

Call for Papers for the
International Conference

**Challenges and Opportunities of
Structurally Weak Rural Regions in Europe.
Social Innovations and Social Enterprises Acting Under Adverse Circumstances**

4th - 5th of December 2017

at Adam Mickiewicz University Poznań, Poland

Structurally weak rural regions in Europe face multiple challenges. They have a below-average economic productivity because only a few enterprises from the fields of industrial production or commercial services offer jobs. If any, then mainly very small and medium-sized businesses are active in these regions. Furthermore, the regions are insufficiently supplied with technological or social infrastructure, also public transport is limited. Inhabitants lament reduced communication in village life, even more as the small shops, the baker's, the doctor's surgery, the post office and the village pub, that once were important meeting places, have long gone. The assumption that investors would come and open up economic perspectives, that they create new jobs and promote regional development were abandoned. As a result of the bad economic situation and the infrastructural deficits in many rural regions, a downward spiral has started with ever more people moving to the cities, thus further reducing the economic opportunities of rural regions. These trends are increased by public discourses referring to a lack of future prospects and raise out-migration as a topic of discussion.

The question of how such downward spirals can be stopped cannot be answered easily. Typically, rural development happened by way of more or less top-down approaches in the form of EU as well as national development programmes that include bottom-up elements. However, there is an imbalance in the range of support activities due to funding rather agricultural than community-related development. The EU and Member States are aware of such problems. Furthermore, awareness has grown that in rural regions novel approaches to solutions are needed.

Against this background, hopes are turned not least towards social enterprises. They are seen as a factor which can help to cope with the multifaceted problems. Social enterprises or social entrepreneurs are actors who, through an entrepreneurial approach, develop and implement social innovations, empowering regional actors in doing the same. Their focus is not profit, but the production of social added-value for a region. *Social* innovations offer novel ways of proceeding in order to meet existing problems more satisfactorily than previous ones.

The concept of social innovation in terms of significant changes in social, cultural, and political practices – apart from economic and technical innovation – has become accepted in most various scientific disciplines. It is considered as an important complement to innovation research, not least in the context of social-science based spatial research. Whereas, however, the innovative capacity of cities typically is estimated to be high, it is said that rural regions are remote from (social) innovation since they consist of homogeneous and traditionally minded groups inclined to preserve, not to change, existing assets. This would mean that social enterprises in rural regions have to act, in very different ways, under adverse circumstances.

The conference focuses on both the challenges and the potentials for social innovations in the countryside. Above all the specific economic, political and cultural framework conditions of structurally weak rural regions in Europe shall be discussed.

We highly appreciate contributions in the following fields:

- socio-economic dynamics of structurally weak rural regions (session 1)
- rural development strategies and policies (session 2)
- changes of rural life and culture (session 3)

We invite you to send us a short abstract of **no more than 300 words**. Please send the abstract to Marie-Julie Jacquemot (Marie-Julie.Jacquemot@leibniz-irs.de). The submission deadline is **30th of October 2017**.

The conference marks the beginning of the research network “Social Entrepreneurship in Structurally Weak Rural Regions: Analysing Innovative Troubleshooters in Action (RurAction)”.



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

<http://ruraction.eu/>

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