Social Innovation in Cultural Landscape Conservation

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Abstract Since about twenty years, the concept of social innovation has gained more attention in research and politics. Nowadays, social innovative solutions are searched for many social challenges of our present and future. We introduce here the concept of social innovation. Then, we reflect on the potential of connecting social innovation research with the concept of cultural landscapes. Combining research on social innovation with the preservation of cultural heritage and cultural landscapes is also an approach that highlights the importance of transdisciplinary research in solving the complex problems of our time.

Keywords Social innovation, cultural landscape, cultural heritage.

The concept of social innovation

The concept of social innovation has attained increasing interest and influence in research and politics over the past two decades. Social innovative solutions are more and more understood as important approaches in dealing with change and challenges in the 21st century. A standard definition widely used by EU agencies is the BEPA definition:

> "Social innovations [are] new ideas (products, services, and 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" (Bureau of European Policy Advisers 2011; compare also to European Commission 2013; The Young Foundation 2012).

As in all innovation, novelty is underscored by the definition. Typically, this is meant in the frames of time and geographic contexts. Even if the innovation is already implemented somewhere else an adaption of a new approach may still be called innovative, as long as it is new to the area. More important is the aspect, that a social innovation needs to address a problem or challenge previously unaddressed in the specific context. Fresh water supply in households in Western Europe is very common (but could

be called a social innovation of the 19th century as Schimpf and Ziegler (2019) show). New ways of providing clean potable water can still be a social innovation if observed in one of the least developed countries.

However, the definition does not stop here. Not only should a problem be solved but the very fabric of society itself is modified. What does this mean? At least new connections between actors are established, networks of cooperation and maybe trust are woven. More demanding definitions expect social innovation to improve the situation of marginalized groups or a new, more equal distribution of power (Nicholls and Ziegler 2019; Terstriep et al. 2015).

As Wolfgang Zapf has shown, social innovations have long been recognized (see Zapf 1989). But in the last roughly two decades systematic research on social innovation has gained momentum (Cajaiba-Santana 2014; Moulaert et al. 2013; Pol and Ville 2009; Rao-Nicholson, Vorley, and Khan 2017; van der Have and Rubalcaba 2016; van Wijk et al. 2019). The European Commission played a vital role in this process by funding research and other projects in structural funds (INTERREG, AMIF, EAsI, ESF).

Nevertheless, social innovation research is still marked by definitional heterogeneity. Some researchers promote the normative dimension of social innovation and define social innovation as improved ways of dealing with pressing social needs or addressing "wicked" social problems (Churchman 1967 as outlined in Krlev, Anheier, & Mildenberger, 2018). But by others, social innovation is used to describe social change or transformed social practice (Franz, Hochgerner, and Howaldt 2015; Howaldt and Schwarz 2010).

On the side of empirical work, there is a remarkable focus on single organizations and case study approaches. Those tend to neglect broader social innovation developments. The importance of the phenomenon for a positive reaction to societal challenges makes it advisable to build bridges between case studies of individual organizations or action fields in wider regional contexts.

Even while the research field is still characterized by multiple conceptual approaches, two main schools of thought can be distinguished. The first approach highlights the positive impacts social innovations have in society. Social innovations are consequently seen as concrete solutions to social problems. For example, neurodiversity is embraced and new organizations are founded mediating between potential employers and individuals with certain traits, e.g., Asperger Autism. Special people get decent jobs and earn their own money. In this approach, the hiring company has to accept changes to accommodate the special needs. Employees must be trained to better understand the new colleague. Thus, not only one person's problem is ameliorated. At the same time there is a change in the environment. Other people learn to accept and even embrace neurodiversity (Cameron and Townend 2021). However, such empowerment, social cohesion, and change of social relationships are seen as further results. The second approach focusses mainly on changes in social practices, organizations, and social relations. Social innovations, so the conviction here, cannot be analyzed in the same way as products or services or business innovations. Rather origin and implementation of social innovations have to be researched in their

complex social context with the focus on the reconfiguration of social practices and dissemination. Those two schools of thought exist not exclusively. Many researchers (and practitioners of social innovation) point out that social innovations themselves generally show both aspects. They see social innovation as a concrete solution (new product, service, or infrastructure) and at the same time as a transformative component (change in social relation, new partnerships, building of social capital) (Krlev, Anheier, and Mildenberger 2019, 19).

Concerning social innovation research, Van der Have and Rubalcaba identify four research fields and corresponding research approaches: social psychology, creativity research, research on societal and social challenges, and research on municipal and regional development. In our research we use ideas from all fields but when it comes to cultural landscapes, we mainly pick up themes of the latter. So far, research on social innovation for municipal and regional development, thus with regard to landscape—or more abstractly—to spatiality, has mainly focused on the urban context, stressing the importance of social innovations for community building, social change, and the regeneration and revitalization of urban areas. Urban regeneration relies on social innovations as a means to resocialize urban spaces, foster social change, and enhance the meaning of community, while transforming social relationships within urban spaces to face social demands and satisfy needs. For an urban environment, it was suggested that social innovations emerge from complex social processes and constellations of actors, including local government, civic society, and organizations. Evidence from the WILCO project ("Welfare innovations at the local level in favor of cohesion") underlines the impact of local contexts which are not a mere local representation of national regimes. Cattacin and Zimmer argue that social innovations constitute a political process whose outcome depends on environmental factors such as coalition building as well as specific constellations of actors and are as such a reflection of city-specific (welfare) cultures. The city-specific settings determine the conditions for the emergence and development of local social innovations with the city governing elites, creating both opportunity structures and constraints. (Cattacin and Zimmer 2016). As Christmann points out, conflicts and the search for consensus are natural in these complex social processes (Christmann 2020).

While social innovations are increasingly discussed and analyzed in an urban context, there has been relatively little theoretical discussion on social innovations in rural areas. Consequently, there is a lack of empirical studies. Nevertheless, the European Commission tried to stimulate research by giving out calls for rural development and improvement of living conditions in the countryside. Thus, we see a series of EU-funded projects. RURACTION ("Social Entrepreneurship in Structurally Weak Rural Regions: Analysing Innovative Troubleshooters in Action") points to rural regions as a fertile ground for social innovation and stresses the importance of exchange, intensive networking, and governance processes for innovation. The SIMRA project ("Social Innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas") shows that social innovation is stimulated by a constellation of key actors (social entrepreneurs), support of political and governance structures, and various intermediaries. Four main lessons

are drawn from the SIMRA project: the keys for successfully facing challenges are (1) support of local actors at the early stage of social innovation processes, (2) enabling local actors to flexibly adjust methods and tools by acknowledging the non-linearity of the social innovation process, (3) promptly identifying management failures, and (4) recognizing the importance of strategic thinking concerning financial resources and required know-how (Govigli et al. 2020).

In addition to cooperation structures and elite consensus, prevailing research on social innovation in rural areas points to the importance of engaging local communities in the process, as civil society appears to be more capable of initiating social innovation than the public or private sectors. This suggests that the most effective outcomes arise when local communities are empowered to make decisions within a supportive, but not over-bureaucratic framework. Hence, a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches is suggested for successful implementation of social innovation in rural areas. Research on territorial development through social innovation clearly shows that territorial features affect an innovation as such, as well as the impact of social innovation initiatives—both in cities and rural areas. Territorial contexts and social innovation activities can therefore not be investigated separately.

We see, however, the focus of social innovation for spatial development has shifted more and more from urban to rural areas, especially those being considered marginalized regions for different reasons (e.g., rural exodus, brain drain, ageing population, disappearing of infrastructure and services, etc.).

Consequently, issues related to rural development have become the focus of research projects in the last years. In particular, the following aspects of socioeconomic interactions in rural areas have been examined: promoting interaction between rural, suburban, and urban spaces (ROBUST ("Rural-Urban Outlooks: Unlocking Synergies")); the application of innovative initiatives developed by social entrepreneurs to shape favorable social change and foster social innovation (RURACTION and RurInno ("Social Innovations in Structurally Weak Rural Regions")); addressing the weak infrastructure and demographic crisis in agriculture and forestry, and stimulating the development of these sectors (SIMRA). Heritage preservation and its use to stimulate social innovation in rural areas have been studied primarily by the RURITAGE ("Heritage for Rural Regeneration") and the rurALLURE ("Promotion of rural museums and heritage sites in the vicinity of European pilgrimage routes") projects.[1]

In the paradigm proposed by RURITAGE, the key role in the regeneration of rural areas was given to cultural and natural heritage. Rural economic, social, and environmental development was supposed to be carried out through a system of innovative areas (SIA) consisting of six points: pilgrimages; sustainable local food production;

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[1]   Cultural heritage in other spatial contexts has been studied in the PERICLES (PrEseRvIng and sustainably governing Cultural heritage and Landscapes in European coastal and maritime regions (https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/770504)) and ROCK (Regeneration and Optimisation of Cultural heritage in creative and Knowledge cities (https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/730280/reporting)).

migration; art and festivals; resilience; and integrated landscape management. The knowledge about these areas, gathered in the locations identified by the project participants as role models, was applied, adapted, or reproduced in six rural areas of Europe named by the replicators. The same approach was implemented within the IN SITU project ("Place-based innovation of cultural and creative industries in non-urban areas") that considered cultural and creative initiatives in non-urban areas of Europe as a driver of economic and social transformation. For this purpose, centers for practical implementation of innovative approaches were established in six European countries. RurALLURE pays particular attention to increasing the flow of tourists and pilgrims to the countryside by creating and promoting in the province a network of cultural institutions (e.g., museums) in the vicinity of the main European pilgrimage routes as a crucial element of social innovation. An essential role in this process was given to a special IT platform, which should make it easier for tourists to find information about sites of interest to them in the countryside and organize a trip there.

Mention should also be made of ongoing projects united under a common topic called "Innovative approaches to urban and regional development through cultural tourism," whose main objectives are to develop new approaches and methods to support European cultural tourism (IMPACTOUR), to explore opportunities to promote sustainable social, cultural, and economic development (INCULTUM), to focus on nature, communities, and cultural diversity (Be.CULTOUR), and to formulate strategies for new forms of cultural tourism (SPOT, SmartCulTour) with the help of new technologies (TExTOUR). Along with the need to develop tourism and popularize cultural heritage sites, one of the most acute and urgent problems in rural and neglected areas of Europe is the threat of the disappearance of traditional craft techniques and knowledge of producing and restoring artifacts. To solve this problem, it has been proposed to combine traditional crafts with advanced digital technology through innovative business models (HEPHAESTUS), to create effective and high-tech networks for the dissemination of traditional crafts knowledge (Tracks4Crafts), and to establish a process of craft education using telecommunications, which is especially relevant for remote areas (Craeft).

These European activities are just examples for a newer trend. Intangible heritage, like traditions or knowledge, and environmental heritage connected to human-nature interactions in rural and remote areas, are promising fields for research. They combine a constellation of both theoretical and practical issues that can be addressed from the perspective of a variety of methodological approaches and research disciplines, which, in turn, open up a wide range of possibilities for the application of data-driven knowledge to revitalize and develop social environment and economic relations in rural and remote areas.

Results of social innovation projects in rural areas show that social innovation is stimulated by a constellation of key actors (social entrepreneurs), the support of political and governance structures, and various intermediaries. Four important lessons can be drawn:

1. Stimulating participation by supporting local actors in the early stages of social innovation processes, involving local communities in the process, as civil society seems to be more capable of initiating social innovation than the public or private sector.
2. Empowering local actors to adapt methods and tools by recognizing the non-linearity of the social innovation process. The most effective results seem to occur when local communities are empowered to make decisions within a supportive but not overly bureaucratic framework. A combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches is suggested.
3. Monitoring the process and promptly identifying and addressing management failures.
4. Strategic thinking in terms of financial resources and required know-how.

Cultural heritage/cultural landscapes

Our work builds on the endeavors sketched out above. Especially, we are interested in three strands: social innovation, rural areas, and cultural heritage/cultural landscapes.

Sustainable valorization of cultural landscapes while at the same time preserving their tangible and intangible cultural heritage is a complex scientific and social challenge. Especially in a non-urban milieu, the gap between scientific concepts and the social, political, economic, and ideological realities that determine the lives of local actors is clearly noticeable.

Cultural landscape as a special part of cultural heritage uniquely combines culture and nature and thus material and immaterial 'cultural goods' with their spatial context. Landscape, in this context, refers to the produced, lived, and represented space, constructed out of the conflicts, compromises, and relationships established for a limited time between competing and cooperating social actors (Mitchell 1996, 30). Especially, the close interaction of the natural and cultivated environments with the material and cultural reproduction of the communities inhabiting these spaces to us seems to necessitate the usage of concepts from social innovation.

Cultural landscape and social innovation

However, the research presented so far is mostly not systematically focused on the aspect of cultural landscapes as a resource for social innovation and revitalization. Often, traditions are utilized in a rather arbitrary fashion as a quarry for new business ideas or they serve as a backup and common ground for community building in a rather vague way.

Therefore, 'cultural landscape' has not been considered so far as a resource of social innovation—neither in rural nor in urban areas. The results from social innovation

research as well as from cultural studies have shown however that social innovation and cultural heritage can join in a fruitful relationship. The concept of landscape opens new possibilities. By also including the concept of social innovation, the main focus is not just landscape management but also dealing with social questions and challenges. As innovation is a complex process, in the end not only a functional solution has been developed but the social fabric itself, the character of a society has changed. In the best case, the results are stronger social ties, a more equal distribution of power, and improved capabilities of communities and individuals. The social and political empowerment is characteristic for social innovative approaches and solutions in tackling social challenges and improving the living conditions of communities.

Social innovations have therefore the potential to strengthen local communities as a whole but also marginalized groups within these communities by empowerment and changed power relations. It has been suggested, for example, that social innovations can improve the social inclusion of women and other groups and contribute to a sense of pride, belonging, and usefulness. This in turn would increase the acceptance for the conservation of cultural heritage.

From this perspective, the question is therefore how to transform the assets of regions into a resource for local people, emphasizing the importance of empowering and engaging local communities in the conservation and management of cultural landscapes through social innovation processes.

Conclusion

The interplay of cultural landscape concepts and social innovation methodologies is a promising concept to stimulate sustainable economic growth. The goal is to develop economic opportunities that use existing natural and cultural resources without destroying them while at the same time strengthening social ties and building communities. This is not only a concept. Quite a few of the contributions in this volume show the feasibility of the concept. The interplay of all academic disciplines is needed together with actors from the community to establish new solutions. Sometimes they may be small-scale and working in a single village or town, sometimes they will be regional and concern bigger political units. Depending on the scale and the political, legal, geographical, and historical conditions, a few or many stakeholders are concerned. Therefore, the competencies of sociology and political science will contribute to the establishment of participatory processes to develop a shared understanding of problems and opportunities.

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