

Territorial Social Innovation: Clarification of the concept.

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Executive Summary

- This document represents the first of three activities carried out by this project. As a response to the general lack of clarity about what exactly social innovation (SI) is, we aim to establish a clear definition, its relevance to service provision in rural and sparsely populated areas, and how it has adapted to the Nordic and Scottish policy and governance contexts. This establishes a firm foundation for subsequent activities; (ii) a review of governance and policy contexts, and the way they affect SI, and (iii) the careful analysis of a collection of examples of SI, focusing particularly on those which address service delivery and other challenges caused by demographic trends. It is intended that each of these will contribute to an online resource to support those interested in promoting SI in rural contexts in the Nordic countries.
- Although its roots can be traced back into the early 20th century, the concept and practice of SI crystallised towards the end of the first decade of the current century, as part of the rise of the social economy. It was widely perceived as a key response to the “perfect storm” created by economic recession/austerity, combined with longer term demographic and social trends, which highlighted the inadequacy of service delivery models developed over the past fifty years, and latterly under New Public Management principles.
- There are a number of definitions of SI. The one we prefer was first set out in a report by the Young Foundation in 2010. In its short form it states that “*Social innovations are innovations that are social in both their ends and their means.*” This emphasises the recursive nature of SI. It can only be initiated as a social process, and therefore requires some level of community spirit and cohesion (i.e. social capital). However in the process of achieving its aims it also builds, or strengthens the capacity of the community to respond to future challenges. As such it has both *direct* and *indirect* benefits to the community. This is what makes it so attractive as a policy tool.
- Social innovation depends on strong local social networks, and some writers have argued that it is therefore more likely in urban environments, which present more opportunities for interaction. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that innovative ideas often come from contacts with the wider world. A number of writers have pointed out that SI is a key driver of place-based development within rural communities, drawing on, and in turn strengthening, both local and wider social networks. Since the capacity to initiate SI varies between rural areas, SI can have the effect of increasing inequalities, as those which benefit “get ahead” and leave others behind. This indicates a need for intervention to support communities in which SI processes do not take place spontaneously.
- There are two schools of thought regarding the role of the public sector in SI. Some writers see SI as a response to the failure of public policies – in other words the two are substitutes for each other. Others see SI as hybrid phenomena, drawing different resources from public, private and third sectors. We argue that attitudes to public sector involvement are likely to be conditioned both by path dependence within different welfare regime contexts, and by different forms of local governance (centralised v localised). In the Nordic context, closer relationships between municipalities and the local communities they serve, may mean that SIs are more often initiated

by public sector actors, and that SIs are more likely to benefit from stronger public sector involvement.

- Social innovation overlaps with social enterprise, but it is not helpful to treat the two as synonymous. Social enterprise is a business model, SI is a process which may, or may not, lead to the formation of a social enterprise.
 - Finally, we consider the broad principles for policy which may be derived from the above clarification of the concept. Here it is important to keep in mind this project's focus upon SI, as the process through which new ways of responding to demographic challenges are generated, (rather than on the requirements for successfully maintaining social enterprises, or other kinds of solutions.) Its also worth reiterating the fact that rural areas vary in their capacity for SI, and therefore the objective should be, at least in part, to better understand, and nurture, the preconditions for SI in areas which seem less well adapted to it. Three approaches are apparent in the literature: (i) Facilitation of the process through which local social networks develop viable alternative solutions to the issues they face. (ii) Transfer of good practice between rural areas which face similar issues but which are geographically remote from each other. (iii) A general emphasis upon "reconnection" of remote rural communities with external sources of ideas, support, and funding. These are all activities which are already very much part of the EU policy concept of Community Lead Local Development (CLLD) and Leader.
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Introduction

This document has been produced as part of a project for the Nordic Council Working Group on [Demography and Welfare](#). The goal of this project is to investigate how the phenomenon of Social Innovation can form part of the response to the pressures and challenges facing rural and remote regions, and their municipalities, as a result of continuing rural-urban migration, which not only accentuates sparsity, but depletes the population of the young, well-educated and economically active, and distorts the gender balance. Such depletion also has an effect upon the capacity of rural communities to survive longer term, due to the effects upon rates of natural increase. These demographic trends, when combined with the need for increased efficiency in the use of municipality and other public resources, constitute something like a “perfect storm” in terms of maintaining and improving service provision and community vitality. Shifts in the distribution and composition of the population of rural and remote areas expose new demands from particular population segments (the elderly, and others in need of various forms of care). They also highlight the need to find or create local opportunities for fulfilling and rewarding economic activity in order to provide disincentives for out-migration.

This document represents one of three core activities of the project. It is intended to lay a firm conceptual foundation for the other two, which are a review of the governance and policy contexts of social innovation in the Nordic Countries and Scotland, and the presentation of a set of carefully analysed social innovation biographies, which illustrate best practice, challenges and opportunities. In this review of literature our objective is not to demonstrate academic credentials, or to derive intellectual stimulation, but to try to set out a clear and simple statement of what social innovation is, how it works in rural, sparsely populated environments, and how it is affected by its governance/welfare policy environment. Since the term “social innovation” is so widely used, and misused, such clarity is an essential first step, and also supplies a conceptual framework, or intervention logic, within which coherent and rational policy recommendations may be developed.

Where did Social Innovation come from?

Several writers argue that the SI concept has a long history – tracing its origins back to the work of Joseph Schumpeter in the 1930s (Mulgan and Pulford 2010, Neumeier 2012, Bosworth et al 2015a). Others (Mulgan and Pulford 2010 p20) point out that the phenomenon existed long before the term was used to describe it. In the seventy years after Schumpeter wrote references to social innovation are scarce, and the concept did not crystallize into its current form until well into the first decade of the current century. Harris and Albury (2009 p17, see also Bock 2016 p8) note the association of this rapid increase in interest with the financial crisis, and suggest that SI gained popularity as the shortcomings of the New Public Management, with its emphasis on market-orientated approaches to service provision, became increasingly evident. It also coincided with the increasing consensus about a number of big social challenges (global warming, demographic ageing etc). At the same time the broader concept of the “social economy” (Harris and Albury 2009 p18, BEPA 2011 p29) was gaining widespread acceptance. The social economy encompasses SI, but also many other phenomena which although associated with economic activity are not solely motivated by profit, competition, and market forces; such as social enterprise, the third sector, corporate responsibility and so on.

It is easy to understand why, in the process of being grasped as a panacea for a range of problems during the dark days of the recession, social innovation became a rather flexible and ambiguous buzzword.

Definitions of Social Innovation

Social innovation is a “contested concept” (Bock 2016 p2). The literature offers many definitions, some rather vague and inclusive, others “tighter” and more specific. According to Bosworth et al (2015b) “The burgeoning literature on social innovation is replete with references to the need for a sound conceptual or methodological framework, greater clarity and more theoretical and empirical work.” Bock (2012 p61) suggests that different meanings are often intentionally “jumbled” together because “fuzziness contributes to discursive power”. The purpose of this document is to make clear how we are using the term in our project, and to explore some of the theoretical implications, using recent academic literature as the source.

Bock (2012) takes a broad perspective, suggesting that the term social innovation is used in the following three ways:

- To highlight the fact that any kind of innovation (a change in technology, product or administrative practice) takes place within a social context – in her words (Ibid p58), they are “socially, culturally and territorially embedded”.
- To draw attention to the fact that not all innovations are “socially responsible”.
- To describe a change in “social relations, people’s behaviour, and norms and values...social innovation needs innovative governance...It should invest in civil society and community development and support collective action, self-governance and political empowerment.” (Ibid p8).

Neumeier (2012 p49), after reviewing the literature, observes that the term SI “can refer to the effort, method, result or change initiated by collaborative actions”, and (p54-55) distils the following common characteristics of SI concepts (for a similar list see Bock 2016 p10-11):

- They are generated by a social process, rather than invention by an individual.
- They are usually triggered by a societal need.
- They respond to immediate needs rather than a distant goal (i.e. they are “non-teliological”).
- The persons involved in the process perceive them to be new (within their context).
- They change attitudes, behaviours and perceptions.
- Their practical implementation appears, to those involved, to be superior to existing methods.
- They are essentially about creating social assets, rather than material outcomes.

Based on this Neumeier (2012 p65) comes up with the following definition: “social innovations can be generally understood as a change in the attitudes, behaviour or perceptions of a group of people

joined in a network of aligned interests that, in relation to the group's horizon of experiences, leads to new and improved ways of collaborative action in the group and beyond."

This more focused definition, equates to Bock's third usage. This has become the generally accepted meaning in the European policy discourse, and it is at the heart of the definition which is most frequently quoted: This is sometimes attributed to a Bureau of European Policy Advisors (BEPA 2011 p33), or to Murray et al (2010 p3), though both of these seem to have been quoting an earlier report by the Young Foundation (Mulgan and Pulford 2010 p17-18). The concise version is

"Social innovations are innovations that are social in both their ends and their means."

This is followed by a more explanatory version (Ibid):

"...new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs (more effectively than alternatives) and create new social relationships or collaborations. In other words they are innovations that are not only good for society but also enhance society's capacity to act."

Mulgan and Pulford (2010) p16 point out that "Social innovation describes the processes of invention, diffusion and adoption of new services or organisational models,... It also describes the outcome – the service or model being developed." Thus SI has both a *process* dimension, and an *output* dimension. With regard to the former it is important that the social process is inclusive and collaborative rather than competitive (BEPA 2011 p35). Social Innovations are often generated within distributed social networks, rather than centralised structures (Murray et al 2010 p5). With regard to the output dimension:

- Outputs are not just measurable in quantitative terms (costs saved, increased efficiency) but are also qualitative (well-being, solidarity etc) (Ibid p34).
- SIs are often "innovations that respond to social demands that are traditionally not addressed by the market or existing institutions and are directed towards vulnerable groups in society." (Ibid p37)
- They tend to address "Societal challenges in which the boundary between 'social' and 'economic' blurs, and which are directed towards society as a whole and involve end users." (Ibid p42)
- They can have wider impact upon society, creating "a more participative arena where empowerment and learning are both sources and outcomes of well-being" (Ibid p40)

An ongoing EU Framework 7 project, SIMPACT¹, defines SI as "novel combinations of ideas and distinct forms of collaboration that transcend established institutional contexts, with the effect of empowering and (re)engaging vulnerable groups, either in the process of the innovation or as a result of it" (Terstriep et al 2015 p10). This strongly underlines non-materiality of the innovation, and therefore views the outcome in terms of the inclusion of vulnerable groups, rather than more tangible impacts, such as the re-invention of service delivery arrangements.

Moulaert (2009 p19-21) emphasises the fact that since their novelty is subjective and defined by contextual norms, social innovations can only be identified and understood through an understanding of their territorial and cultural environments, together with the role of path dependency.

¹ Boosting the impact of social innovation in Europe through Economic Underpinnings.

In this project we feel that the Mulgan and Pulford definition (quoted above) is the clearest and most useful as a basis for exploring the role of SI in generating new responses to the challenges presented by demographic change in rural and sparsely populated areas. This is because it highlights the role played by social capital, and community cohesion, as both the sources and the beneficiaries of the SI process. This is the key aspect picked up by a number of writers who have made the link between SI and “bottom up” rural development, or to be more precise “neo-endogenous” processes, thus relating it to a substantial literature on practical policy making.

Social Innovation and Territorial Development

In this section we begin to shift our view from SI in general, and to focus upon research which explicitly connects the nature of the process with its geographical environment, both locally and further afield. In other words we begin to concentrate upon “Territorial Social Innovation” (TSI).

Although every SI operates within ethics and codes of practice which are constructed within the local community and territorial context (Moulaert 2009 p7), both local territorial embeddedness and wider networks are important success factors for SI: “social innovation can never be analysed as belonging only to ‘its’ place, the place where it was generated, but as occurring within a complex web of spatial interconnections”. Moulaert (Ibid p16-17) goes on to describe the role of SI in what he terms Integrated Area Development, which is, in essence, a “bottom-up” (endogenous) community development process. Such processes are socially innovative both because they depend upon the creation of new social relationships, institutions and forms of governance, and because they address inequality and social exclusion (ibid p17-18). He explains (p16) that such phenomena are most often associated with urban areas in the developed world, due to the “high tangibility of decline and restructuring” in densely populated contexts, but also the fact that “spatial density works as a catalyst for revealing alternatives...proximity to institutional and economic arenas underscores the ambiguity of these neighbourhoods: they are both hearths of doom...and ambits of hope...and often become loci of new types of social relations and drivers of alternative agendas.” Not all territorial contexts are capable of nurturing SI. Those which are not Moulaert describes as “disintegrating”.

Notwithstanding Moulaert’s arguments about SI being more likely in urban contexts a number of writers have drawn attention to the role which it seems to play in rural development processes, especially in what has in recent years become known as “neo-endogenous” growth. In very broad terms this follows the rejection of top-down or “exogenous” policies common at the end of the last century, and the purely locally-based “endogenous” approaches which followed. Neo-endogenous development requires a fine balance between local initiative and resources on the one hand, and appropriate inputs of capital, expertise and sources of innovation, which may best be accessed by networks stretching out into the wider world (Ray 2006, Bosworth 2012, Bosworth et al 2015a, 2015b, Bock 2016). Thus according to Bosworth et al (2015a p3); “Neo-endogenous development is based on local resources and local participation but is also characterised by dynamic interactions between local areas and their wider environments.”

One of the first to see this connection was Neumeier (2012), who affirmed (p65) that “...social innovation seems to be one of the key requirements of successful rural development,... the importance of social innovations for the success or failure of sustainable neo-endogenous rural development should not be underestimated...”

More recently Bock (2016) has made the connections between SI, neo-endogenous approaches, and the changing role of proximity in rural development, and has coined the term “nexogenous growth” to describe the processes of change which she observes. She points out that SI encompasses key characteristics of a number of earlier approaches to rural development (exogenous, endogenous, and neo-endogenous) and also has much in common with relational place making approaches (ibid p4). What is distinctive about SI is “the explicit importance attached to social inclusion and the expected beneficial effect of social innovation for society as a whole...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.” (Ibid p4-5)

Bock argues that “...collaboration across space is the sine qua non of development in the current context...” (2016 p2). This is the foundation of the style of development which she describes as “nexogenous growth”. In this context the role which social innovation plays “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.... 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.” (Ibid p18).

Just as Moulaert observed that not all urban localities/communities have the preconditions for social innovation, Bock argues that many marginal areas have reduced capacity due to sparsity, exacerbated by out-migration which “results in the loss of the most entrepreneurial people” (p15), and by cost savings in the public sector which lead to centralisation of service provision. She concludes that a reliance on social innovation as a “self-help” strategy driven by local social capital is likely to result in increased spatial inequalities; areas which are able to respond will leave behind those which lack the pre-conditions. “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.” (Ibid p17). For Bock the solution for such “disintegrating” areas is “reconnection”, rather than “self-help”. Regional and national institutions and agencies have a responsibility to facilitate this: “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.” (Ibid p 16). What, in practice, a policy of “reconnection” looks like, and what specific measures are likely to be most effective in supporting nexogenous growth processes is not entirely clear.

The Role of the Public Sector

In this section we address an issue which is extremely important in the Nordic context; the role of the public sector in social innovation. As the following quotations show the early literature generally took the view that SI did not privilege the third sector – it could just as easily involve public or private sector actors.

“...many innovations take shape within organisations – public agencies, social enterprises, mutuals, co-ops, charities, companies as well as loose associations.” Murray et al 2010 p6

“Social innovation can take place inside or outside public services. It can be developed by the public, private or third sectors, or users and communities — but equally, some innovation

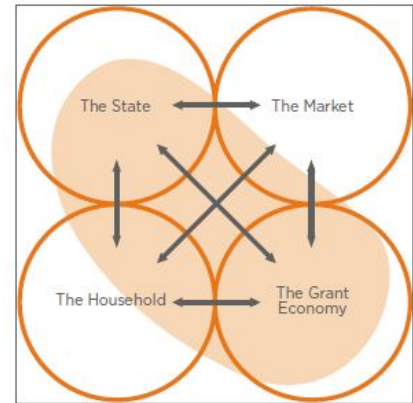
developed by these sectors does not qualify as social innovation because it does not directly address major social challenges.” (BEPA 2011 p37)

“social innovation does not have fixed boundaries; it cuts across all sectors (the public sector, private sector, third sector and household)” Mulgan and Pulford (2010) p14.

“Social innovation can take place inside or outside of public services. It can be developed by the public, private or third sectors, or users and communities...” Harris and Albury 2009 p16

This view was associated with the concept of the social economy. Murray et al (2010 p141) explained:

“This social economy is the source of social innovation. However, while it already plays the key role in developing new models and services to meet social needs, it could play an even greater role.”... “The social economy is a hybrid. It cuts across the four sub-economies: the market, the state, the grant economy, and the household.... If the social economy is a hybrid, so are the firms, states, charities and households that operate within it. They have a base in one of the four sub-economies, but also operate across its boundaries.” Ibid p143



Source: The Young Foundation

Other writers argue that the increasing popularity of SI is associated with a reduced role for the public sector. Thus Harris and Albury (2009 p17) argue that “The long emergence of social innovation to its current prominence represents a growing recognition of the inherent limits of the state, the market and of voluntarism as they are traditionally conceived.” Bock (2016 p8) asks “Is social innovation, then, nothing other than the withdrawal of the state and shifting of responsibilities to the individual and the market? It seems that, for her, the answer is yes: “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... (Bock 2016 p10-11) ... and again “Many (SI initiatives) reflect the wish to regain power and a say over their community and to operate at a distance from the government.” (Bock 2016 p11)

Although we currently have no evidence to support this observation, it may be that such a view is not transferable between different local governance and welfare regime contexts. It is possible that such a disconnect between the (local level) public sector and civil society is more likely where the structure of governance has become more centralised, and where the effects of austerity have been strongly felt at the local level. It seems possible that where the relationship between the local community and the local administration continues to be characterised by high levels of trust, it is more likely that the public sector will be involved in, or indeed exercise leadership, in networks which carry out SI. Our review of national contexts for SI suggests that this may well be the case in the Nordic countries.

Social Innovation and Social Enterprise

SI is often confused with social entrepreneurship/enterprise (Mulgan and Pulford 2009 p15-16). This is not too surprising since there is some overlap between them. Perhaps the easiest way to distinguish them is to recognise that social enterprise is a business model, (associated with the

activity of social entrepreneurship), whilst SI is a process which may (or may not) lead to the formation of a social enterprise.

Social enterprises are very much part of the social economy. They are run on commercial lines, but with goals which relate to the delivery of social value rather than profit. Social innovations, as explained above, are distinguished by the fact that they are created by social interactions, and they in turn create new social networks, stronger social capital, and community capacity. This may, or may not, be manifest in the form of a new business, or social enterprise.

Social enterprises may well be part of the solution to the challenges associated with demographic change. They are also more tangible and therefore easier to study than SI. However in this project we are interested in social enterprises only if they are associated with an SI.

Can the preconditions for Territorial Social Innovation be nurtured by Policy?

Finally, we consider the broad principles for policy which may be derived from the above clarification of the concept. Here it is important to keep in mind this project's focus upon SI, as the process through which new ways of responding to demographic challenges are generated, (rather than on the requirements for successfully maintaining social enterprises, or other kinds of solutions.)

Most of the early reviews of SI (Mulgan and Pulford 2010, Harris and Albury 2009, Murray et al 2010) devote a substantial number of pages to discussing ways in which national policy can create favourable conditions for, and support SI across the full range of policy areas. The Nordic Council of Ministers recently published an extensive report on "Social entrepreneurship and social innovation: Initiatives to promote social entrepreneurship and social innovation in the Nordic countries". Many of their recommendations are apposite to TSI too.

Its worth reiterating the fact that rural areas vary in their capacity for SI, and therefore the policy objective should be, at least in part, to better understand, and nurture, the preconditions for SI in areas which seem less well adapted to it. The conceptual framework presented above suggests some broad guidelines as to how local policies, by municipalities, and other local or regional actors might create conditions in which SI may be nurtured. Thus "The state should promote capacity building among citizens and the local government to improve their capacity to mobilise the local community..." Bock 2016 p16.

Three approaches are apparent in the literature:

(i) The first is facilitation of the process through which local social networks develop viable alternative solutions to the issues they face. The literature is replete with advice and examples on how to stimulate a local dialogue in order to generate the ideas and the networks which may become the basis for SI (see for example the three references cited at the beginning of this section. There is also some SI analysis relating specifically to LEADER and the rural context (Bosworth 2015a). Various techniques involving public consultations, workshops etc are commonly used. Strengthening local networks and "bonding capital" is extremely important, though, as we shall see, not enough on its own.

(ii) A second approach is the transfer of good practice between rural areas which face similar issues but which are geographically remote from each other. According to Bock (2016 p17) "social

innovation does not need to begin locally, and it may also include the uptake of novel solutions developed elsewhere". In this approach the focus is upon making available information about successful SI, developed in remote or sparsely populated areas, which have the potential to be adapted and implemented in other similar areas. Here again the EU Leader programme has a strong track record², along with other actors which create national and international fora for exchange of good practice, such as the rural parliament movement³, or the PREPARE network⁴. Of course this project aims to make a contribution to exchange of good practice, which will differ from most of the examples already available in focusing particularly on understanding the process and characteristics of the SI involved.

(iii) Finally there is a need for "reconnection" of remote rural communities with external sources of ideas, support, and funding. Bock asks (2016 p16): "Can we really expect social innovation to step in where the resource base for regeneration is seriously under pressure? Based on 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." Bock is insistent that SI should not be viewed simply as a call to local communities to take responsibility, and rely solely on their own resources. It is also essential that "a higher level of development politics" is supportive. Global forces are ultimately responsible for the social and demographic trends affecting marginal rural areas and "the problems they generate are too big to be locally solved" (Ibid p16) It is also necessary that policy should enhance "access to complementary external resources... embedding local development in wider collaborative relations." (Ibid) Provision of physical communications infrastructure (such as high speed broadband) is necessary, but not sufficient. The exogenous support or "bridging capital", which local actors in rural TSI require, suggests a need for carefully designed support strategies from regional and national levels of governance.

² http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/gpdb_en.htm

³ <http://europeanruralparliament.com/>

⁴ <http://www.preparenetwork.org/>

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