

How to develop social innovation in marginalised rural areas? Practical examples and policy lessons

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We are at an important inflexion point in global development

- All is not well with the environment, with climate change, biodiversity loss, water quality decline
- All is not well with society, with overconsumption and increasing income and spatial inequality etc
- These challenges mean we must fundamentally change the way we think and act. The late Bruno Latour's work reminds of the inseparability of nature and culture.
- Development is not just about growth, but about human and planetary wellbeing
- Social innovation is one important way of exploring possible ways of driving positive change – a laboratory of practice

What I want to talk about

Why we should be interested in social innovation in marginal rural areas?

Where does social innovation come from?

What triggers social innovation?

Suggest that a definition that embraces civil society and third sector actors is useful

Observe that a binary model of state and public sector as providers of goods and services is wholly inadequate

Using examples, explore why social innovation and its conceptual cousins have high relevance for rural mountain areas

Explore how policy could better assist social innovation

Why social innovation is so important for marginal rural areas



Markets are often weak and in retreat, in spite of ephemeral booms

Public service delivery is very costly and infrastructure costs are high and austerity policies have led to service decline

Rural communities are often repositories of distinctive cultures

Those that stay are often willing to act collaboratively because of their strong place roots

Without social innovation these places would be likely to decline further

Artieda, Aragon, Spain

A community in a
depopulating part of Spain
determined to thrive

Multiple projects

- Deep engagement with community planning
- Local food
- Ecotourism
- ICT infrastructure
- Access to housing-
bringing young people
back

A collective collaborative
venture





Portsoy, Aberdeenshire: its story



The divergent roots of recent social innovation

Third way managerialist politics to solve wicked problems/grand societal challenges

Espoused by N American social enterprise academics, Geoff Mulgan, NESTA and implanted into EU thinking in BEPA publications

“Scaling up” successful SIs

Radical (mostly urban) movements for citizen empowerment addressing inequality and the casualties of deindustrialisation

Espoused by urban social scientists such as Swyngedouw, Moulaert and MacCallum and paralleled in Erik Olin Wright’s work

Giving agency to local actors to engage in place making

What triggers social innovation?

- A perceived injustice or inadequacy of the prevailing mode of provision
- Normally closure of a keystone service (school, post office, only shop, bus service, garage) or main employer or other threat
- Decline in quality of a service (esp social care, public transport, but also retail)
- Resistance to a general decline in socioeconomic wellbeing
- Sometimes (but probably less frequently) recognition of an unrealised opportunity (such as community renewable energy)

Leading to

- *A collective response by the community*
- *A willingness to invest time and resources to resolve the problem, realise a project and work together*

The importance of place-based local actors



The specificity of place in a world of common problems



A physical community has:

A physical identity, buildings and landscape	Distinct socio-ecological systems	Specific power relations in relation to public and private actors	Specific stock of natural social and human capital	Often, but maybe not to all, a sense of my place: I belong here
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Place based actors are a critical force in SI

The SIMRA approach

*“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**”*

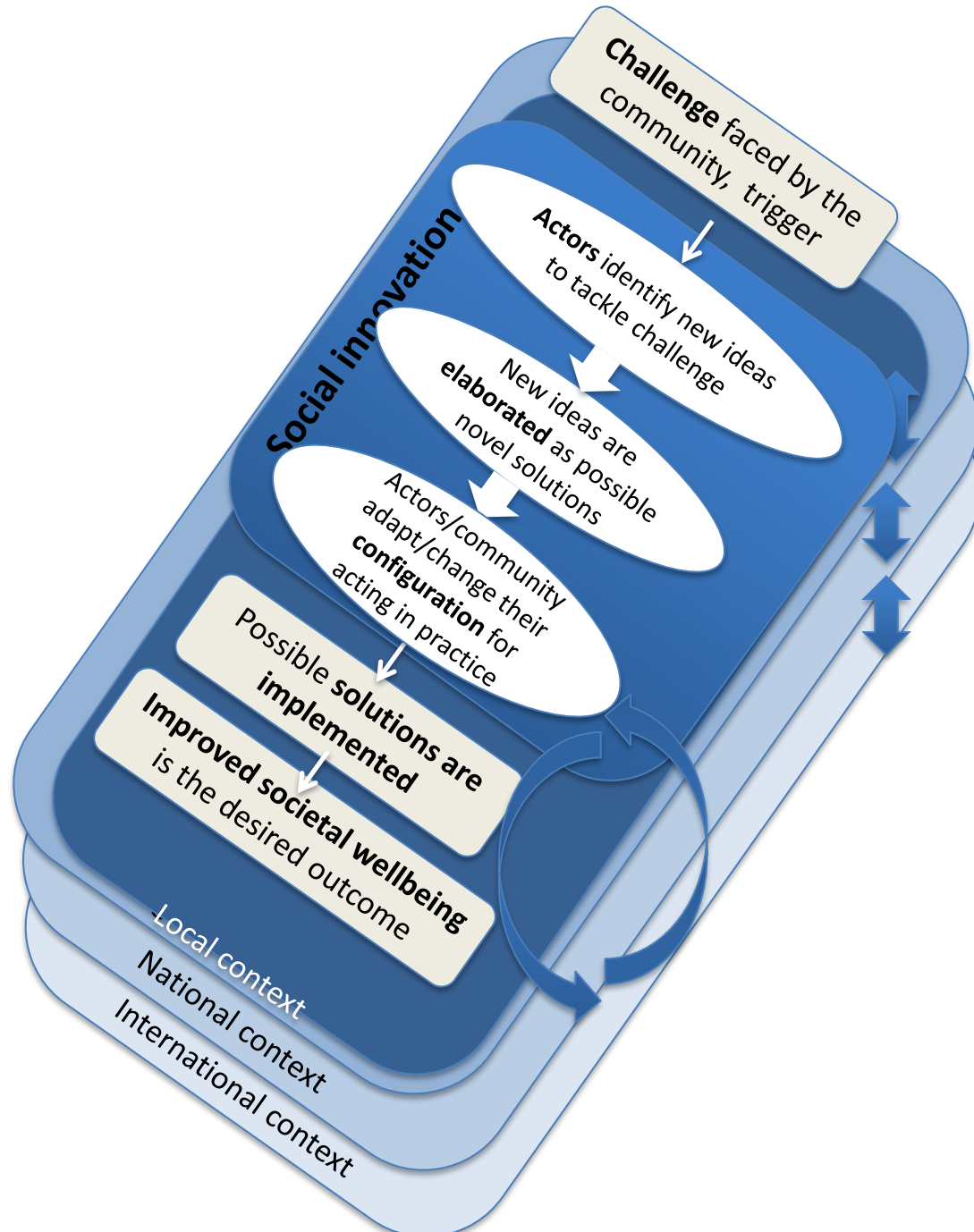
- Scope for environmental and economic elements not just social (although there is a social process behind it)
- Reconfigured institutions and practices are key
- It seeks enhanced social wellbeing
- It recognises and accepts trade-offs
- **It asserts the centrality of agency of civil society actors working alone or with others**

....SI overlaps and interweaves with a raft of related concepts

co-production; transition theory; stakeholder capitalism;
deliberative democracy; place-based community development;
community-led local development (CLLD); bottom-up
development; smart villages; the collaborative economy; the
sharing economy; the social solidarity economy; community
empowerment; Big society; creative commons; creative class;
institutional bricolage.

....all seeking the policy maker's attention

All are built around the belief (which I share) that current models
are not working, for all sort of reasons; and new models are
needed



What makes a vibrant community?

- An element of economic competitiveness- an economic rationale – and supporting services
- Its ability to continue intergenerationally
- An identity that bonds its inhabitants
- An active civil society
- A supportive local and national state
- Resilience – capacity to act in the face of challenges and capacity to recover from shocks

How does change happen?

after EO Wright's Envisioning Real Utopias

- **Ruptural** change- a major break with the past
- **Interstitial** change (something filling gaps/needs unmet by existing modes of provision)
- **Symbiotic** change: working with existing agency to deliver enhanced outcomes

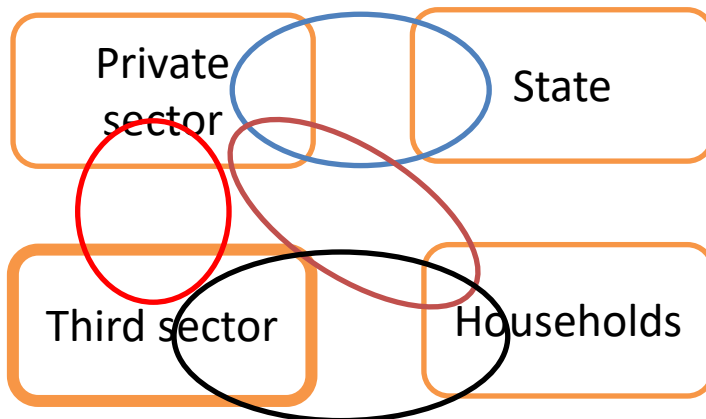
Social Innovation can work with all three models of change.

Wright argues that ruptural change is the least likely routeBut the rise of populist movements may represent a kind of rupture...

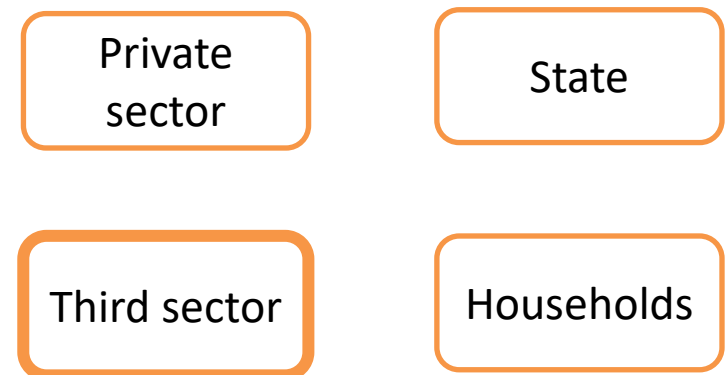
...even if interstitial and symbiotic change are more likely

Four modes of provision not two

Electricity



Elderly social care



- Choices are based on socio-cultural and political values
- No unilinearity of direction of travel
- No inexorability of commodification
- Movement from one to another mode is possible
- Increased hybridity over time

Four examples of socially innovative projects

- DNT refugee integration project, Norway
- Huntly Development Trust, Huntly
Aberdeenshire
- Mit Bäuerinnen lernen-wachsen-leben, South
Tyrol, Italy
- Creative Worlds of Apprenticeship Styria,
Austria

Case study 1 Integrating immigrants into Norwegian culture

Norwegian Trekking Association (DNT) 260,000 members

SIMRA Innovation Action to integrate immigrants into this central part of Norwegian identity

Located in Gudbrandsdalen - an area with declining population

Organised walks with diverse immigrants

The key is helping repopulation through integration

Creating and maintaining new networks is challenging



Case Study 2 Re-purposing, refurbishing, rekindling the heart of a community

Huntly Development Trust was built on foundations laid in a fixed term municipal small towns project

Five years of chasing project funding to secure survival

Realisation of a need for a stable income generating activity

Wind energy was the key to unlocking new opportunities

HDT runs an electric car club, major multipurpose community hub, farmers market, farming and forestry projects, community bookshop etc.



Case study 3 Social care in South Tyrol

Motivated by a desire to provide an alternative culturally sensitive model of childcare by farm women on the farm and by the disadvantaged socioeconomic condition of women in rural areas of South Tyrol

Leadership critical in creating a cooperative structure in 2007

118 providers offering 6 spaces per farm with over 500 children

School visits to farms added as part of a wider cultural programme (10 k visits in one year)

30 providers of day care for elderly people now offered

A national law gives official recognition of social farming 2015



Styria Austria Creative Apprenticeships project

Creation of mobile modular “workboxes” to exhibit local crafts to schoolchildren...

..to give them a taste of SME and microbusiness activities in region and help recruitment and survival of small businesses

Since 2014, 7000 teenagers have been involved, accompanied by 500 local entrepreneurs, who participate as volunteer mentors in these career orientation days

Children get taster sessions and build relationships with business actors

Lately a mobile version on an large lorry container has been developed

This builds on a develops an earlier model; it reaches out to the challenge of intergenerational survival of small business



Resilient
Futures

Vote now for



Creative Apprentice Worlds



Policy and social innovation: uneasy partners

Social innovation is often a form of collective bottom up reaction to adversity (market failure, environmental threat, policy failure, inequality, powerlessness)

...so if there were effective policies to address that adversity social innovation would not happen

Social innovation often challenges the status quo

But

“Policy” can enhance the opportunity for successful social innovation

It can create the appropriate institutional architecture

It can enable/support participatory fora and actions

It can provide seedcorn funding, training, capacity building

EIP Agri has begun to operate in this field

so in practice

....there is a unrehearsed and clumsy dance between community agency and collaborators- the social innovators- and public authority in designing policy

...and sometimes policies are inappropriate of bureaucratically burdensome and actually subvert or undermine social innovation

Sometimes there is policy capture by elites which stifles social innovation and exacerbates inequality

Challenge funding has become an unhelpful norm

Policy often plays catch up- Multi-actor partnerships and Bottom up development predate CLLD

New institutions emerge and the widening range of community-led enterprise necessitated new legal forms

Their lack of access to credit triggered new policies

Scotland's policy support for social innovation

- A desire to do things differently after Scottish devolution 1999
- The support for community based land reform following strong social movements
- Two Land Reform Acts establishing and extending community right to buy and a Community Empowerment Act extending community rights further
- Publicly supported arm's length support agencies not led by civil service (Local Energy Scotland, Climate Challenge Fund, Community Land Scotland)
- Local Energy Scotland's CARES fund as an example
- Active support of Leader and CLLD approach but increasingly bureaucratic and municipally controlled
- National policies for community empowerment and the creation of new institutional forms are the key drivers

The Scottish Government's Community and Renewable Energy Scheme



Community renewables Schemes have high up front costs and long times from idea to completion

Community groups have much to gain but limited access to risk capital

Quite a high proportion of projects fail on technical or planning appraisal

But those that are successful contribute to climate targets, and generate large incomes for investing locally

Local Energy Scotland provide grant/loan finance for pre-construction and construction costs

If the project is feasible and gets consent, the finance is treated as a loan; if it fails to come to fruition, then the finance is treated as a grant

The CARES model also offers an innovation grant to innovative community projects

Doubts and worries

- The neo-liberalisation of social innovation through competitive funding (we don't want policy as a form of social Darwinism)
- Little evidence of affirmative action. Funding agencies want to pick winners.
- There is not so much a social innovation ecosystem as place-based endeavour, sometimes supported and sometimes subverted by public agency
- Municipalities can be enabling or resistant (they are often adversely affected by austerity). Smaller municipalities seem more grounded and engaged
- But big municipalities like Bologna are also getting close to their citizens (Ianone)
- Strong social capital esp bridging capital becomes key to drawing down funding
- Success owes as much to “sheer bloody minded determination” as to favourable policies. Doing SI is not easy.



To conclude

- All too often the term SI gets lost in a conceptual fog of alternatives and similar ideas. In EU policy it is currently only present in rather small niches.
- At its core is the belief that alone or in concert with others, communities and collective action can acquire agency and respond to challenges
- Its classic manifestation in marginal rural areas is as place-based, place-bonded institutions plugging the gaps of market and state and sometimes outperforming them
- We need to acknowledge, affirm and support third sector ownership as a dynamic force in local development, sometimes alone often in partnership (aka community wealth building)
- In reality, SI is about reconfiguring formal and informal institutions (new governance models) to address what are mostly place-based challenges, but sometimes sectoral issues like integrated catchment management, refugee integration etc.

Conclusions (2)

- In reality, interstitial and symbiotic transformative action is much more likely than ruptural change: that is how transformative actions begin and happen. Local actors can and do acquire agency but this is often context-specific
- SI is not so much a panacea as a practical laboratory of ideas, driven by local challenges and local people
- Collective self-organised activity needs a reliable income stream *
- SI needs operating space and legitimised institutions: Policy can help create enabling conditions for local action
- Policy can be proactive but mostly comes along as a means of nurturing what SI has already shown to be effective; but sometimes can suppress community-based endeavour by its bureaucratic entanglements
- “collective self-organising...(can) significantly add to the material and social possibilities available to the people who live work visit and conduct business” in marginal rural areas

Huntly

& District Development Trust

10th YEAR ANNIVERSARY

TRUST CELEBRATES 10th ANNIVERSARY OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ACROSS HUNTLY & DISTRICT



2010 - Those First Little Steps

- Huntly Walking Festival
- First visit to Finland exploring exchange opportunity
- Huntly Traffic Management Review on behalf of Aberdeenshire Council
- Huntly Sustainability Plan produced

2012 - Starting to Engage

- Partnership with Grampian Housing Association
- Walks Around Huntly and District published
- Jubilee path commissioned June 2012
- Trust officially registered as a charity

2014 - Tight Corner Turned

- Purchase of Greenmyres
- Secured 3 year DTAS funding for Trust core costs
- Green Travel Hub created including car club and e-bikes
- 1st Room to Run (with Huntly Home)
- 1st Energise newsletter launched

2016 - Good Report Card

- Gold star from HM Inspectorate
- Wheelmont turbine onstream
- Contract Signed for Greenmyres turbine construction
- Greenmyres turbine commissioned

2018 - At Full Speed

- Trust secure Huntly Express Archive
- Huntly Five concept launched
- Huntly receives Green Butterfly award
- Publication of Huntly's Place Standard
- Huntly 2030 Project launched



2009 - In the Beginning

- May 2009 - Trust Founded
- Trust office opened
- Community Survey Homecoming Mini Tattoo (with Huntly Home)
- Trust manages Huntly Flood Appeal
- Launch of Huntly, Scotland Facebook and Twitter Feed

2011 - Developing High Standards

- Hydro in Bogle explored
- Accounts year undertaken

2013 - Becoming Recognised

- New town gateway signs produced
- Huntly Cultural Fund/Creative Place Award (With Deveron Arts)
- Finland Transnational Exchange
- Cambornow partnership agreement signed

2015 - Things begin to Take Off

- Commonwealth Legacy Funding for Sports Veloc
- 1st Huntly Audax cycling event launched
- Room to Run entrants trouble

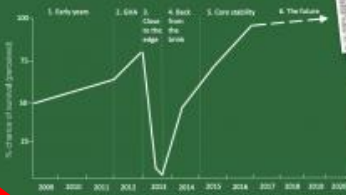
2017 - Community Keystone

- Cambornow Turbine commissioned
- Huntly Town Centre Regeneration Project Launched
- Greenmyres botby - planning permission secured
- Trust takes on supporting role for community minibus

2019

- Purchase of 1st building in Town Square - Former RBS building
- Town Centre Development Manager appointed
- Purchase Cruckshank's Building for Community Cultural Centre
- Improvement work starts at Greenmyres
- Lots more to come

The not always smooth financial path



Conclusions (2)

- In reality, interstitial and symbiotic transformative action is much more likely than ruptural change: that is how transformative actions begin and happen. Local actors can and do acquire agency but this is often context-specific
- SI is not so much a panacea as a practical laboratory of ideas, driven by local challenges and local people
- But sustaining collective self-organised activity needs a reliable income stream *
- SI also needs operating space and legitimised institutions: Policy can help create enabling governance conditions for local action
- Policy can be proactive but mostly comes along as a means of nurturing what SI has already shown to be effective; sometimes policy can suppress community-based endeavour by its bureaucratic entanglements
- “collective self-organising...(can) significantly add to the material and social possibilities available to the people who live work visit and conduct business” in marginal rural areas

Thank you

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