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Rural Marginalisation and the Role of Social Innovation; A Turn Towards Nexogenous Development and Rural Reconnection

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Abstract

Rural development in Europe is a long-standing issue that has been supported through EU policies in various ways. The effects of rural development have been uneven, and differences between well-to-do and marginal rural areas have been increasing both across and within countries. This process is reinforced by the current financial crisis. Recently, social innovation has been introduced as the new *panacea* for realising development and growth while, at the same time, warranting social inclusion and counteracting social inequality. A central question of this article is whether social innovation may help to effectively fight rural marginalisation, why that could be the case and what conditions then must be met. Three examples of rural social innovation are used to distil specific features of social innovation and compare them with other concepts and approaches to rural development. Rural social innovation is distinctive in its dependence on civic self-reliance and self-organisation due to austerity measures and state withdrawal, and its cross-sectoral and translocal collaborations. This article concludes that it is time to go beyond earlier ideas of exogenous versus (neo-)endogenous development and introduces the idea of nexogenous development with socio-political reconnection as an engine of revitalisation.

Rural development and social innovation

European policies have been pursuing rural development for decades, although with varying success. There are, hence, prospering and marginalising rural areas, with differences between rural areas increasing across and within countries. This process is reinforced by the current financial crisis and austerity measures, which affect some areas more than others and add to the general process of societal segmentation taking place in Europe between countries, regions and social groups. Recently, social innovation has been introduced as the new *panacea* for realising development and growth while, at the same time, warranting social inclusion and counteracting social inequality.

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Social innovation is a contested concept. It is popular among policymakers at national and European levels and encourages much research, so far, particularly in urban contexts (European Commission 2013; Moulaert *et al.* 2013). Advocates cherish the opportunity for civic initiatives to empower and to promote the renaissance of the cooperative movement. Critics view social innovation as state withdrawal and condemn the shift from public towards private responsibility.

There are certainly reasons to be critical and look beyond overly romantic stories of civic initiatives. However, there is also reason to keep an open mind and investigate what social innovation may or may not be able to achieve. Social innovation offers an interesting approach to research into rural development and, in particular, marginalisation, as it reminds us of the fact that rural marginalisation is part of a broader process of social change, affecting society at large, and not particular to marginal localities. It also underlines the importance of the social and relational aspect of rural development. At the end of the day, development results from social interaction and collaboration.

Social innovation has, hence, a problematic side and a promising side. The aim of this article is to consider both aspects while discussing the role of social innovation in marginal rural areas and considering its relevance for current processes of rural marginalisation and development. In doing so, it seeks to answer the following central question: How can social innovation enable us to fight rural marginalisation, and which conditions must then be met?

The basis of this article is a literature review, including recent studies on rural marginalisation and social innovation, as well as scholarly contributions that discuss and compare established theoretical approaches to rural development. In addition, three examples of socially innovative initiatives are presented based on material available on the project's websites and/or scientific studies analysing the initiatives. The selection of the three initiatives is arbitrary, and similar initiatives could have been found elsewhere. The purpose is not a thorough analysis, but rather a preliminary exploration of what might be specific for social innovation. More in-depth research is needed to confirm these results.

This article is structured as follows. It begins with a discussion of the concept of social innovation, whereupon it presents the dominant problems in marginal depopulating rural areas. It continues with an analysis of three initiatives for social innovation that address rural marginalisation. The examples are used to reveal some specific features of social innovation, unravelling what is distinctive for social innovation compared to earlier approaches to rural development and exploring the particular relevance of social innovation in marginal rural areas. The article proceeds with a discussion of the preconditions for successful social innovation and concludes that collaboration across space is the *sine qua non* of development in the current context. It pleads for a turn towards nexogenous development with restoring bonds between (urban and rural) areas and reconnection of marginal rural areas at its core.

What is social innovation?

Social innovation is a buzzword used frequently by policymakers in the context of development and marginalisation in urban and, recently, in rural contexts. The

European Commission, for instance, published a call for research proposals under HORIZON2020 in 2015, in which social innovation was presented as a novel rural development tool: Unlocking the growth potential of rural areas through enhanced governance and social innovation (ISIB-3-2015).

One could argue that social innovation is political jargon and, as such, of limited use as a scientific concept. On the other hand, one may wonder – are not all rural development concepts used in research politicised? Rural development research is after all developing in close interaction with rural development policy. This assures the societal relevance of rural development research, while also implying considerable control of research agendas (Glenna, Shortall and Brandl 2014). In this particular case, EU policy and funding prominently shape our interest in social innovation. This calls for a critical view of the term itself, as well as of the question of why it is so popular right now. The article begins with the first question and turns to the question of its current popularity below.

When unravelling the use of the term 'social innovation' for the Standing Commission on Agricultural Research (SCAR), Bock (2012) identified three main interpretations of the social innovation concept that are also relevant in the context of rural development:

1. The social mechanisms of innovations
2. The social responsibility of innovations
3. The innovation of society

In the first of these, the concept underlines that innovation takes place in a social context and in interaction with social relations, practises and norms and values. Whether innovations are successfully implemented depends on how well they fit in the social context – are there potential users with needs and desires the innovation can fulfil? Innovations, moreover, affect social relations and are often to the advantage of some and to the disadvantage of others.

The second interpretation stresses that innovations should be 'social' in the sense of socially acceptable, relevant and ethically appropriate, and therefore, 'society' – stakeholders – should be engaged in the innovation process. Successful social innovations are supposed to result from collective action and creative social learning and address unmet social needs. In the rural context, this includes needs such as income and employment, health care and other public services.

In the third interpretation, the need for society to innovate is underlined by the purpose of creating a better society with more equality, social inclusion and social justice. It concerns the need for rural society to ensure its resilience in the light of changes in society at large and changing rural-urban relationships. In the latter case, social innovation is often used in a normative way, stressing the need for social and political change. However, one might also argue that the concept as such is value laden in all three interpretations in the sense that social innovation is generally considered to be a positive development.

It is difficult to present a general definition of social innovation, as the notion is used in quite different ways to promote the realisation of quite different outcomes (Bock 2012). What most definitions have in common is the basic idea of social

innovation as a motor of change rooted in social collaboration and social learning, the response to unmet social needs as a desirable outcome, and society as the arena in which change should take place. The process is generally referred to as a bundle of undifferentiated yet beneficial processes and outcomes. What exactly should be achieved, however, differs quite substantially between the different advocates of social innovation.

The European Commission makes use of the following definition, which clearly reflects the three elements of social innovation introduced above.

> *'Specifically, we define social innovations as new ideas (products, services, models) that simultaneously meet* ***social needs*** *(more effectively than alternatives) and create new* ***social relationships*** *or collaborations. They are innovations that are not only good for* ***society*** *but also enhance society's capacity to act'. (European Commission, 2011) (extra emphasis added by the author)*

Viewed from a rural development perspective, new collaborations refer to citizen engagement and networking, which have been long perceived as the means underlying local development processes (Dargan and Shucksmith 2008). It also indicates the desired end and ultimate development goal – an innovative and vital rural society. The latter includes the nurturing of local and extra-local relations, the alignment of different groups and contexts, and a collective and creative learning process in which those novel products and practices needed to address the sustainability challenge will be developed.

So far, the discussion of social innovation and rural development is policy led. Some attempts have been made to unravel its theoretical notions (Neumeier 2011; Bock 2012), but in general, social innovation is still considered a concept in need of a theory (Oosterlynck 2013). Two existing studies by Neumeier and Bock indicate that social innovation shares characteristics with earlier concepts of rural development, such as exogenous development, (neo-)endogenous development and relational place-making.[1] Social innovation aims at local development and the development of a local development base, similar to the endogenous development model, which views rural development as resulting from local resources and driven by local collective action (van der Ploeg *et al.* 1994). It underlines the importance of external collaboration that has been at the core of the exogenous model (Terluin 2003) in the updated and moderate manner that characterises the neo-endogenous model (Ward *et al.* 2005; Ray 2006; Shucksmith 2010). The neo-endogenous model acknowledges the importance of external relations and interaction between communities as contributors to local development (Bosworth *et al.* 2015), but it does not consider development as imported from outside, as in the exogenous model. Last but not least, the conviction that social relations and the reconfiguration of alliances are key to social innovation underlines social innovation's proximity to ideas of relational place-shaping and place-making where the relations and interactions between actors are expected to shape development (Woods 2015).

What seems to distinguish social innovation is the explicit importance attached to social inclusion and the expected beneficial effect of social innovation for society as a whole. The latter is also a result of social innovation's focus on conditions of socioeconomic deprivation and its coming into existence in the context of the global financial crisis, which produced massive public budget cuts. As a result, policy documents on

social innovation underscore the prominence of not only self-determination but also self-help and self-reliance as components of social innovation. What that means in terms of facilitation and support for capacity building remains to be seen. In a time of austerity measures, one may expect that the time of the generously funded animation, training and transnational exchanges typical of the LEADER programme is over.

The article now turns to the distinctive features of social innovation and their significance in addressing rural marginalisation after elaborating the predominant problems in marginal rural areas.

Problems and causes of rural marginalisation

Rural marginalisation is often associated with geographical remoteness, primary sector dominance, insufficient infrastructure in terms of roads and public services, economic and demographic transition and population decline and, hence, rising unemployment, outmigration of economically active groups and ageing (Copus *et al.* 2011). One expects to find marginal areas in the border regions, in mountainous regions or regions with other geographical 'disabilities', and in areas distant from urban centres. In the high times of the modernisation paradigm, such a disadvantageous location was expected to cause backwardness in economic and sociocultural (low education and popular culture) terms (Terluin 2003).

Whereas in the past, the main cause was ascribed to geography, this has changed in the sense that the lack of access to resources is now explained as resulting from a lack of socioeconomic and political connections ('connectivity') and, hence, of relational 'remoteness' that is not necessarily bounded to geographical location. This has to do with changes in technology, the turn towards mobility and an emergent network society in which mobility is ubiquitous and in principle transcends space (Castells 2000; Urry 2007; Cresswell 2010). It also reflects the insight that relational reach matters more for connections between territories than proximity (Healy 2004; Shucksmith 2010). The latter is confirmed in recent research demonstrating that marginalisation or 'peripherialisation' may occur in any region, even in those that are more centrally located, when their former connections lose significance or are broken (Wiest 2015). This occurred during the transition process in Central and Eastern Europe, the reunification in Eastern Germany, and it is happening right now as a result of the global financial crisis. Geographical remoteness, as such, therefore does not cause marginalisation, nor does a central location promise prosperity. However, this does not mean that geography may not constitute real challenges to development. These challenges may be overcome through improved 'connectivity'; however, real costs are implied, and in the meantime, these challenges have real relevance (OECD 2014).

A common feature of marginal rural areas is population decline. Even in a country such as the Netherlands, which is highly urbanised and fully embedded in a highly industrialised area of Europe, such areas exist along the border with Germany and Belgium, in the Northeast, East, Southeast and Southwest (Krikke *et al.* 2014). These areas are defined by their demography and are considered, for instance, as 'areas of depopulation'. However, in many cases, it is more accurate to speak of an unbalanced or unstable population instead of population loss because outmigration

of some may occur concurrently with the immigration of others, for instance, tourists, retirees, migrants and/or refugees. In addition, problems result not just from reduced numbers of residents but also from the loss of specific groups, for instance, the young, highly educated or economically active (Krikke *et al.* 2014). This puts under stress not only economic prosperity but also potentially the reservoir of social and cultural capital, which, in turn and on the longer term, may be expected to undermine the community's capacity to act and regenerate. The exodus of residents threatens to result in a loss of socioeconomic and political power when losing residents goes along with being cut off from the residents' internal and external relations and resources.

The situation is currently particularly difficult in the Dutch areas of depopulation as a result of the concurrence of multiple problems (Krikke *et al.* 2014). Not only the low and unstable local user base questions the cost effectiveness of public services. The range of services offered is more generally under pressure due to substantial national reforms aimed at cutting public costs. In the case of health care, several countries cut budgets and allowed for more market-based competition, which led to the centralisation of facilities and rendered such service less accessible to residents of remote rural regions. A similar process of 'rationalisation' has taken place in public transport, illustrating a self-fulfilling prophecy: when buses run infrequently, it becomes more convenient to go by car, which further deteriorates profit margins for buses, resulting in an even lower frequency of bus services. The general financial crisis reinforces this process through cuts in public spending and austerity measures, reform of the welfare state and reconsideration of its former principle to provide services to all citizens. Generally speaking, this process leads to the narrowing down and centralisation of services, which puts residents of remote rural areas at a disadvantage.

Depopulation affects the profitability of private business too and often preludes their downfall. Here, we may think, for example, of shops, banks, restaurants, pubs, and hairdressers. Again, the financial crisis plays a role, producing higher unemployment figures, reduced incomes and, hence, reduced spending. Negative processes tend to accumulate, which further undermines the perceived quality of life, pushes outmigration and accelerates marginalisation (Krikke *et al.* 2014). In this process, discursive labelling and stigmatisation of areas as 'areas of abandonment' plays a role, which has also been described as territorial exclusion (Bock, Kovacs and Shucksmith 2015). Regions lose out in terms of their relative position to other regions. Whereas one is expected to offer no opportunities and is perceived as a place for losers (Wiest 2015), other places, especially the big cities, are perceived as the 'land of plenty' in terms of careers, opportunities and the good life.

Rural marginalisation is, hence, part and parcel of growing spatial disparity, and embedded in broader processes of social change. In other words, what happens in depopulating rural communities is not locally produced but rather a consequence of large socioeconomic and political changes. What, then, are the main factors causing rural marginalisation?

For one, **globalisation** affects rural areas. Rural areas are part of the globalising world, in which distances in time and space become less inhibiting in terms of social relations and the economy. In a recent paper, Woods (2012) identifies the following processes of globalisation as most significant for rural areas: market liberalisation,

network extension and intensification (including global commodity chains), international mobility, growth of global consciousness (such as environmental awareness), and the acceleration of information flows (with Information and Communication Technology (ICT)). How these developments affect rural areas depends on the regional context and capacities and is mediated by the geographical location of specific areas, their natural and cultural resources, the political-economic context and the skills and capacities of the regional workforce. Certain areas are able to use the opportunities globalisation offers, while others see their development base weakened.

The growing **mobility** of capital and people is another general factor affecting the rural areas. The expanded opportunity and ability to travel promotes the interest and drive of especially young people to leave home and explore the world. This is true all over Europe and especially as a result of European enlargement (Horváth 2008; Wiest 2015). It encourages (young) people to leave remote rural areas, thereby contributing to the area's marginalisation. Those, however, who move to rural areas elsewhere promote rural development there. Rural immigrants from Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, and Ukraine contribute to the repopulation of remote rural areas in the North, West and South of Europe and address labour shortages in (among others) food processing, agriculture and domestic care (Bock, Osti and Ventura 2016). It is yet to be seen how the arrival of international refugees, who are frequently hosted in rural areas, affects the remote rural areas in Europe (McAreavey 2016).

Increasing mobility produces **urbanisation**, which, at the same time, importantly induces rural outmigration all over the world. The big cities attract youth through the prospect of glamorous and prosperous metropolitan life and the promise of income and employment to those escaping from rural un- and underemployment. Depopulation creates problems in the rural areas, however, population growth and concentration and congestion in metropolitan areas also threaten the quality of urban life (Buhaug and Urdal 2013; Kabish and Kuhlicke 2014; Shaker 2015).

Finally, the **global financial crisis** is an important game changer. For one thing, rising unemployment and a loss of business lower incomes for residents and municipalities. This again forcefully pushes rural outmigration. A lack of facilities and employment also limits the return of young people when starting a family, which has been witnessed quite regularly in the recent past (Leibert 2015; Rauhut and Littke 2015).[2] At the same time, cuts in public budgets and shifts in financial responsibilities augment costs for municipalities and residents.[3] Meanwhile, the dominant public austerity discourse promotes the idea of individual responsibility, corrodes solidarity thinking across urban and rural areas and promotes local responsibility; declining communities have to take action.

In summary, the concurrence of multiple problems is an important factor in processes of rural marginalisation, feeding into a vicious circle of decline. Loss of employment and services encourages further outmigration, which puts services and business even more at risk. Marginal rural areas are confronted with falling income, rising costs and a decreasing (or unstable) and ageing population. The latter increases the dependency rate and undermines the carrying capacity of current models of business, public and private services. It also means that fewer people carry the burden of transferred responsibilities when public services disappear and take up the challenge of reversing the circle of decline. The big questions are if and how such

communities are able to maintain their regenerative capacity, and how governments can support them in this process.

This is clearly the problematic side of social innovation: social innovation is promoted as a solution in a context where the development base is also weakened as a result of policy interventions. Let us now turn to its potential.

Rural initiatives for social innovation

Social innovation as defined above refers to changes in the social fabric of rural societies that are pertinent to their survival: social relations, available capabilities, readiness to engage for the collective and the capacity to organise collective action. This definition overlaps quite a bit with the idea of (neo-)endogenous development and relational place-making. What is different is the explicit reference to new models, the expectation of higher effectiveness and efficiency of innovations and the expectation that social innovation solves the big problems that hamper the functioning of society at large, such as social exclusion.

These new components gain particular significance when taking account of the current austerity context. Social innovation is expected to deliver more radical innovations in terms of the following: the functionality of products, novel business and delivery models; collaboration, with less reliance on public actors and governmental support and new faith in private business; and, finally, improvement in the self-efficacy and self-reliance of citizens in general. This may also be interpreted as proving the shift towards the individual/private and local responsibility discussed above. Is social innovation, then, nothing other than the withdrawal of the state and shifting of responsibilities to the individual and the market? Here, we investigate this question by unravelling three initiatives that are promoted as examples of social innovation[4] seeking to cope with the problems in marginal rural areas.

DORV, (Dienstleistung und Ortsnahe Rundum Versorgung)

Aprize-winning German model for proximity based all-around service provision http://www.dorv.de/favicon.ico Accessed 8 July 2015).

Simply said, the project called DORV (which borrows from the German word 'Dorf', meaning village), presents a template with instructions to realise local 'shops' that offer multifunctional services. These shops sell food and offer space for anything else rural residents may need, such as postal and banking services, travel agencies, laundry and repair shops, as well as social services, health care, child care and elderly care. They also function as places to meet for a coffee or a meal or for cultural activities organised by the local community. Many have counters with ICT facilities for administrative chores and online shopping.

The aim of DORV is to maintain the quality of life in villages while taking account of the changing demography. It follows five principles: a selective offer of goods and services bundled in one facility, with local suppliers to strengthen the local economy, warranting quality through personal service, proximity, freshness and flexibility, using the internet and social media.

DORV resembles the 'kulturhuzen' frequently found in Scandinavia (and transferred to the Netherlands in the 1990s as 'kulturhusen'), which are rural centres offering multiple services. DORV differs from these earlier concepts in departing from a business model in which the profitability of a shop selling food is achieved through the concurrent offering of services, and vice versa. Citizen engagement at the core of the management structure enhances commitment and local solidarity.

DORV presents itself as an initiative of citizens for citizens oriented towards continuity and not profitability and combines voluntary engagement with salaried employment. It promotes local provision and delivery as an added value and an investment in the local economy. Most remarkable is that DORV is a patented concept, developed by a private firm, which offers advice and supervision to communities that are interested in implementing DORV. Civic initiatives are still at the core of the project under external guidance and following an existing model.

Dutch broadband internet cooperative

It has often been said that spatial distance becomes insignificant in this era of high mobility in which ICT offers great opportunities for remote areas to reconnect and revitalise (Townsend *et al.* 2014; Roberts and Townsend 2015; Salemink, Strijker and Bosworth 2015). Although this may very well be true in principle, the promise of ICT connectivity is far from being fulfilled. In reality, rural areas lag behind in internet access and, in particular, high-speed internet. Here, the obstructions are also material. Building a fibre network in rural areas is expensive, with higher costs per user compared to urban areas because of the lack of economies of scale. European rules inhibit state contributions, and as a result, the rolling out of high speed internet has been delayed for many years. Recently, a number of Dutch communities managed to break the deadlock through the foundation of broadband internet cooperatives, in which citizens, governments and local businesses collaborate.[5] They try to bundle user interest, negotiate with network suppliers about costs and network types and, in some cases, set up an open network under the management of the co-operative.

The co-operatives are not always successful and struggle with a number of obstacles, as Salemink and Strijker (2015) concluded based on their study of 75 initiatives in the Netherlands. Frequently encountered problems include unreliable governmental support, the opposition and counteraction of established telecom business, difficulty to realise and bundle sufficient user interest, and problems in organising the technical operations and in agreeing on which type of network to set up. The authors underline the need for technical knowhow, as well as economic, social and political capital to organise local commitment and conclude contracts with network providers and governments. Social cohesion, solidarity and readiness to share costs are vital to realise full network coverage. When the initiatives are successful, they give an important boost to business and social cohesion. Particularly interesting is that many co-operatives are bottom-up initiatives, for whom the realisation of an open network under their own management is also a reflection of their desire to regain self-determination and self-reliance and to demonstrate the vitality of rural areas.

Care co-operatives – the example of Hoogeloon

In recent years, Dutch citizen groups started a number of so-called care co-operatives. Following Bokhorst (2015), there are approximately 50 initiatives at the moment. The movement began in the rural areas, with the aim to maintain local care facilities and enable elderly and/or disabled residents to stay in their villages. In the meantime, similar co-operatives have begun under the heading of urban villages in the city of Amsterdam (www.stadsdorpenamsterdam.nl Accessed 8 July 2015).

The first care co-operative was founded in Hoogeloon in 2005.[6] It is run by 25 professionals and 60 volunteers and offers care to 230 elderly members (approximately 10 per cent of the village community) (Bokhorst 2015). The members pay an annual fee of 20 euro, which grants them priority in terms of activities and the right to vote in the biannual assembly. Typical for the care co-operatives is the collaboration with professional care facilities and a mixture of professional and voluntary care, whereby the latter explicitly include time for communication to prevent isolation and loneliness. In Hogeloon, members may live at home or in one of the care villas located in the village.

Bokhorst (2015) considers the form of a co-operative as symbolic for a novel (or renewed) philosophy, rooted in nearby small-scale health care, which offers personal care and is rooted in the idea of mutual help and solidarity. The care villas for patients unable to live on their own resemble private houses with personal care. Care co-operatives are inspired by health care innovation, seeking to fundamentally change the impersonal business-like model of institutional care that leaves patients without a voice. Care co-operatives are, hence, also about self-determination.

Care co-operatives are successful and highly respected among Dutch policymakers who promote them as flagships of the so-called 'participation society'. At the same time, health care co-operatives struggle to implement their idea of 'homely care' due to current health care regulations, rooted in professional care and strict supervision. They are also vulnerable because of their dependence on citizen engagement (Bokhorst 2015).

Distinctive features and added value of rural social innovation

Analysing these three examples described above allows us to identify some of the features of social innovation, which need to be further elaborated and confirmed by future research. Departing from them, we may reflect on the added value of the concept of social innovation compared to earlier approaches to rural development.

Features of social innovation

Generally speaking, social innovation may be described and characterised as follows.

1. Social innovation begins in civic action and aims to fulfil the needs of residents through the provision of (or alternatives for) services that are no longer available. Social innovation may, hence, also be interpreted as a result of the dismantling of

the welfare state, and return to traditional models of mutual help, be it in a more formalised way, that is, less dependent on private networks but realised in functional networks, established for this particular purpose

2. There is a new role for co-operatives and collective action with self-determination, self-management and self-reliance – or, in other words, with autonomy – as a core ingredient of their philosophy. This does not exclude economic success or a business-like professional operation and organisation, even without profit orientation. They may also be characterised as social enterprises, a concept that is more prominent in the UK (Radford and Shortall 2012)[7]
3. Even though the reduction, privatisation and/or market-based restructuring of public services are at the background of citizens' dissatisfaction, their reorganisation also offers opportunities. Redesign leads to the development of business and delivery models that operate following a substantially different logic compared to current private or public services. They are different through the mixture of salaried and voluntary labour; the collaboration of local and external partners; and the decision-making power regained by the (final) providers/producers and the customers/consumers, who have little say in the usual arrangements governed by large (semi) public and private corporations (De Moor 2013)[8]
4. The need to reorganise and reinvent local service provision promotes the establishment of novel forms of collaboration between citizens, businesses, third-sector organisations and the government, and stimulates the connectivity of rural areas
5. The initiatives are driven by an intrinsic motivation to improve the quality of life in the community and the currently offered services. Many also reflect the wish to regain power and a say over their community and to operate at a distance from the government, which appears to offer little support or even to stand in the way of realising improvement (De Moor 2013). Social innovation includes, hence, an element of resistance and socio-political opposition and a desire for social change
6. Dissatisfaction with the quality of services and desire for more small-scale, sustainable, and affordable high-quality products and services is another important motive (Bokhorst *et al.* 2015)
7. New technologies may enable citizens to act at low costs
8. It is currently uncertain if and to what extent the new delivery models are accessible and affordable for all citizens. When organised through co-operatives, the exclusion of non-members is, at least in theory, a risk

Social innovation and earlier approaches to rural development

Some of the features elaborated above and summarised in Table 1 are not exclusive to social innovation initiatives and characterise many civic projects for local and rural development, as elaborated extensively in theories of (neo-)endogenous rural development (Bosworth *et al.* 2015). However, differences and novel qualities also emerge when looking in more detail into the correspondences and differences between social innovation and earlier approaches to rural development.

Table 1: *Principles of rural development and rural social innovation*

	Exogenous development	Endogenous development	Neo-endogenous development	Relational place-making	Rural social innovation
Key principle	Economies of scale and concentration	Harnessing local (natural, human and cultural) resources for sustainable development	Maximising the value of local resources; Competitiveness based on local assets	Relational construction of place	Collective citizen action across places reconnecting marginal areas
Dynamic force	Urban growth poles (drivers exogenous to rural areas)	Local initiative and enterprise	Networks of local actors connected to external influences; The state is facilitator	Through social, economic, cultural and political relations with other places and recovery of local sense of place	(Supra-)local co-operatives with citizen, business & third sector; novel business model and ICT; self-help and self-reliance, at distance of state support
Functions of rural areas	Producing food and primary products for urban economies	Diverse service economies	Diverse production and service economies; Interdependent – urban demand remains critical for services and traditional sectors	Diverse production and service economies	Residency, recreation, food production, landscape management, resource extraction, low urban demand

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Table 1. *Continued*

	Exogenous development	Endogenous development	Neo-endogenous development	Relational place-making	Rural social innovation
Major rural development problems	Low productivity and peripherality	Limited capacity of areas/groups to participate in economic activity	Low service provision; Unbalanced communities - ageing & inequality; Remoteness, isolation & lack of critical mass	Low sense of belonging and disengagement; disconnected from relational networks; symbolic construction of marginal places	Unbalanced communities as a result of migration processes; ageing, low income, lack of employment, low service provision; low social capital; low quality of life and feeling of abandonment
Focus of rural development	Agricultural modernisation	Capacity-building (skills, institutions, infrastructure); overcoming exclusion	Holistic approach to include local empowerment, capacity building, overcoming exclusion, adding values to local resources, enhancing connectivity and promoting innovation	Reconstruction of relations; rebuilding of a local sense of belonging and shared positive sense of place	Promotion citizen action, innovative products and practices replacing public services; reconnection and social inclusion

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There is considerable overlap in terms of the faith put into collective action and citizen engagement in local development and in motivations that go beyond self-interest. The ambition seems to be higher in the sense of providing alternatives for what is no longer offered by the market or the state. In that sense, autonomy has gained importance in the context of reduced public budgets. There is less reliance on state support and even indications of citizens distancing themselves from (local) governments (De Moor 2013). This is also a result of the opportunities Information Technology and social media offer and an expansion of various forms of sharing economies or collaborative consumption, in which individual ownership is replaced by shared access to a product or service (Botsman and Rogers 2011). Reliance on this collective capacity to act without state intervention or support, however, may lead to widening inequalities between places, as discussed below.

The examples presented require external collaboration and networking, which is acknowledged in the neo-endogenous approach. However, in social innovation, nationally operating large business and third-sector corporations seem to play a vital role, such as in the case of broadband and care co-operatives. Here, the collaboration between those located geographically 'remote' and 'central' not only bridges spatial distance; it may even be interpreted as its annihilation, as it demonstrates the irrelevance of location. This may be interpreted as reconfirming the idea of relational place-making. The adoption of the care-co-operative approach in 'urban villages' in Amsterdam could be interpreted as positive discursive labelling, where the rural model of mutual care and solidarity is considered exemplary for a generally desired innovation. What is also clearly reflected is the need for a high degree of professionalism amongst the social actors.

Social innovation, as presented in the examples above, focuses less on agricultural problems and farmers' needs compared to earlier approaches, although this again needs confirmation through more empirical research. Farmers may be included in the delivery of services, and there are indications that this is the case, for instance, in Italy, where health care institutes collaborated with (social) farms to reintegrate activities to cope with budget cuts (Di Iacovo *et al.* 2014). This shift may be explained partly by the differentiation and dissociation of agriculture and rural areas (Breman *et al.* 2010), as a result of which the marginalisation or success of the two are no longer interrelated. In the rural areas experiencing population decline, the fragile socio-economic dynamics need particular attention, which is indeed the focus of the above-presented examples of rural social innovation. Social innovation initiatives developed in the context of rural marginalisation present novel elements less evident in earlier approaches to rural development (see Table 2).

These elements reconfirm what has been discussed above: rural marginalisation and social innovation are embedded in broader process of social change, such as the global financial crisis, welfare state reforms and austerity measures, as well as the opportunities modern technology offers and the related renaissance of co-operative movements, reflected among others in initiatives for collaborative consumption and the popularity of self-reliance. Such movements and initiatives have significance far beyond the local level. They express civic confidence, withdrawal from and distrust towards the state, and the aspiration of self-sufficiency. The examples above portray

Table 2: *Novel elements of rural initiatives for social innovation*

1	Context of welfare state reform/austerity
2	New importance of self-reliance and self-organisation
3	Less trust in state support – civic withdrawal
4	Collaboration with large and distant partners
5	Use of ICT for self-organisation
6	Developing alternatives with relevance beyond the local
7	Positive re-labelling of 'the rural'

civic action that solves local problems yet is of relevance elsewhere and is born partly from collaboration with extra-local and extra-regional levels.

These features put the idea of 'local' and endogenous rural development in perspective. Some initiatives consist of the local implementation of ideas developed elsewhere, which underlines the crucial importance of external collaboration.

Preconditions for social innovation

This all sounds wonderful and, indeed, promising, but is it too good to be true? The crucial question is whether remote rural areas offer a fertile ground for social innovations to emerge and develop. The particular features elaborated above make specific demands on the context, after all.

The experiences with LEADER are very instructive, as they give insight into the conditions under which civic action can thrive. These studies have pointed to the need for abundant human and social capital (Kinsella *et al.* 2010) and the presence of social networks that link the regions and reach out to potential external partners. Citizens need to trust each other and be willing to collaborate and engage for the collective, driven by a common sense of place and place identity (Dargan and Shucksmith 2008). Capable and charismatic leaders and entrepreneurial people are needed to inspire others and negotiate (Horlings 2015). Research has also demonstrated that local development is hampered '*in places with a weak entrepreneurial culture, with low levels of service, a weak civil society and no history of collective actions, with little institutional capacity, pre-existing clientalistic power relations, and a top down approach through the local government*'. (Bock 2012, p. 18)

Research into the new citizen co-operatives produces similar results. It requires the presence of highly qualified, creative and persistent citizens who generally have professional experience, higher education, and high income (Uitermark 2015). In addition, bonding and bridging social capital are needed to realise collective actions based on shared ambitions. All this is rarely present in disadvantaged regions (McCulloch, Mohan and Smith 2012).

Overall, this introduces a note of pessimism concerning the opportunities for social innovation in remote rural areas. Many areas will most probably score low in terms of the assets, resources or capital referred to above, as depopulation generally results in the loss of the most entrepreneurial people. Can we really expect social

innovation to step in where the resource base for regeneration is seriously under pressure? Is this not just as problematic and unlikely as discussed above in the case of LEADER? Based on the experiences with LEADER, it may be expected that only the most resourceful rural areas are able to develop social innovations, as alternative models of service provision are grounded in collective action and co-operation. If this is true, social innovation will reconfirm existing inequality and promote further spatial disparity.

The European Commission puts faith in governments promoting social innovation, and it is evident that governments have a role to play. Studies into (neo-)endogenous rural development underscore the important 'new role for the state as co-ordinator, manager or enabler rather than as provider or director' (Shucksmith 2010, p. 4). The state should promote capacity building among citizens and the local government to improve their capacity to mobilise the local community, and it should support the development of public-private partnerships within and across local communities. The problem is that all this requires substantial public funding of local development, which has been significantly reduced in this time of austerity. It is, hence, questionable that governments are ready and capable to offer large funds for social innovation. Moreover, even when such funds were available, these rural development programmes did not solve problems in the most disadvantaged regions, as studies have demonstrated time and again (Bock, Kovacs and Shucksmith 2015).

What, then, should be done? Should we forget about social innovation? Not necessarily: social innovation still has potential if understood as a call for change at a higher level of development politics and not just as a matter for local communities. This is reflected in the 'Rural Manifesto' recently adopted by the European Rural Parliament gathering at Schärding in Austria in 2015: '*The pursuit of our vision demands in every country a refreshed and equitable partnership between people and governments. We, the rural people and organisations, know that we have a responsibility to give leadership and to act towards our own collective well-being. But we also fairly demand that governments at all levels, including the European institutions, work to make this crucial partnership effective*' (http://europeanruralparliament.com/ accessed 11 November 2015).

Supporting social innovation and development in the marginal rural area requires the recognition that these areas are confronted with structural disadvantages, such as poor resource endowments and disconnectedness from markets and networks. Several disadvantages are caused by broader forces such as globalisation, urbanisation, increasing mobility, post-socialist transition, European enlargement and, last but not least, the global financial crisis, with differential impacts of policies, creating advantages for some and disadvantages for other regions (Shucksmith 2012). Such structural forces and events are beyond the control of local communities, and the problems they generate are too big to be locally solved.

Local rural development takes place in a dynamic political-economic context that can be understood only when taking account of its global embeddedness. In addition, remote rural areas are part of a globalising world, which may nuance their peripherality and offer new opportunities in a global economy, while also producing new vulnerabilities (Woods 2012). Denying these dynamic structural causes of development

and marginalisation while underlining the individual responsibility of local communities to innovate is cynical and ineffective.

What then, should be focused on and done with the limited resources available, taking into account our emerging insight into factors enhancing social innovation and the changing societal context of rural development today? Based on the above, connectivity seems to be a crucial factor, as it offers access to resources and social infrastructure that may not be present at the local level and that are known to be crucial for innovation, including better education, entrepreneurialism, access to markets, other business and already trained employees, to mention just a few. *'However, as pointed out by Johansson and Quigley (2004), specialized networks across space can compensate for the proximity and high accessibility that characterize dense, metropolitan regions'* (Naldi *et al.* 2015, p. 95). Rural-urban linkages are, hence, important, but close collaboration between regions may also importantly increase the benefits of so-called agglomeration economies. Investment in regional development is significant as well, as it improves the collective asset base from which multiple localities may profit.

The realisation of 'virtual proximity' through the construction of high-speed internet is important, as it provides access to external knowledge, partnerships and markets. Linkages may also be provided through the external engagement of local companies, as well as the collaboration with external companies and their access to external assets and markets. In a similar vein, temporary residents can play an important role either by putting their assets, skills and capacities to use during their presence or by providing access to their external networks (Bock, Osti and Ventura 2016). *'Actors who bridge regional and international contexts can be particularly significant'* (Woods 2012, p. 104). This is also true in the case of social innovation. As the examples above have demonstrated, social innovation does not need to begin locally, and it may also include the uptake of novel solutions developed elsewhere. The examples also reveal the enormous importance of collaboration across space. It may be time, then, to let go of the focus on endogenous, locally produced development, which have been so popular since the early 1990s, and acknowledge that local development does not need to be fully 'born from within' (van der Ploeg *et al.* 1994).

More research into social innovation is needed to understand if and how local capacity for social innovation may be enhanced. The considerations above focus on the specific features of social innovation and on how a departure from social innovation may alter our current understanding of rural development. It also takes account of substantial cuts in public budgets and the withdrawal of the state. The political-economic context of rural development has changed, whether we like it or not. In some rural areas, the resulting problems mobilise engagement of citizens, NGOs, the third sector and business. In others, this does not happen – maybe because the local asset basis is (already) too weak. The above measures may help to supplement this basis by giving access to complementary external resources and embedding local development in wider collaborative relations. The boundaries of territorial development are not fixed; they may be defined geographically (and relationally), but they are the result of political negotiations and may, hence, change according to current conceptions of responsibility and solidarity.

Conclusion – a turn towards nexogenous development

Rural social innovation shares many characteristics of (neo-)endogenous approaches to rural development and the idea of relational place-making. They all have citizen engagement and entrepreneurialism at their core. Social innovation differs in its orientation on citizen issues, socio-economic fragility and problems resulting from welfare state reforms and austerity measures, which reflects the changing political economy of rural development with seriously limited state support.

The latter is part and parcel of the problematic aspect of social innovation – the shifting of public responsibilities to private initiatives and the localisation and individualisation of rural development and marginalisation accompanied by ignoring and neglecting the structural disadvantages and vulnerabilities created through state reforms.

Social innovation is promising, as it takes account of the opportunities that change offers in terms of self-organisation, new alliances and the use of modern technology. Here, we may think of citizens developing novel solutions based on innovative business and delivery models, which, if successful, may also be implemented elsewhere. Characteristically, they are socially innovative also in their ambition to redesign and improve social organisation. More research is needed, although the importance of IT and social media is already apparent. Once the remote rural areas have access to high-speed internet, the use of novel technology offers great opportunities to such areas, as it greatly improves their connectivity and, with that, the accessibility of external services, resources and social networks.

By definition, social innovation flourishes at a distance from policy and policymakers. Many rural inhabitants undertaking initiatives are disappointed by the market and the state and want to be in charge themselves. Nevertheless, policy remains important: negatively through regulations that curtail the room for manoeuvring through the withdrawal of support and the demolition of public services, which motivated initiatives to begin with, and potentially positively if facilitating the roll out of high-speed internet, social networking and collective learning and the exchange or common development of novel business and delivery models, especially when based on innovative technologies. Here, it is important to better understand the tipping points in the process of marginalisation, when cumulative problems result in a lock-in, and when the mitigation of certain problems helps to ensure the resilience of remote rural areas.

Theoretically, social innovation is interesting, as it shifts our perspective from fixed actors in separate rural areas towards a more fluid image of shifting actors and relations and functional networks operating across places and beyond the local and rural. Relevant actors are not only the permanent and temporary residents of rural areas but also their urban and peri-urban counterparts. Conceptually, social innovation transcends the boundaries of specific places and even the rural space. It is evident that rural social innovation requires networking and the building of relations across the borders of the place in question. This is a reason to reconsider the existing approaches to rural development as either exogenous or (neo-)endogenous and to adapt our focus.

Social innovation calls for a **nexogenous approach** to rural development that departs from the importance of reconnecting and binding together forces across space. It borrows from the Latin noun '*nexus*' for bond and the Latin verb '*nectere*' for binding together. It underlines the importance of reconnection and re-established socio-political connectivity of especially marginal rural areas. The linkage and collaboration across space give access to exogenous resources, which allow for vitalisation if matched with endogenous forces. The development of marginal areas is seriously hampered if social innovation is understood simply as self-help and an indication that marginal rural areas have to rescue themselves. Then, social innovation reconfirms their material, symbolic and political disconnection.

If social innovation is interpreted not just as local civic action but also in its broader significance as an innovation of and for society (European Commission 2014 a, b), it includes rethinking social and spatial solidarity. Social innovation is, then, not about finding solutions for the problems in individual rural places, but rather about how to address the uneven but interrelated effects of social change. Urbanisation and rural marginalisation are, after all, two sides of the same coin. If social innovation is to fulfil its promises, rural-urban linkages must be reconsidered and revalued and interactions and mutual dependencies must be taken into account. The social innovation of marginal rural areas is, then, not only a task for individual and disadvantaged rural areas but a common concern.

Notes

[1] See Table 1 for the principles of these development models (based on Bosworth *et al*. 2015).

[2] This may also occur in prospering and gentrifying rural areas, where houses may become unaffordable as prices have been driven up by newcomers, tourists and second home owners (Shucksmith 2012).

[3] Residents are also affected by the decentralisation of facilities in health care, education, transport, banks and post offices, which increases cost.

[4] Similar initiatives may be found elsewhere in Europe.

[5] For successful examples, see http://langedijke.opglas.nl or http://www.boekelnet.nl both accessed 9 July 2015.

[6] For a short documentary in English, see http://zorgcooperatie.nl/index.php?p=video_care_2 Accessed 8 July 2015.

[7] The Netherlands has a long history of co-operative movements, which may explain their prominence there (De Moor 2013).

[8] Mackenzie (2006, pp. 396–96) draws a similar conclusion when analysing the Scottish Land Reform Act implemented in 2003, where the collective ownership of land introduces new political possibilities for local development in which social justice and sustainability rank high.

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