What is social innovation and how can it boost villages?

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Local people and their needs are at the heart of Social Innovation

What is social innovation?

"*the reconfiguring of social practices, in response to societal challenges, which seeks to enhance outcomes on societal well-being and necessarily includes the engagement of civil society actors*"

- **Reconfiguring**: doing something differently
- Addressing **societal challenges**
- Seeking enhanced **societal wellbeing**
- Involving **active engagement of civil society**

The challenge: a crisis-driven reorganisation of economic activity

- Many small private service businesses are closing

- Other large-scale businesses are closing village branches (esp banks)

- Public sector cutbacks "austerity" leading to service decline in rural areas

- Privatisation of some services (housing, libraries, social care) threatens delivery to remoter areas

- The third sector often seeks to "plug the gaps" or deliver outcomes better
  - Housing
  - Transport and mobility
  - Retail services
  - Social care
  - Energy
  - Banking
  - Training
  - Recycling
  - Hospices
  - Tourism services
  - Integrated land management

The response: Society

- ➢ Service provision such as social care for elderly, young and handicapped people
- ➢ Community transport
- ➢ Community shops
- ➢ Helping refugees
- ➢ Housing

A Farm Women's social care co-operative South Tyrol Italy started with child care and now has over 100 farm women as providers; it is now branching into care for the elderly with 30 providers.

The response: Economy

Economy

➢ Community shops

➢ Community land ownership and management

➢ Village renewal

➢ Festivals to increase local and tourism interest

➢ Training

➢ Recycling

Portsoy traditional boat festival: Revival of culture and economy through community action centred on tourism
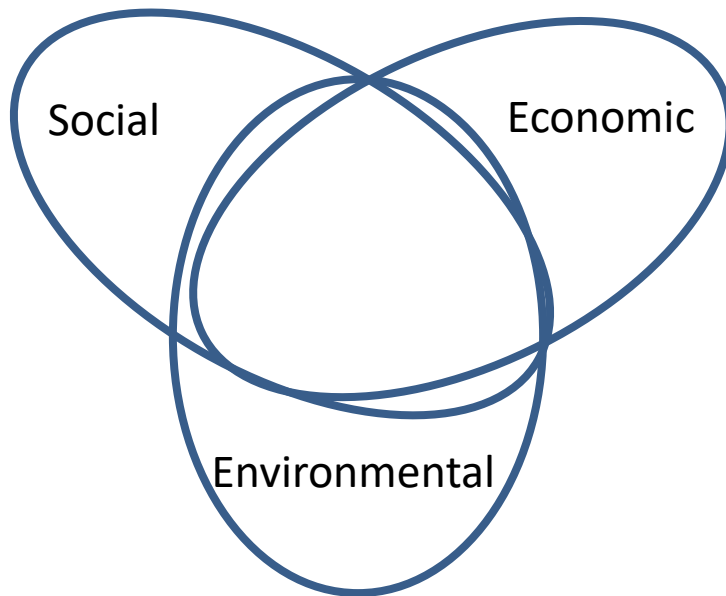
The response: Environment

Environment

➢ River basin management

➢ Renewable energy

➢ Climate change

➢ Waste management

➢ Fire management

➢ Agri-environmental partnerships

Catalunya Spain: Helping new entrants into land and reducing fire risk by activating farm management on abandoned land

The interconnectedness of local development

Social

Economic

Environmental

- The distinctions between "Social", "Economic" and "Environmental" are often rather academic

- A community pub has economic and social functions

- Community forests generate environmental, social and economic outcomes

- Social enterprises that deliver excellent care for disabled people are both economic and social

Villagers think about their place, their problems, their solutions not in terms of abstract theories and concepts

simra
Social Innovation in
Marginalised Rural Areas

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What obstacles do social innovators face

- High start up costs (in some cases)
- Institutional barriers and even suppression
- Risk averse public sector officials and policies
- Insufficient human capital/leadership
- Weak social capital/trust in some places
- Apathy and disengagement and naysayers in the community("it can't be done" ...."it will never work")

The challenges to social innovators

- Running out of steam/burn out

- Key people stepping back

- Taking a step (or two) too far

- Accepting failure

- The ability of relatively advantaged places to perpetuate advantage (and vice versa)

- Getting an income stream

- Getting the scale of intervention right

Where can policy make a difference

- Support capacity building/training
- Support effective community engagement
- Support formation and capacity building of community hubs/anchor organisations
- Fund non statutory village development plans
- Create appropriate sector-specific policies (e.g. community feed in tariff for renewables; CARES scheme: grant to loan)
- Enable asset transfer of redundant/underused buildings and land to the community
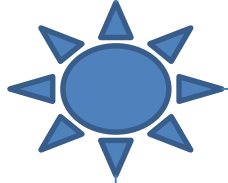- Get Social Innovation explicitly supported in RDPs
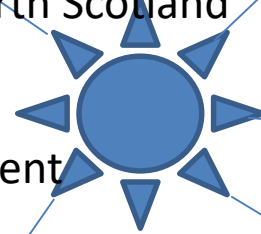
Anchor organisations are key

South Tyrol Italy

Co-op

Moray Firth Scotland

Development Trust

To conclude: why social innovation matters so much

- Smart villages are at the leading edge of social innovation
- Being smart is not just about having and using technology!
- Social innovation is an important seedbed for creativity
- "Locally owned" services means a virtuous cycle of spending; reinvestment builds linkages and slows down leakage
- Enhanced community capacity can be redeployed in new arenas of concern: the hub-satellite/anchor model is key
- Social innovation is vital in the renegotiation of the "social contract" between rural communities, the state and markets: **communities should not be passive**

THANK YOU