel space for agricultural production (for example, farm-based cooperatives, alternative landownership schemes), Minga engaged in creating new value chains (e.g. sales channels) and procedures for the facilitation of certification and business formalisation. Such a strategy can potentially be efficient when material elements of new practices (in this case, informal gardens or other types of plots) are already present in the area, while the culture and knowledge required for developing small-scale commercial organic entrepreneurship are at the early stages of development.

The second category – the type of community engagement – is largely related to the previous category. The creation of the cooperative format for alternative sales and exchange channels allows for the engagement of actors who are already carriers of innovative practices (e.g. young farmers with the knowledge and ambition   to engage in innovative agricultural practices), as well as actors who can potentially become carriers of such practices (conventional farmers, who can turn to new practices if, for instance, new value chains prove to be efficient). This type of engagement can be described as a pull-push strategy, where the cooperative can attract similar minded actors as well as actively recruit actors, for example, by generating and disseminating knowledge through workshops, collaborative farming days, and the interaction of cooperative members with farmers who would like to sell through the cooperative.

In terms of collaborations, the cooperative is trying to establish a strong partnership with the local municipality in order to facilitate the transformation of agricultural practices. Minga has initiated contact with the municipality to negotiate opening a channel for local producers to supply school canteens with vegetables, with Minga serving as an intermediate facilitator to reduce bureaucratic accounting issues. It also is seeking a more collaborative relationship with the local authorities. For example, there needs to be a more engaged discussion about the adaptation of school menus to the seasonality and production possibilities of the local producers and the construction of infrastructure for local producers, such as a common municipal kitchen to allow local producers to transform their fruit and vegetables into preserves, reducing the burden of constructing and certifying individual

transformation units. Since social innovators are relatively new in the area and work with uncommon practices, partnership with the municipality, a well-recognised actor, can be seen as one of its strategies for legitimisation.

4.1.7. Intermediate conclusions

New social organisation and a changed material infrastructure have the potential to enable new practices and/or new forms of relationships between actors and elements of practice (Littig and Leitner 2017). Such processing of the integration of new elements usually happens in an experimental format or niche environment, and their potential spread depends strongly on the enabling or hindering environment (ibid). The successful interaction between new social practices and socially entrepreneurial actors and organisations, which play a great role in social innovation emergence, depends greatly on the degree of novelty and institutionalisation of the new practices and the strategies social entrepreneurs choose to interact with the various elements of these practices.

The next section will explore the processes of social innovation spread in rural regions through interrelated networks of people and more-than-human agents through the dynamic relations of imitation, repetition, and opposition.

4.2. Socially innovative infrastructures and practices of spread

Following on from the previous contribution, this section reconsiders the material and relational aspects of *spatial spread* in social innovation as a generative, more-than-human[7], and performative practice. It opens with a short introduction to the cases, then briefly reflects on 'practices of spread' in social innovation and theoretical advances in New Materialism – a novel theoretical framework suitable to advancing this proposal. Following on from this, the contribution asks the questions: what are examples of practices of spread, and what do practices of spread consist of? It ends with a short summary putting forward the concepts of material circulations and relation dynamics as components of practices of spread.

The two case studies exemplify two extensive social innovations that have traversed usual territorial boundaries to support fragmented social groups across large rural landscapes. The first example comprises a socially innovative project intended to support, disseminate, and co-generate knowledge-practices in the emerging herb farming sector in rural Portugal. The second, is an integrated system of rooms spread throughout upper Austria that provide open spaces, or "labs" in villages and towns for residents to meet, learn, and experiment together. Both social innovations aim to support specific groups. In Portugal, these groups are new young farmers recently arrived in the countryside from urban areas, and in Austria, residents are supported to start small interest groups which may, and often do, evolve into new socially innovative initiatives, known as "nodes". Both projects are highly networked, a resource often valorised in the social innovation literature (e.g. Moulaert and Mehmood 2011) and are invoked to explain spread or diffusion (e.g. André et al. 2009). However, explaining

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[7] More-than-human or posthumanism refers to a shift in contemporary critical theory to think the world beyond the anthropocentrism that has marked much of post-enlightenment rationalist epistemology. More-than-human practices, as I evoke them here, refers to feminists STS which has forged this new theoretical trajectory to overcome the nature-culture divide and to decentre the archetypal figure of 'Man' as the reference point for being in and knowing the world. See for example Haraway 1985, Barad 2007, Braidotti 2013.

growth and spread of social innovations though social networks often ignores the materiality at work in such projects. For example, in the Portuguese case, networking and forging new social relations between new farmers entailed much bodily work, e.g. driving around the region in hot summers to meet new farmers and see their specific farms, and organising and attending events, conferences, and workshops in air-conditioned rooms, gardens, or farms. Similarly, in Upper Austria, where public transport in the region is more readily available than in Alentejo, long drives between remote locations (often at night, as many lab volunteers work during the day) became regular routines in spreading labs to new locations. In this sense, acknowledging both the material and social dimensions of these highly networked and geographically extensive support s*ystems, they can be more accurately described as infrastructures.*

4.2.1. Putting forward generative, more-than-human "practices of spread"

In Laws of Imitation, Tarde (1903, 2000) identified the repetition of social innovations and their interplay between other, *opposing* inventions to elucidate – at a micro-level – how societies stabilise and change over time. According to Tarde (2012), the *social* refers to the relational forces between bodies and constellations, including people, planets, galaxies, microbes, etc. (p.73), where the universe consists of many overlapping, more-than-only-human societies. Tarde is recognised by some as the grandfather of both diffusion research (Rogers 1995; Kinnunen 1996) and social innovation theory (Howaldt, Kopp, and Schwarz 2013; Moulaert et al. 2013). By the middle of the 20th Century, diffusion research had shifted towards a more human-centric notion of the social, turning its attention to the spread of technical innovations by the diffusion of information as "one individual communicates a new idea to one or several others" (Rogers 1995, 18) across a social network. Networks of actors and the communication of knowledge between them explained how ideas – as (immaterial) representation of innovations – spread.   More recently, attention has turned away from the representation and primacy of ideas (e.g. Hacking 1983), to ways of doing and saying things in, or as, social practices (e.g. Schatzki 1996). Here, "bundles" of practices are the loci of the social (Reckwitz 2002), consisting of the interplay of capacities, recourses, and materiality (Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012). As outlined in the previous section, social innovations are often described as novel social practices targeting specific situated problems, which spread to other locations and become social innovations as they transcend from being seen as instances of deviant behaviour to socially accepted norms, routines, and patterns of behaviour (e.g. Howaldt and Schwarz 2010; Christmann 2016; etc.).

Scholarly work under the rubric of New Materialism has turned to consider the effects of more-than-human agency (Latour 2005), multispecies *becoming-with* (Haraway 2008) and intra-activity (Barad 2007)[8] in practices in deeply relational and material ways. Barad's work, in particular, provides fertile ground and theoretical tools for re-thinking practices of spread. Barad's performative posthumanism (Barad 1996, 2003) aims to draw attention to the re-distribution of agency within entanglements of material-discursive practices, claiming matter and meaning to be deeply interwoven and generative of each other. Here, "bodies," 'things", "subjects", and "objects" do not enter into practices as coherent entities, but instead such "relata" are co-generated through relations within material-discursive

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[8] Where and how agency is distributed is a central focus to more-than-human literature and discourse and takes many guises. Core to many of the discussions in the field is to show how other actants, beyond only humans, are agential in productive social situations. In Haraway (2016) for example, different species interact and symbiotically co-producing and affecting one another, that is humans and animals emerge, or *become* together.

practices (Barad 1996). Barad calls this intra-action in order to highlight that things are already connected (exterior-within), and, in fact, what occurs is a reconfiguring of relation-yielding bodies. This is an idea that resonates with Howaldt and Schwartz' practice-orientated definition of social innovation put forward in the previous section.[9]

Taken together in this way, Barad and Tarde call for a shift away from recording the movement of pre-existing objects or practices from location to location as the only measure of spread, or further still, bring into question pre-existing networks lying in wait, ready for the diffusion of ideas. Rather, relations are already spread and their reconfiguration leads to the generation of bodies, objects, and spaces and new meanings, values, norms, and behaviours. Networks, or in these cases, the infrastructures are performative, that is, they emerge from an interplay of relations, materials, and discourses as they re-spread. This has implications for the concept of spread and the methods used to "measure" it. Spread, in this interpretation, is a generative, material-discursive, and more-than-human practice. It is the notion of practices of spread that will be examined further below.

4.2.2. A note on method

To reach this performative notion of spread, methodologically, it was first necessary to identify the circulation of materials and discourses and then consider how these "doings and sayings" produced the infrastructures through which they were spreading. As a second step, we consider how these *material circulations* began to shape and define other components, such as participating individuals. The third step was to identify the forces that propelled or obstructed the spread.

4.2.2.1. Equipment

In both cases *equipment* circulated, serving as a means of sharing or exchanging technologies and techniques between different locations and actors. Here, equipment is not only a set of technical objects required to carry out particular tasks, but also refers to the process of supplying equipment necessary for undertaking such tasks (*to equip*), and it denotes the mental resources required to complete tasks (*intellectual equipment*). Therefore, it is at once a material object, mental process, and a set of practices mapped in both cases.

4.2.2.2. Open lab infrastructure

In the first example, radio equipment was exchanged between "open innovation labs" in villages and towns across Upper Austria. Beginning with two sets of rooms in two villages in 2011, iterations of the labs continue to spread regionally, nationally, and internationally, forming a well-connected infrastructure of lab spaces, "nodes" (resident led initiatives), activities, and actors (see box 1).

In 2012, a third lab opened in a village 60km away from the first. Here, the first sub-initiative ("node") was a community radio station. Radio stations were not a part of the initial "blueprint" of the labs, but were the result of the specific *adaption* between the relatively new open lab concept and the specific resources and cultural capital available in the village, attributed to the interests and experiences of a

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[9] "New combination or configuration of practices in areas of social action, prompted by certain actors or constellations of actors with the ultimate goal of coping better with needs and problems than is possible by using existing practices" (Howaldt and Schwarz 2010, 27)

particular local actor. These factors, in combination with local political will and access to funding and equipment (mental and material) led to a succession of later labs taking up radio broadcasting as an activity. In a reversal of direction, one of the first labs decided to incorporate the practices and also established its own radio station.

These adaptations to the open lab concept and practices turned out to be powerful and defining for the growth and spread of the open lab infrastructure across the region. Radio broadcasting was popular with young people and attractive to funders and development agencies. As an outreach activity, learning radio broadcasting provided access to often hard to reach younger people. Crucially, the skills for learning and maintaining the radio equipment were established and could be shared through the emerging infrastructure.

4.2.3. What does this mean for the practices of spread?

Firstly, social practices were being repeated in other locations as mental and material equipment was circulated between villages in the form of lending and exchanging microphones, mixing desks, headphones, etc. and sharing the know-how to operate and maintain these technologies. This meant driving at least 60km between locations, resulting in face-to-face contact that would otherwise not have happened. Such physical encounters reinforced and strengthened social relation through numerous unplanned interactions, like having lunch together or sharing a drink, which often led to new ideas being discussed (there is now a shared kitchen in both these labs). Furthermore, symbolic associations were formed between the labs working on radio broadcasting. They were able to share their successes, problems, and mistakes with each other, learning together. In this way, as radio broadcasting was taken up in other locations across the region, knowledge was fed back into and disseminated through the emerging infrastructure of the project. The infrastructure, taken to include human actors and the practices they participated in, was co-evolving. In Barad's terms, this is performative, that is, as practices were carried out the objects (infrastructures) and bodies (individuals) who were doing and sharing the practices were being (re)made.

Secondly, as I have indicated, social practices co-evolved as they adapted to local conditions. For example, the labs did not follow a blueprint, but were conceived to adapt to the specific needs and capacities of the rural settlements they spread to. This confirms the idea that practices, objects, people, etc. are not coherent entities spreading through space, instead, they co-evolve with space and other practices as they travel. Spread is generative.

Thirdly, spread does not occur uni-directionally from one location to the next. In fact, here a previous iteration of the lab learned from and adapted to later versions by incorporating radio broadcasting into their activities. Spread is complex and non-linear.

Finally, in addition to equipment spreading between labs, labs spreading to new locations, infrastructure being performed as it spreads through regions, and shared and individual meanings emerging as materials move around, radio shows were being broadcast across the region. This provided a powerful means to extend its spatial and temporal reach (programmes could be archived and listened to at any time), communicating between labs, with the infrastructure serving to discursively weave it together as it unfolded. According to Tarde (2000), this is a process of intrinsic, qualitative growth, similar to Barad's intra-activity, through which relations are reconfigured. Additionally, these discursive practices were able to reach potential members not yet enrolled, a form of spread described by Tarde (2000) as extrinsic or qualitative growth, a growth in numbers as

constellations or infrastructures expand. Both of these forms of spread are beneficial to traverse large geographic distances in rural regions. Typically, diffusion channels such as radio, television, etc. would have restrictions and barriers to access mediated by mainstream institutions, broadcasting schedules, journalists, commissioners, etc. However, in this social innovation, the infrastructure was publicly owned, operated, and maintained by the community groups involved.

4.2.3.1. Herb farms

The second example illustrates a socially innovative infrastructure that was conceived to support new farmers and to develop an emerging herb farming sector, thereby, supporting rural development in Portugal (see Box 2).

In this case, the propagation of landscape fabric weed barriers as an equipment for preventing the spread of unwanted plant species between profitable herb plants unintentionally worked to generate and circulate certain discourses between farmers. These discourses had the effect of creating new shared meaning between farmers. As the case study highlights, the repetition of bureaucratic application procedures led to many new farmers adopting practices and equipment that they later perceived as inadequate for farming herbs in the hot and arid climate of the Portuguese interior.

Farming medical and aromatic herbs is hard work, consisting of weeding, planting, harvesting, cutting, and preparing, and then once the herbs are collected, drying, cutting, sorting, packaging, and transporting them for sales. Keeping the fields "clean", free of weeds, is crucial to an efficient and effective harvest. Buyers prefer sacks of single, unpolluted species: the higher the grade the better the price. This, however, requires ongoing maintenance of the farm infrastructure, including the fields. Woven polypropylene fabric weed barriers (initially adapted from market and domestic gardening) were being experimented with and used effectively in farms in the north-east of the country, in proximity to the Atlantic coast.

This equipment (alongside others) had been incorporated into early funding applications – made by others actors in the north-east (see Box 2) – to help new farmers cope with weeds and lower the need for additional labour and maintenance on their farms (labour costs were not eligible for funding, only partial contributions towards material costs of equipment and capital cost for property were eligible). Application protocols were repeated for new applicants, thereby spreading the same equipment specified within the application across new farms in the Alentejo. Polypropylene fabric is not an expensive material per sq./m, but over three hectares the costs are not negligible, especially factoring in the costs of other necessary proprietary equipment, such as staples to hold the fabric down, etc. However, it was not the price of the equipment as much as the performance of the material, it's aesthetic impact on the landscape, and its material impact on the soil and microorganisms within, combined with the symbolic value it came to hold that affected the farmers most.

Herb plants are perennial and can last up to 4 years and yield between 2-4 cuttings per year. After preparing the fields, the weed barrier is laid with holes that are cut or melted every 50cms or so for saplings. Once laid and planted, the fabric remains in place for the lifespan of the plants, as to remove it would be time and labour intensive and would risk damaging the plants. Why then, would farmers want to remove the weed barrier, as was happening across the region?

It started to become apparent that the equipment was not suitable for the climate of the interior for organic farming as carried out by these farmers, and it began to symbolise a funding procedure that

the farmers were beginning to resent. One example of the material inadequacy is that under the hot sun of the Alentejo, the polymer weave and weft would eventually break down and individual fibres would mix into, and merge with, the soil. The new famers had placed great personal significance on the eco-ethics and organic farming practices, and these practices had begun to inform the emerging identities of the new farmers, which were incompatible with potentially contaminating the soil. Paradoxically, this breakdown of material and its symbolic significance came to partially connect and weave together the farms as they co-generated novel counter practices supported by, or indeed in collaboration with, the project infrastructure.

Farms were not only supported by infrastructure but became enmeshed with the infrastructure, becoming both destinations (objects of support) and the conduits through which relations where *re-spread*. In this way, new farmers became unwittingly embroiled in the politics and practices of rural development. This seemingly immaterial and transient infrastructure benefited from, and piggybacked on, other more stable and established infrastructures, including roads, conferences circuits, overhead phone lines, international supply chains, EU structural funding, UN rural development policy, etc. to operationalise itself.

With recourse to Barad's insights, we can see the entangled nature of materiality and discursive orders in this example. That is, as equipment spread, so did discourses and vice versa, or, more accurately, new shared meanings emerged as equipment was circulated and, in this example, broken down. A further point to take away is that spread is not an entirely intentional practice. That is, when equipment is circulated as the result of other practices (e.g. repetition of funding applications), in this sense, it is a more than only human practice, one which includes other materialities and types of agency.

4.2.4. Intermediate conclusions

Following insights from Tarde, we can say that the social innovation in the project, at least partially, emerged in relational opposition to other prevailing equipment (knowledge, discourses, and material practices) spreading from elsewhere (the constellation in the north-east). In this way, the innovation emerged, at least in part, in relation to the spread of other innovations. This point is not new and was made by Tarde in 1903. Moreover, Tarde also registered the dynamics of competing forces of repetition, opposition, and adaption. However, by drawing attention to the processual dynamics of innovation through practices of spread within infrastructure, I aim to provide an alternative reading of spread to the prevailing and normative idea that spread is simply the number of instances a social innovation is found across a space. In this mainstream interpretation of spread, which seems to have forgotten Tarde's observations, spreading of social innovation objects is a product of human intentionality alone and is usually seen as a good practice, or termed "best practices" that should be repeated in other locations, which as this case depicts, often has little regard for the on-going and co-emergent spatial conditions constituting locations such as climate (which is far from stable) or soil types, or to the unpredictable combinations of practices and meanings as witnessed in new urban professionals-cum-farmers, whose eco-ethics were as much a result of their distance from country life, as from actually working in fields.

Connected to this, and what Tarde could not have realised at the time of his observations, is how agency is re-distributed through practices of spread. New materialist theory, particularly with recourse to Barad, provides us with tools to re-think agency as "a doing" in re-distribution (Barad 2007), where agency is not pre-given to subjects (or objects), but occurs within intra-activity. In the examples above, it is possible to see how the particular material re-distribution of equipment, such as radio

broadcasting, funding protocols, or weed barriers and their discursive entanglements, such as communicative practices, shared symbolic meanings, subjectivation, etc. contributed to the re-distribution of agency within emerging constellations (e.g. a shift in power from the north-east of Portugal to the rural interior, empowerment).

Materials were circulated in infrastructure, yielding new shared meaning, and gained momentum through the relational dynamic of repetition, opposition, and adaptation. As materials circulated, new relations were made, or following Barad's observations, reconfigured. Such relations, as in the second case study, can be relations of power leading to the re-distribution of agency. Furthermore, we see how in both cases the projects "piggybacked" on or incorporated other existing, established infrastructures, extending both spatial and temporal reach.

Through the cases presented, I have attempted to illustrate examples of material-discursive circulations (equipment) and relational dynamics (repetition, opposition, and adaptation). Together, these rubrics begin to constitute a more-than-human performative reading of practices of spread in social innovation. Such performative practices, in one way, distribute practices (of social innovation) through infrastructure and, in another way, the circulation of material practice makes infrastructure by spreading and re-spreading relations, therefore, providing two types of spread.

4.3. Social innovation, its impacts, and the challenges of impact assessment: The experience of local development initiatives from Baixo Alentejo

4.3.1. Social innovation as a concept for regional development

In recent decades, there has been a shift in focus from the conventional development and economic growth of the regions towards paying more attention to dimensions of quality of life, empowerment, and local involvement. The need for a sustained reorientation of the economic understanding and policy strategies for regional development, prioritises dimensions such as sustainable resource use, well-being, and social innovation above economic growth (Dax and Fisher 2018). In this sense, social innovation plays a great role in helping regions find new solutions to meet the needs that have not been met otherwise through improvements in participatory governance, enhanced collaboration, improved networks, etc. Moreover, the role of social innovation comes into play due to the fact that technological innovations alone are not capable of overcoming the social and economic challenges rural regions are facing, due to the complexity and context-dependence of such challenges (Howaldt et al. 2018b). In this regard, social innovation has been awarded a prominent place in research (Moulaert et al. 2005; Neumeier 2012, 2017; Bock 2016; Avelino et al. 2019) and policy (OECD 2010; BEPA 2010; EU 2013), with various understanding arising from the discussion. To this end, in the field of rural studies, social innovation has been understood as an action that: a) is innovative with regard to the context or beneficiaries; b) meets needs more effectively than previous actions, projects, and initiatives; c) provides long-term solutions; and d) is adopted beyond the initial group/network that developed it (Neumeier 2017, elaborated).

The potential of social innovation to support sustainable development of regions was introduced as a response to the challenges faced by those territories. In the report by the OECD (2006), the notion of a "circle of decline" was introduced in an attempt to explain the process by which rural regions find themselves unable to escape the reproducing loop of out-migration, low population density, lower business creation rates, and lack of job opportunities. One of the solutions suggested for the development of those regions is innovation in rural development, with the prominent example of the

LEADER Community Initiative. This initiative is an integrated and neo-endogenous approach to rural development with an innovative approach to development and facilitating local action groups (LAGs) to promote innovative solutions as a better response to the challenges that have not been met otherwise. However, the implementation of (socially) innovative projects in rural areas is not limited to LAGs, but is done by various actors, with local development associations (LDAs) holding a prominent place in the local development of rural areas. Thus, the experiences of both LAGs and LDAs in implementing social innovations and tracing and assessing the impacts of such innovations, as well as the challenges they face, are discussed below.

4.3.2. Neo-endogenous development and social innovation

The traditional image of a structurally weak rural region is of an area that is lagging behind due to the limited capacity of actors and groups to participate in economic activities (Bock 2016). Sometimes, structurally weak rural areas are perceived as lacking innovation in comparison to their urban counterparts (e.g. Shucksmith et al. 2009). However, this view has been contested by those who regard rural regions as those that, despite structural disadvantages such as poor resource accessibility and detachment from markets and networks (Bock 2016), develop creative solutions for existing challenges, and have the drive needed for the development and implementation of innovative projects. The synergies between local actors and extra-local counterparts, in this regard, are important in order to support rural regions in the process of exchanging know-how, implementing novel practices, etc. A neo-endogenous development framework, while still recognising the need for external participation in the development process (and the usual presence of an external impetus as well), puts greater emphasis on utilising local resources and enhancing local participation in order to boost the development of a given rural region (Neumeier 2012). To this end, social innovation takes on the role of mobilising local (endogenous) resources and connecting such resources to extra-local networks. By supporting a bottom-up approach, alongside empowerment and increased participation of the local communities in socially innovative projects, local development initiatives (both LAGs and LDAs) strive to utilise local resources to their fullest potential. Neo-endogenous development, to this end, is characterised by relying on local resources and local participation, but places emphasis on dynamic interactions between local areas and their wider environments (Ray 2001; Gkartzios and Scott 2014). Approaching social innovation through the lens of neo-endogenous development (as suggested by Neumeier 2012) suggests that social innovation initiatives are needed to support sustainable development, which, in turn, contributes to further development and implementation of social innovation projects by LAGs and LDAs working in the Portuguese region of Baixo Alentejo.

4.3.3. Impacts produced by the activities of local development initiatives in Baixo Alentejo

4.3.3.1. Tangible and intangible impacts of social innovation projects

The impacts produced by social innovation activities in the case study regions are described by members of LAGs and LDAs to be "tangible" rather than "intangible". Such impacts include capacity building by organisations among local communities (through workshops, seminars, and one-on-one entrepreneurial consulting), and the empowerment of the local community through involvement in co-creating and co-producing projects. Social enterprises and local development organisations focus on the promotion of entrepreneurial skills and knowledge among local communities, alongside creating and strengthening networks among various actors.

4.3.3.2. Interconnectivity of various types of impacts produced

Despite the fact that impacts can be observed in various dimensions (social, cultural, organisational, etc.), it is rather challenging to identify impacts that can be easily put into one category. One of the possible illustrations for the support provided to the local supply chains that results in alternative consumption models and further support for economic activity in the regions is the example of the EPAM network (*Empreender na Fileira das Plantas Aromáticas e Medicinais em Portugal*, implemented by ADC Moura), where the network of medicinal plants producers has grown over time, by starting local. By providing the farmers with a support network of fellow farmers, know-how, and capacity building through workshops and seminars, and taking on the role of an intermediary, ADC Moura, as a local development association, has promoted the EPAM network in the region of Baixo Alentejo and further afield.

4.3.3.3. An integrated approach to rural development

In both cases, LAGs and LDAs strive for integrated development, meaning, the projects implemented by organisations cover various fields within one project, rather than target only one domain, e.g. promoting tourism through the use of natural assets and local knowledge. In most of the projects, such organisations strive to promote holistic development by implementing interventions that cover diverse groups of people (e.g. elderly, young, female) simultaneously, while also not limiting their projects to specific domains of (purely) economic or social development. In Baixo Alentejo, integrated, sustainable development through projects concentrating on different combinations of interventions was said to be one of the main objectives. Such an integrated approach is especially supported by LAGs and LDAs, as the public sector was not seen as always working in an integrated way by the interviewees.

4.3.3.4. Opportunity driven and problem solving social innovation

Rural development has experienced a shift towards perceiving available local assets as an opportunity and a valuable feature, rather than an obstacle (Dax and Fisher 2018). Despite the fact that most literature refers to social innovation as a new way of solving problems or meeting needs, opportunity and asset driven social innovation are rarely discussed in lieu of problem solving. LAGs and LDAs from Baixo Alentejo took the approach to focus on the opportunities, with an attempt to change the perception of the region among both local communities and external actors. The importance of promoting opportunity driven, rather than solely problem solving social innovations stems from the fact that opportunity driven social innovation can potentially provide more transformative outcomes (Bosworth et al. 2016), despite the fact that problem-oriented actions can often provide the best available solution at a given time.

4.3.3.5. Opportunities and challenges of social innovation impact assessment among organisations

As argued, one of the main objectives of assessing impacts in the third sector is to understand (in social, environmental, and economic terms) what difference an organisation's activities make to the world, and communicating that value to the organisation itself and its stakeholders (Dey and Gibbon 2017). Implementing a system to assess such value can help organisations set realistic goals for the planned intervention, monitor and improve their performance, and inform decision-making.

Impact assessments are seen by the LAGs and LDAs as a tool to potentially illustrate and showcase their work. Such work is usually presented by the organisations to local communities (communicated in the form of leaflets and on the LDA's web or social media page), and financing and monitoring bodies such as the EU (in the form of more professionalised reports), as well as the peer community (e.g. colleagues in the field and other organisations).

Assessing the impacts produced by their activities can help organisations gain legitimacy. The process of presenting the impacts achieved can help organisations provide "proof" of an organisation's delivery on the proposed actions – and that those actions have had an actual impact on the community and beyond. However, there is a risk of such impact assessments being done in a manner where what can be measured is only what can be evaluated, and more perniciously, determining that what can be measured is what *should* be evaluated (Millar and Hall 2013; Cunha and Benneworth 2020). Therefore, the organisations should be cautious of such bias and strive to assess various types of impacts, rather than those that are more convenient to measure.

Impact assessments are approached by the LAGs and LDAs as both a self-evaluation and a planning tool for future interventions. Based on either delivering on the expected impacts – or in case of failing to do so – the organisations in question can adjust their strategies and use such assessment procedures to evaluate their own work (and determining why some social innovation projects were "successful" at achieving expected impacts and others not); based on that, they can adjust and change the future interventions.

At the same time, results of the study conducted in Baixo Alentejo show that local development associations and local action groups struggle with the impact assessment of social innovation activities and projects. The empirical evidence suggests that the ambiguity and fuzziness of the social innovation concept plays a role in identifying the activities as a social innovation in the first place.

The causality issue of whether the change resulted from the implementation of a specific social innovation project or from other aspects imposes difficulties in accessing impact. Due to the context-dependency of social innovation, as well as the complex process of social change it encourages, the organisations in question struggle to account for various contextual factors when it comes to attributing the achieved impact (specifically) to the social innovation implemented.

The lack of (systematised) data on social innovation initiatives, namely systematic data available for a longer period of social innovation implementation, makes impact assessment challenging. The organisations face the issue with data availability due to the lack of resources to compile such data sets (e.g. time constraints due to project- based work, etc.) or due to the fact that such data is only partly available at the regional and national level (see Portugal Social Innovation).

While conventional methods of impact measurement tend to rely on numerical ("hard", quantitative) data, interviewees point out the need for a different approach to impact assessment that would pay greater attention to qualitative developments such as network building, community engagement, increased participation, etc. By its own nature, social innovation cannot be assessed only using metrics and quantitative approaches. Therefore, it is important to combine both qualitative and quantitative approaches to assess impact in order to inform the research and practice.

The possibility of having a unified, universal approach to impact assessment has also been at the core of the discussion. Despite the fact that both LAGs and LDAs have expressed the wish to have a somewhat "universal" tool for assessing the impacts of the social innovation projects they implement

that would be meaningful and easy to apply, the potential of having such an approach or tool has been questioned by the interviewees due to the different nature of every social innovation project they have implemented. However, the possibility to use indicators to assess impact that can provide a basis for comparison is important, since it would help to build a knowledge base on social innovation initiatives that work (Preskill and Beer 2012). Moreover, such assessment can be used by public decision-makers to formulate better policies to promote social innovation initiatives (Bund et al. 2015).

However, one of the fundamental challenges faced by such organisations in the Baixo Alentejo region, drawing from the empirical data, is that there is only fragmented knowledge and expertise in how to apply existing tools for impact assessment.[10] Due to this, the organisations either need their own expertise to be enhanced internally or to rely on external partners to run assessments for them.

Resulting from the issues discussed above, several suggestions can be made in order to contribute to building an improved, more sustainable mode of impact assessment for the organisations in question:

- LAGs and LDAs require more (extensive) knowledge on the existing and available tools for conducting impact assessments of their socially innovative projects. This can be achieved through partnering with peers and/or universities that are dealing with the topic of impact assessment.

- The initiatives working in the field of social innovation in Baixo Alentejo could benefit from more exchanges of know-how and experiences with other organisations and expert bodies focusing on impact assessment procedures. The neo-endogenous approach comes into play when local actors are seeking support from extra-local bodies in the procedures of assessing and evaluating the impacts of the projects implemented (e.g. the support of Minha Terra provided to the LAGs).

- Impact assessments require extensive resources – both human and financial – that quite often are lacking at the organisational level. Therefore, more support infrastructure could be offered by the regional and/or national frameworks and institutions to the LAGs and LDAs in implementing and running impact assessments in a sustainable way.

- The long-term character of impacts (in comparison to results which are short-term and outcomes that are mid-term in focus) requires some time and perspective in order to be assessed and evaluated. One of the solutions arising from empirical research is the idea of setting up a task force and/or working groups to follow-up with the participants of the projects so they have an opportunity to come together (some time) after finalising the projects and reflect on the potential impacts.

- As suggested, social innovation might have a "dark side", e.g. the potential negative impacts of innovation policy on society (Fougère and Meriläinen 2019), socially divisive or destructive objectives and intentions (Nicholls, Simon, and Gabriel 2015), as well as deviant or unintended consequences that achieve negative social effects (e.g. widened social exclusion as a result of some groups falling out of focus). Therefore, LAGs and LDAs should take into account a more reflective approach concerning the potential negative impacts produced as a result and/or as a by-product of the social innovation implemented.

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[10] The approaches most used include social return on investment, social impact assessment, and social added value. For more, see Antadze and Westley (2012); Moore, Westley, and Nicholls (2012); Rawhouser, Cummings, and Newbert (2019); Cunha and Benneworth (2020).

The current section has discussed the links between social innovation and neo-endogenous rural development, as well the impacts produced by the social innovation projects implemented by local development initiatives in Baixo Alentejo, alongside the challenges that those initiatives face while implementing impact assessment. Notwithstanding the importance of impact assessment for both internal (organisational) and external (community) purposes, the organisations in question still require a certain degree of support in: 1) gaining more detailed knowledge and expertise regarding the available assessment tools and how to implement them and/or how to develop their own impact assessment tools; 2) providing resources in order for LAGs and LDAs to be able to execute impact assessments; and 3) reorienting from project-based, *short-term outcome reporting* practices towards more sustainable, *long-term impact reporting*.

4.4. Intermediate conclusions

Summarising the above, several key conclusions concerning emergence, spread and impacts of social innovation in rural regions can be drawn. The emergence of social innovation in rural areas is a complex process of interaction between already existing elements of practices, on the one hand, and strategies that social innovators choose in order to support these practices, on the other hand. The degree of novelty and the institutionalisation of these practices is an important aspect that greatly influences the choices of targeted interventions that can be carried out by social innovators. Thus, the important aspect of social innovation emergence is the identification of which elements are already available in a region and which are at the inception stage. As was illustrated via an example in this chapter, the availability of material components of practices and a simultaneous lack of knowledge and shared culture of new practices presents an opportunity for social entrepreneurs to focus on establishing mechanisms to foster the development of missing links.

In the following section we have outlined and illustrated practices of spread that consist of material circulations and relational dynamics to explain two different types of spread: extrinsic or quantitative growth and intrinsic or qualitative growth. Spread can be measured by the instances or iterations of a social innovation occurring across space. This helps to define social innovation as it evolves from an isolated social practice to eventually becoming institutionalised and accepted as a social norm. Whereas spread normally only refers to the re-spreading of relations *within* assemblages or infrastructures and has a generative capacity; here spread affects the space, bodies, matter, and other practices with which it intra-acts, as new matter and meanings are made.

Impact: In the last section we discussed the interconnection between social innovation and neo-endogenous development, together with the potential impacts social innovation initiatives have on rural development (based on examples from the Baixo Alentejo region). Results indicate that the impacts produced by social innovation activities are taking on an "intangible" character, constituted by network creation, community empowerment, shared vision creation, etc. However, such intangibility poses some challenges for the organisations promoting social innovations, since it makes impact assessment and evaluation challenging. The social innovation initiatives, therefore, require stronger support from peers and other social innovation promoters, as well as from formal organisations in terms of knowledge exchange and capacity building related to assessing and evaluating their impacts.

Case 1. Open "labs"

This social innovation is an integrated system of rooms spread through upper Austria that provide open spaces or "labs" in villages and towns for residents to meet, learn, and experiment together. Residents are supported to form small interest groups which may, and often do, evolve into new socially innovative initiatives, known as "nodes".

The buildings or rooms are owned by the municipality and loaned at no cost. Events in the spaces are hosted by "nodes" and open to other communities. The number of "nodes" in the entire infrastructure varies, as new ones start and others end, and include, for example, food co-ops, solidarity agriculture initiatives, dance studios, repair cafes, etc. Currently, there are around 35 "labs" across Austria, and instances in Italy and Germany.

The open lab social innovation's aim is to provide residents who have their own specific interests and skills and wish to share them with others, the space and capabilities to do so, with few barriers to access. The labs reuse under-used municipally owned rooms and buildings across the region. Prior to this, such spaces for these purposes did not exist in rural areas in Upper Austria. The social innovation responded to specific rural conditions as experienced in Upper Austria in the early 2000's, but also in other places across Europe. A significant factor in the project's development was the perceived threat to rural areas in upper Austria, as young people were moving away (usually to cities such as Lintz or further to Vienna) for higher education or to find work. However, what distinguishes Austria from other European locations such as Portugal or the UK post-2010 is a coherent and interconnected regional governance system where the state plays an active role through a network of regional development agencies, and/or supports and re-distributes resources to other non-state actors undertaking regional development.

In addition, there is a well-equipped network of elected and representative bodies from villages, through to regions. Such interconnected governance, especially between the local and regional levels, has led to many LEADER funded initiatives in the regions. There are also well-resourced non-governmental development organisations that for many years have contributed to rural and regional development programmes in the regions. Key actors in the emergence and spread of the open lab social innovation have backgrounds in either extra-state organisations or had held a senior position in (governmental) regional development agencies.

The open labs aim to address and counter rural decline by providing space to "educate" through self-directed experimentation, aimed initially at introducing young people to new technologies. In the mid-2000's, technology (particularly digital) and education were two areas that were attracting project funding in Austria, as it was perceived that these themes could address the effects of rural depopulation and youth out-migration and help re-skill workers.

Case 2. Herb farm infrastructures

The social innovation, EPAM, supports and facilitates young farmers that are new to agriculture to start and develop small family farms in rural Portugal. By supporting new famers, the aim is to develop an emerging herb farming sector and, thereby, support development in rural regions across the country.

To do this, the project founders designed and implemented a web platform and an ongoing series of face-to-face events to connect the geographically distributed and fragmented groups of farmers. The intention was to create better communication between farmers and new methods of collaboration, otherwise uncommon to agriculture in Portugal. Together, these modes of interaction and communication work as an infrastructure to distribute information and co-generate new knowledge-practices for herb farming.

The 2007-2008 financial collapse took its toll on Portugal, and many young professionals in urban centres along the Atlantic coast found themselves out of work. For some, the crisis provoked existential questions that led them to leave the cities to pursue new lives in agriculture in the Portuguese rural interior. As they looked around for opportunities, herb farming – as seen and heard in the media – became an attractive option. Most had no prior farming experience, and herb farming provided the possibility of a profitable business with low barriers to access and potentially low maintenance and labour – if done with specific equipment. Importantly, to these newcomers, this type of farming could be carried-out according to sustainable and ecological principles on small family farms.

Around this time, a small group of entrepreneurs, farmers, and rural development consultancies had begun to form and establish themselves as "pioneers" in herb farming. This constellation was forming in the north-east of the country. Although not fully institutionalised, it was a powerful assemblage that was setting the discourse and the material practices of herb farming in Portugal. At their disposal, actors had access to mainstream diffusion channels, such as national television networks, print media, and popular YouTube channels and blog sites – many "new rurals" initially heard about herb farming though narratives spread via these channels.

Other actors in the constellation became "gatekeepers" to EU structural funding, as they had experience and a track record in obtaining funding for rural development projects. Many of the new farmers required access to EU funding to help them establish farms in the countryside and make contact with actors in the north-east constellation.

5. Summary
by Gabriela Christmann

In this handbook, it has been pointed out that structurally weak rural regions face a wide range of economic and social challenges (Chapter 1). Although the precise economic and social conditions of the individual regions in Europe often differ considerably, the pattern tends to be the same: typically we observe limited economic productivity, limited career perspectives, deteriorating infrastructure, depopulation processes, and, last but not least, negative discourses about the areas that lead to negative impressions of them. As a consequence, a further deterioration in the economic prospects of such areas can be observed.

However, it has also been shown that some regions have proved to be resilient, developing innovative solutions to existing problems (Chapter 2). Despite adverse circumstances, they have succeeded in stopping the downward spiral and changed negative impressions. The intensive cooperation of various stakeholders in the region has proved to be an important factor in this process. In order to facilitate change, it is also important that actors open themselves to new ideas and learn to trust their own capacity to act. Particularly, the rural inhabitants themselves are called upon in this process, who ideally should develop into active rural residents. Public discourses are, therefore, needed that can encourage them and show them that it is worth taking matters into their own hands, working together.

The Mühlviertel region in Austria is an example of how innovative processes can be set in motion and how an economic shock can be overcome. A social enterprise in the region played an important role in this because it was able to inspire regional actors to cooperate with one another, as well as to open up to new ideas and creativity. Equally as important was a participatory discourse that – driven by active rural residents – was able to unfold. As a consequence, the Mühlviertel region has actually been witnessing positive net business creation and in-migration. It should be stressed that not only the rural population should be targeted when it comes to promoting innovative solutions; rather, other stakeholders such as political decision-makers, public institutions, and other influential actors should also be attracted by the projects. Projects often fail because the scepticism of these influential actors prevails and they tend to hinder the respective developments.

Another topic discussed in the handbook is the question of how social enterprises tackle problems in structurally weak rural regions (Chapter 3). It is generally expected that social enterprises can help to promote innovative solutions for rural problems. However, even if they have extensive experience and can be regarded as experts in social innovation, they too face difficulties. One cannot automatically assume that the work of a social enterprise will be successful per se. Therefore, it is important to understand what social enterprises are, under which conditions they work, and what has to be prioritised in the context of this work.

What social enterprises have in common is their ability to use a wide range of resources, to recombine them and use them to meet the needs of rural residents. At the same time, however, it must be mentioned that there is a great diversity among social enterprises operating in rural areas. Some of them are (more) market-oriented, selling and buying goods and/or services, usually focusing on local and regional markets. Others respond to needs by redistributing existing resources, e.g. because they have the right to use material goods such as land, buildings, and/or tools owned by public entities. Still others rely more on reciprocity, in particular, by cooperating with other organisations and interest groups, e.g. by jointly raising donations and identify sponsors, and lending and sharing machines, tools, rooms, etc. Many social enterprises even combine all these resources to develop socially innovative solutions. In addition, social enterprises are typically active in various societal sectors, e.g. in the economic, social, cultural, and/or environmental sectors. A social enterprise can even cover several sectors simultaneously.

Against this background, social enterprises are conceived of as "hybrid" organisations, which means that they typically bring together very different "logics", topics, and thus, also stakeholders. On the one hand, this can be a source of creativity building and problem solving, but, on the other hand, it can also be a challenge because it can lead to a clash of different "logics", e.g. of possibly incompatible values, ideas, interests, and/or goals. These incompatibilities can lead to clashes between certain external stakeholders, but also internally between the staff. It is, therefore, essential that social enterprises pay attention to such tensions and try to actively manage or balance them. If tensions can

be jointly resolved in a constructive way, the social relationship between the participants can be strengthened and the bond to the social enterprise can be increased.

Another important message is that it would be unrealistic to place expectations of bringing about change only on the work of individual social enterprises. The power for sustainable change lies rather in cross-sectoral cooperation between various small initiatives in a region, organised both by social enterprises and by other organisations. This is one proven way to build and strengthen a self-organised and resilient production and service infrastructure in a region.

While the research literature that deals intensively with the legal forms, forms of organisation, and working methods of social enterprises has grown considerably, there is, in contrast, a lack of knowledge about how the innovative activities of social enterprises, which are generally regarded as a central feature of these organisations, actually take place. This handbook has, therefore, also examined questions relating to how social innovations emerge and how they spread spatially, along with how their effects can be measured and presented (Chapter 4). When we look at processes of social innovation, it quickly becomes clear that innovation may often encounter resistance, as it challenges existing structures and institutions to change. Old and new practices can conflict. Such conflicts can be particularly pronounced in rural areas because – as it is often said – their inhabitants are more tradition-oriented than is perhaps the case with residents of large cities.

Our research suggests that it is often new actors (e.g. people who have moved in), new organisations (e.g. social enterprises), and/or new infrastructures (e.g. the internet, social media, etc.) that favour the development of novel solutions. They are the ones who allow for experimentation with new formats within existing niches. Without them, it is, therefore, difficult for novelty to develop. This insight underlines that the role of social enterprises in rural areas should not be underestimated. Of course, the success of such experimentation also depends on how they are perceived, taken up, and processed by the social environment when they leave the narrower niche and to what extent they are accepted and developed or rejected and prevented. In this handbook it has been shown, among other things, that it is a favourable factor when innovations can tie in with something that is no longer new in a region, but once represented a change and has now found social acceptance because the former novelty has produced something good.

In Chapter 4 it has been shown that it is helpful for the establishment of an innovation when material components of new practices (e.g. informal gardens or other types of plots) already exist in the region, even though the knowledge required for further developing it are still at the early stages of development. It, thus, becomes clear that, apart from specific actors and constellations of actors, material elements can play an important role in innovation processes. This aspect has so far been strongly neglected in research and practical work on social innovations. It has, therefore, also been neglected that the spatial spread of an innovative approach can be the result of the migration of a material element (e.g. of the establishment of a new technology lab at location B, due to a successful technology lab at location A), and that this can then lead to new practices at location B. Against this background, consideration should also be given in the future to finding ways to support the spatial spread of innovative solutions through the mobility of certain material factors.

Finally, it will also be helpful if in the future the effects that novel initiatives have had on the development of knowledge, action, networking, jobs, infrastructure, and/or quality of life in a place/region are more systematically recorded and publicised. The work of such initiatives could, thus, be better legitimised. Presenting the impacts achieved could help initiatives to provide "proof" of their delivery on the proposed actions. However, measuring impacts is a prerequisite and requires systematic support, not least from the scientific community.

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