Can Social Innovation offer Transformative Opportunities to Marginalised Rural Areas?

Maria Nijnik with thanks to David Miller, Carla Barlagne, Bill Slee, Sophie Alkhaled and numerous projects' partners & supporters

simra
Social Innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas

The James Hutton Institute

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SEFARI
LEADING IDEAS FOR BETTER LIVES

Processes Observed in Marginalised Rural Areas:

- ❑ **Out-migration** & ageing
- ❑ **Population drift** to larger villages & towns:
  - • Closure of services
  - • Threatening capacity for endogenous adva[n]
- ❑ **Diversification** & restructuring
- ❑ Changing **infrastructure**
- ❑ Changing **lifestyles**

To respond: *support small businesses & new business models; local, short supply chains; circular bio-economy; infrastructure & services; digital growth; exploit green spaces & nature based solutions; valorise ecosystem services (ES); explore fiscal incentives &* **new collaborative actions – social innovation (SI)**

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Wormery
Social Cohesion
Circular Economy
Biodiversity

BETER ETEN, BETER LEVEN

Beebox:
Local food (NL)
Home-delivery
New Businessmodel

Foodcollective:
Social Cohesion
Fresh food for people in need

Squaremeter garden:
Biodiversity
Food Education
New Businessmodel

What is Social Innovation about?

… quality of life & human **well-being**…

… new social relationships & **collaborations**

… innovative **governance**

… social cohesion & **justice**

… **sustainable** & **smart & inclusive** growth

Find out our innovation actions

new **ideas, products, services, arrangements, relationships, interactions** (attitudes, collaborations, values, behaviours, skills, practices), **fields of activity** (social entrepreneurship & social enterprises) & **processes** (e.g. learning) to meet societal needs

Social Innovation is about:

Doing things for people & with people

"the reconfiguration 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" (Polman *et al.,* 2017)

Social innovation opens new opportunities & responds to pressing social demands not traditionally addressed by existing institutions, including public policies & markets

James Crombie
The Boatshed, Portsoy

Bill Slee
Rural Development Company

The SIMRA project:

SIMRA - Social Innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas (MRA) - **a H2020 project of 26 partners from 15 countries, addressing SI in forestry, agriculture & rural development** http://www.simra-h2020.eu/
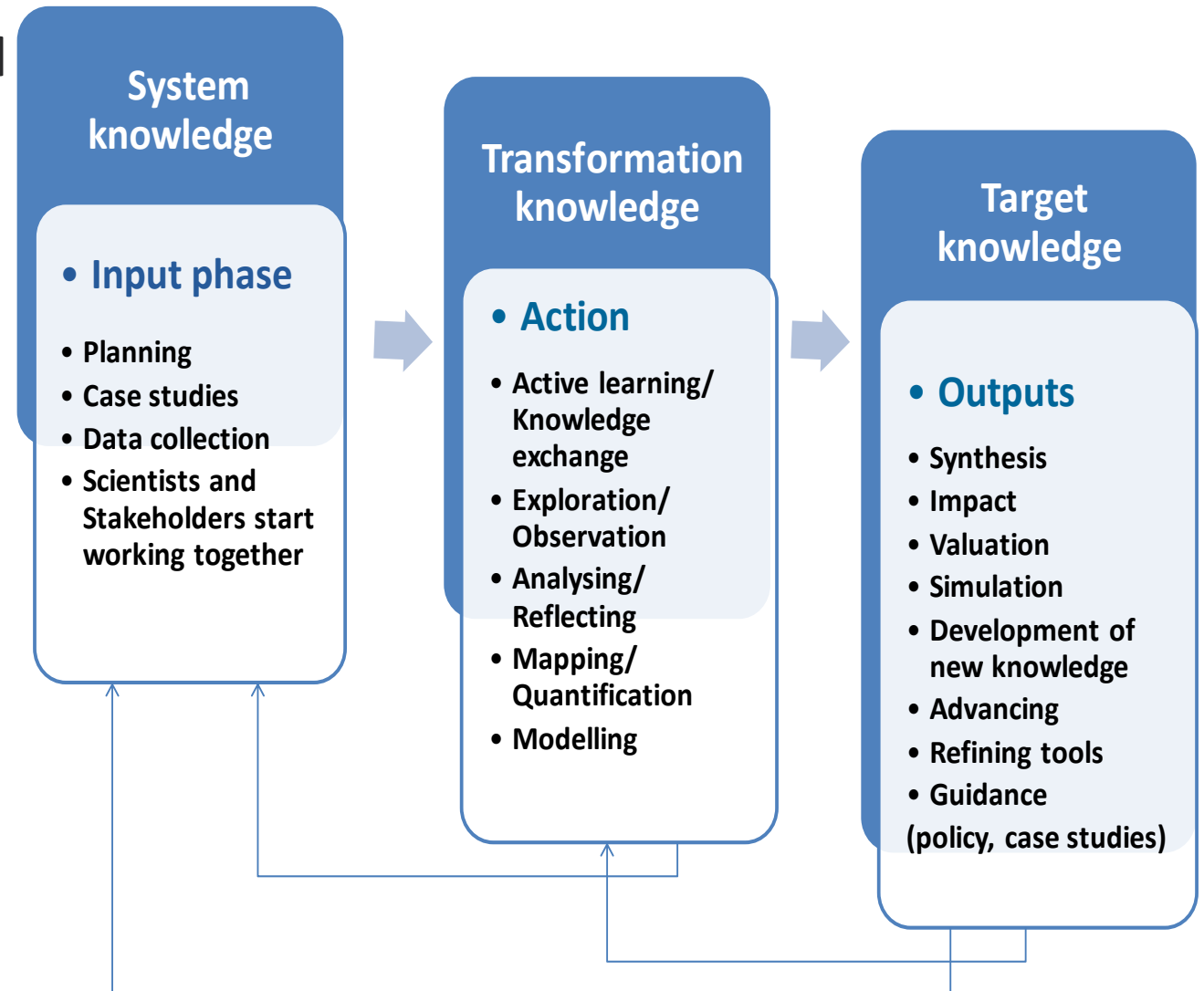

- ✓ **Improved existing understanding of social innovation & how to enhance it**
  - ▪ **Defined, conceptualised, categorised**
  - ▪ **Explained its variability & diversity**
  - ▪ **Analysed its triggers, enabling & success factors, challenges & barriers**
- ✓ **Advised on how SI can help revive FDC & bring prosperity to MRA**
- ✓ **How to initiate/develop/spread SI**
- ✓ **What's the impact & how to assess it**
- ✓ **To build capacities & develop collaborations to promote sustainability transformations via SIs**

- **Transdisciplinary** approach, combining Theoretical–Empirical–Expert–Traditional knowledge (KN) & local wisdom
- **Multi-level multi-actor** engagement
- **Living labs (science-stakeholder)**

Co-constructing new KN with people & evaluating decisions for our common & more sustainable futures

Social innovation & new collaborations (e.g., community hubs) & partnerships enable new forms of governance (e.g., community woodlands; carbon forestry) creating **pathways to societal benefits**

System knowledge

- **Input phase**
  - Planning
  - Case studies
  - Data collection
  - Scientists and Stakeholders start working together

Transformation knowledge

- **Action**
  - Active learning/ Knowledge exchange
  - Exploration/ Observation
  - Analysing/ Reflecting
  - Mapping/ Quantification
  - Modelling

Target knowledge

- **Outputs**
  - Synthesis
  - Impact
  - Valuation
  - Simulation
  - Development of new knowledge
  - Advancing
  - Refining tools
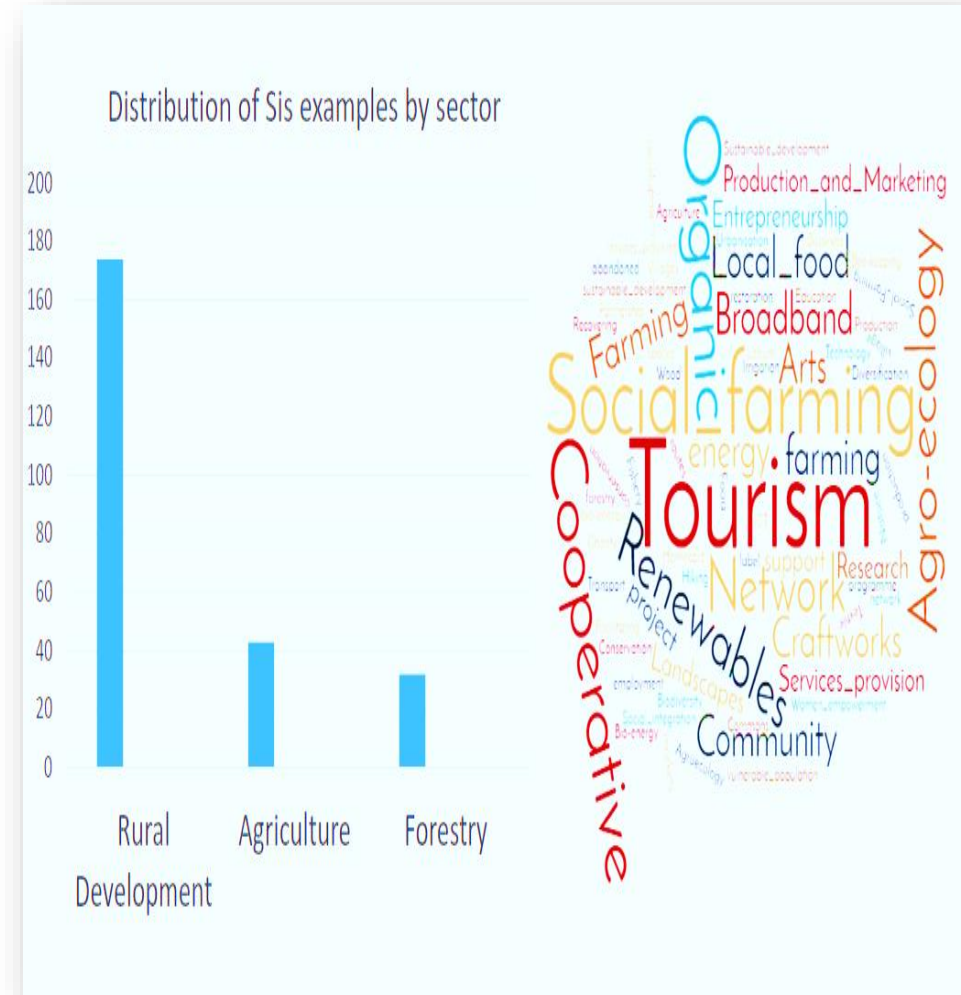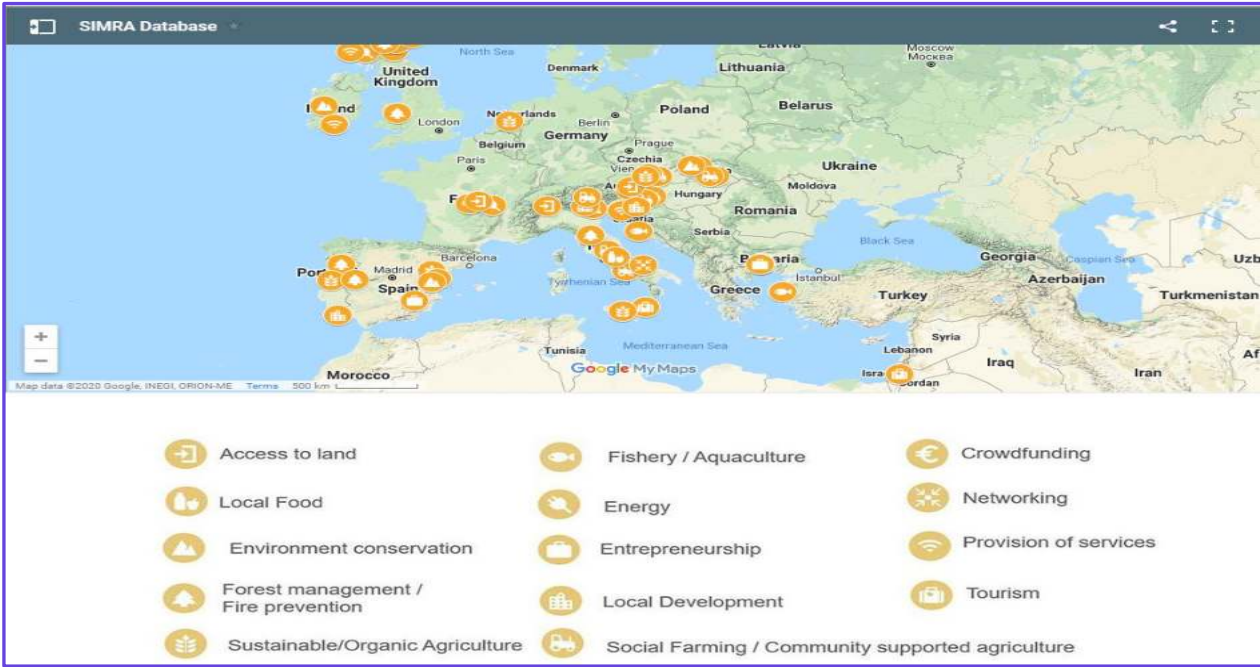 - Guidance
  (policy, case studies)

- **Scientific impacts** (e.g., **50 journal articles**, 4 special journal issues) from SIMRA & research supported by the Scottish Government provided a basis for improved stakeholder engagement, science-policy-practice dialogues, changing attitudes & perceptions, advancing & sharing KN, raising awareness, helped building capacities

- **Societal benefits are realised** via **spreading uptake of:**

i. <u>evaluation methods & framework</u> for evaluating SI and its impacts; ii) the <u>manual</u>; iii) use of a <u>database N=100 frameworks, approaches & tools</u> <u>by researchers, agencies,</u> and in <u>follow-up projects</u>, <u>PhD theses,</u> <u>Young Leadership Programme & summer schools</u>

ii. **new evidence by evaluators & innovators** (e.g., of <u>Divergent Development Paths</u> & a <u>Catalogue of Diversity</u> of SI comprising N≥ 400 (243 validated) <u>examples</u> accompanied by an <u>interactive online database</u> of SIs (c. 3K downloads) & maps of <u>characteristics of MRA</u>

- **Outputs for practitioners :** i) a **guide/checklist** in SI (5 languages) underpinned by the **Innovation Actions** (IA), N=7; ii) **enhancing human & social capital** through <u>face-to-face</u> (N=35) & SIMRA <u>MOOC</u>, (N=521 learners; N=1045 joiners) & 2 educational sessions (N=27) at the <u>Final Congress</u>

End-users received **immediate access** to evidence, <u>findings,</u> <u>tools</u> & processes to develop, evaluate, <u>support</u> & spread SI. Local rural communities **build capacity** in <u>N=24 Case Studies</u> (CS) & beyond.

Sustainable Hub to Engage into Rural Policies with Actors (**SHERPA**) further contributes to the formulation of future policies relevant to EU rural areas, by creating a **science-society-policy interface**

Database of Social Innovation examples and Case Studies:

SIMRA database: ca 450 SI examples (ca 243 validated); 24 Case Studies & 7 Innovation Actions

Developing community restoration projects

Developing a community managed visitor attraction

Developing Community Hydropower
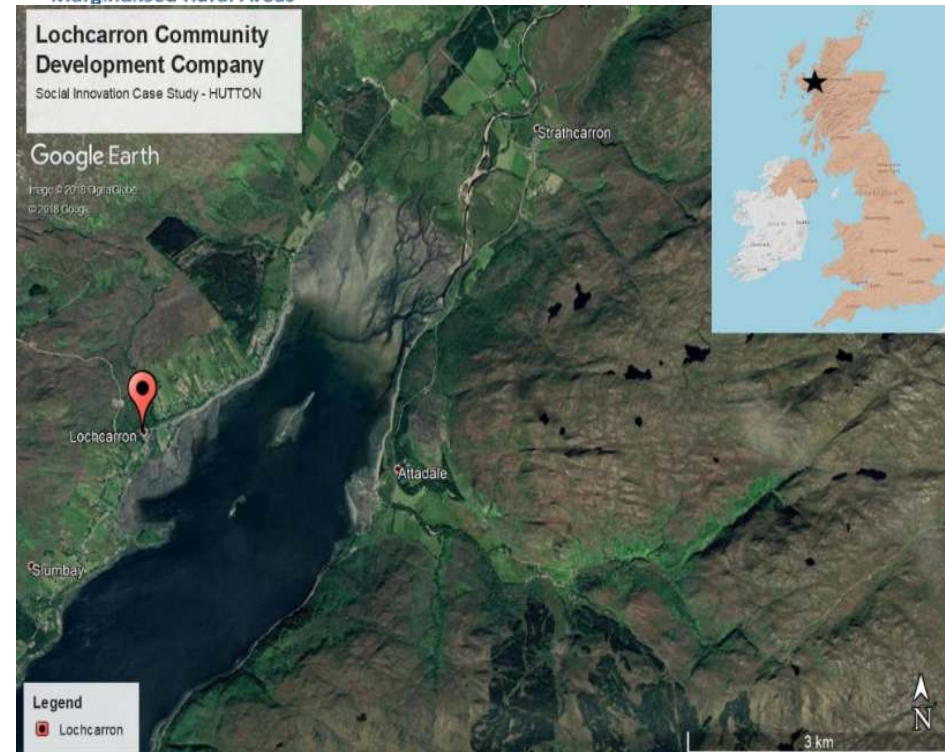
Developing an old people's social care project

Community hydro scheme
Social enterprise
Crowdfunding scheme

Social innovation in Scotland: a case of Braemar

- A village of 400 people
- Most remote in Deeside, the Cairngorms National Park
- Often cut off by bad weather
- Poor public services
- Grid connection problems
- Energy poverty
- Earlier population decline
- Needs to retain young people
- Opportunities not pursued by private sector

What have they done?

- Established a community development trust (CDT) to oversee projects through feasibility studies & advising
- Exploited strong social capital – a mix of local people & new incomers to create a vibrant community willing to innovate
- Each social enterprise (uses nature based solutions) is nurtured by the CDT & then becomes independent

Social Innovation in Lochcarron:

The Lochcarron Community Development Company (Kirkton Woodland & Heritage Group, KWHG) was formed in 2009 to revitalise the FDC and to:

- Manage the land/forest/assets for the benefit of people
- Advance environmental education
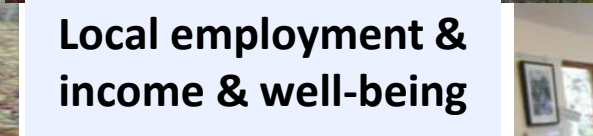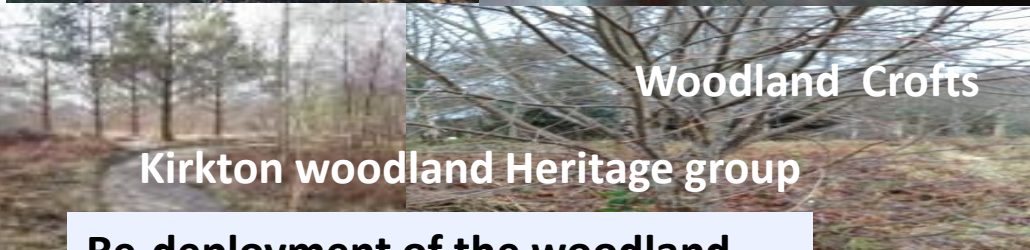- Promote the arts, heritage, culture, and science

In 2011, KWHG applied to purchase a woodland through the National Forest Land Scheme. In 2 years, they raised the 90k GBP required. A new management plan set by the community has led to a mixed multi purpose woodland with open space to max people-nature interaction, with paths, picnic sites & local amenities (Barlagne et al., 2021).

Factors of marginalisation:

- Remoteness
- Ageing population
- Medical desertification
- Fuel poverty
- Youth unemployment
- Lack of affordable housing
- Opportunities not pursued by private sector or markets

❑ **An innovative idea:** The community acquired a previously owned state forest to achieve benefits for improved human health, well-being & other ES

❑ **An innovative process** of reconfiguration of network, governance & attitudes: The LCDC established connections with a range of organisations. They source funds & expert knowledge (if not available within the community).

❑ **An innovative project** with new products & ES: The woodland is managed for: fuel wood for the community, timber, & as a recreational area, etc.

Smithy Cultural development

Tree house

Potter

Wood turner

Woodland Crofts

Kirkton woodland Heritage group

Local employment & income & well-being

Re-deployment of the woodland multifunctionality heritage, education (Barlagne et.al., 2021)

Lochcarron Community Development Company

Kiki's craft corner

Tree pruning

Professional training and skills development

Craft centre

Dry stone walling

Willow weaving

https://lochcarroncommunity.wordpress.com/

The Amal ('hope') project - socially integrating (150) Syrian refugees

A committee of 4 men & 4 women was elected to enable families to contribute to the community on the concept of collective good & not for profit action

The Kitchen project – at the Community Centre, the Syrian refugees cook Arabic & provide food for the newly arriving immigrants & the local Scottish community

The Garden project – a place for the refugees to mix with locals at an allotment & to practice English. It promotes volunteering & building the New Scots' confidence in applying for work

EU Horizon 2020
RIA No 677622

Examples of Impact in Local Communities beyond Scotland:

In **Case Studies** & **Innovation Actions,** stakeholders co-constructed/used KN, creating impacts through new processes (e.g., **VALAB, Guadeloupe, FR**), income streams & new business models

- **ISHOPRURAL -** sustainable jobs for > 100 women in Lebanon; 500+ natural products marketed on e-platform; >50 small-scale producers benefited; >1425 orders (including from abroad) received; > 12.2K products sold, worth c. €40K; well-being improved for >100 households

- **Fire volunteers in Catalonia,** Spain, directly involved N=38 participants & 400 civil society actors in locally rooted models of tackling fires. This experience is spreading

- **A Box of Sea**, Greece, brought together citizens & low impact fishers from Lesvos & Leros to stop overfishing & improve livelihoods: jobs; access to markets: > 200 boxes of fish sold of €6K

- 13 argan cooperatives of **Afoulki network, Morocco**, promoted independence of 300 women

- **Dairy producers, Tunisia,** improved value chains, productivity & livelihoods

Examples of Policy Improvements:

(a) **The EU** Long Term Vision for Rural Areas**;** Green Deal; ENRD Smart Villages Thematic Network

(b) **Briefings** at the EU Parliament & Agencies

(c) **Conferences:** OECD RD; EC Innovation Summit; COP26; World IUFRO Congress & events, **48 SIMRA sessions ran**

(d) **Capacity building** (e.g., face-to-face & MOOC **training** courses (SIMRA, FAO/IMPROMO)

97% of participants reporting the benefits of gaining KN to revitalize MRA, 77% of willing to share the KN: *"After this course, I feel confident in strongly supporting SI in MRA".*

(a) **Dialogue of national leaders** (e.g., invited talk at Netherlands Royal Palace; bringing SI in the S4C Agenda, 2022-2030) The EFI Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Policy Support brings together Heads of Ministries from EU countries to shape policies to which the SIMRA Coordinator is a contributor

(b) **Advisory committees** involving SIMRA & Sherpa partners *e.g.,* UK ECFS; EFI SAB; IUFRO Unit: SI & entrepreneurship

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EU Green Deal 10 Priorities Include:

- **Climate neutrality** by 2050/clean, affordable & secure **energy**
- Greening the **Common Agricultural Policy** / 'Farm to Fork'
- Preserving & protecting **biodiversity** / Biodiversity 2030
- Mainstreaming SUST in all EU policies / **Just transition**

Each aim of the Green Deal with an example of SI from SIMRA:

SOCIAL INNOVATION

A catalyst for the European Green Deal

SIMRA brochures & other resources are at
http://www.simra-h2020.eu/index.php/resources/

What is Underpinning Social Innovation?

- **Creativity & Motivation**: lie at the heart

- **Niche Development**: well-designed policy & supportive governance can encourage creation of exploratory niches for trials & pilots and upscaling best solutions to promote transitions

- **Multi-level Policy interventions:** (i.e. 'innovation ecosystems') can strengthen SIs

- **Strong Social & Human Capital**: enhances the emergence, development & spread of SI

- New/emerging **opportunities & business models**

- **Co-learning:** is core to SI, e.g. with local actors sharing experiences within & between places and at national & international levels, and with scientists, policy actors & businesses

- It empowers actors, fosters collaborations & helps develop & strengthen partnerships

University of Padova

Social Innovation in Rural Areas

Explore applications of social innovation in rural areas and discover best practices for managing social innovation projects.

📅 **Starts 23 Mar 2020**

Go to course

innovation to have a significant impact has to start from the people that live in the community especially if they are youth

- **Different countries are at different stages in developing support structures for SI**

- **Take actions and find solutions in countries where the policy architecture for SI is least developed and civil society's capacity is weaker by supporting training visits and exchanges to best practice exemplars**

- **Education & knowledge sharing is seen as a way forward.**

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Peer-to-peer learning on social innovation

Successful in agriculture ...

PLAID
PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING:
ACCESSING INNOVATION
THROUGH DEMONSTRATION

Mountain Partnership
Partenariat de la Montagne
Alianza para las Montañas

Multi-Actor Platforms

H2020 ...
SIMRA
SHERPA
DESIRA
...

Involve "multipliers" - people who can bring in practical knowledge and help disseminate the results in the long term

Social innovation is a means to advance sustainability, but it is important to:

❑ Design the ways of how to promote the **initiation** & **development** of SI

❑ Strengthen local **governance & support actors** for SI to **sustain & spread**

❑ Give case & context specific considerations to **enablers & barriers**

Practical Challenges:

- The way through? Dependence on volunteers. Their "fatigue"

- SI forest-dependent communities could be "victims of their success"

- Initial & matching funding

- Adequate scale & size and how to foster SI & scale it up & out

- New relationships between citizens, communities, public-private bodies...

To steer the Green Recovery, the following research questions merit attention:

- How does SI fit into systems approaches of developing a **bio-economy**

- How to **empower** SI actors to develop solutions to **climate/environmental** challenges?

- What SI **models are most effective** for improving **mental health** & **human well-being**?

- What are the **perceptions & motivations** of SI actors while initiating & sustaining SI?

A social initiative in the Carpathian Mountains, Ukraine

Developing Community Hydropower in Braemar, Scotland

Thank you for attention
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