

(Un)just structures and practises of collaboration in rural social entrepreneurship – international comparison

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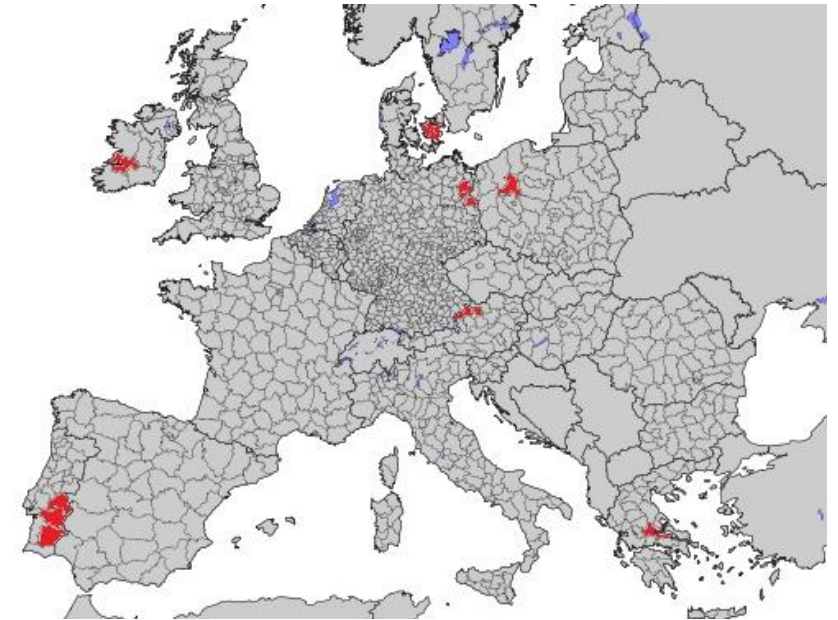
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Social Entrepreneurship in Structurally Weak Rural Regions: Analyzing Innovative troubleshooters in action

- Presentation is a part of a PhD research within H2020 Marie Skłodowska-Curie ITN-project RurAction
- Project addresses depopulation, retreat of public services & negative image of rural regions
- enhances knowledge & cross-sectoral training in the intersection of rural development, social entrepreneurship and social innovation
- PhD research focuses on relevance of collaboration for long-term sustainability of rural social enterprises, conducted at the University of Leipzig & Leibniz-Institute for Regional Geography, Leipzig, Germany. Supervisor Dr. Thilo Lang
- Timeframe Oct 2017-2020



Research areas in the project. Picture: Lucas Olmedo

Collaborative social Entrepreneurship in rural areas

Social enterprises (Defourny & Nyssens 2012):

- Organisations that sell and produce goods and services to markets in order to reach social and ecological change.
- Independent of public sector and corporations, private profit generation is limited and subordinated to ethical goals.
- Strong expectations in policy level on creating solution for unemployment, weak markets, depopulation and infrastructural decline (Bundesministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft (BMEL) 2015).

“The grand narrative of social entrepreneurship comprises, among other things, a high level of univocity, unambiguousness, one-sidedness as well as a quasi-religious makeover (and it) often relies on an individualized notion of social transformation.” (Dey & Steyaert 2010 88-89)

- So far strong focus on individual entrepreneurs as messianistic champions or on “community enterprises” in rural areas.
- ignorance of how social and ecological goals are actually practised and realised by diverse stakeholders in multiple scales. Implicit expectation of a single, tight social structure in rural villages.



Approaching spatial and economic justice from post-developmental perspective



Justice rather a practise and experience of self-realization and empowerment than universal principles.

Never-ending attempt at doing right to the diversity of needs, spatial and structural conditions, imageries (“gerecht werden”) (Ronge 2015, 21).

- Seeing, cultivating empowering & ethical potentiality in „peripheral“ and „failed“ identities and spaces, as not yet determined by capitalist development path.
- While simultaneously attention to providing necessary living conditions and reducing class divisions..
- ..in constant negotiation and daily practice (Gibson-Graham 2006, 101).

→ Risk of romanticizing peripheric spaces and concrete challenges of (involuntary) economic and institutional degrowth for wellbeing and basic services (Büchs & Koch 2019)?

Questions:

Whether collaborative social enterprises can sustainably enhance the rural residents' access to basic services, as well as their political agency in tackling regional disparities?

How these potentials are influenced by privileges and (in)justice both in the level of regional resources and infrastructure, as well as in the daily work experiences in social enterprises?



Epistemology & methodology

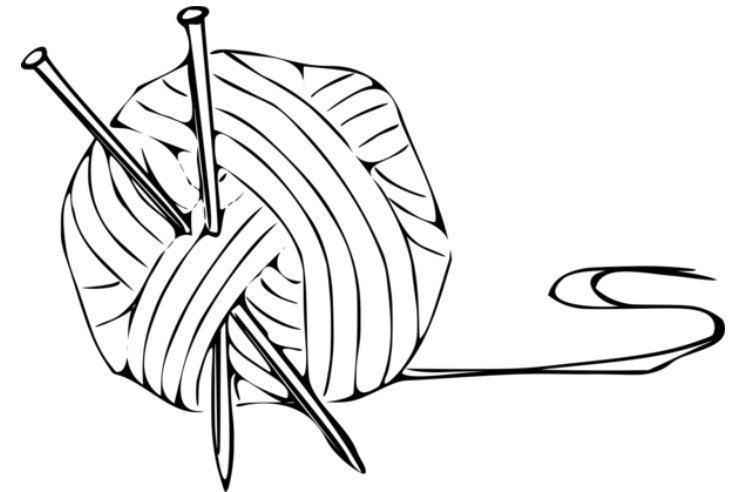
Practice approach: knowledge as emergent in joint, mundane practise and reflection (Wenger 2008)

Poststructural geographies (Gibson-Graham 2006)

International comparative case study

Methods (Knoblauch 2001; Lang 2018)

- Focused ethnography (7-14 days / case)
- Thematic semi-structured interviews (8 per case)
- Supportive documents
- Case as an enterprise and relations of the participants
- Interviews with workers, board members, manager, volunteers, public sector, peer organisations, funder
- In Germany in native language, in Portugal partly with translation



Cases

Name	Founded	Size	Form	Field	Location	Aims
Daycare	1934	40	Association	Early education	South-Eastern Alentejo	To provide early education, enhance inclusion and equality, increase access to higher education
Youthwork	1917	15	Association	Youth and adult education	North-Eastern Brandenburg	To provide political and cultural education for adults and youth, enhance cross-border and cross-cultural dialogue, support local services and infrastructure and active engagement of citizens



Collaboration with children’s summer camp and artists’ residence at youthwork, photo by Franziska Mandel



Mother’s day Event at Daycare



Guiding children to make decisions and keeping them as part of the daily routine, Daycare

Results:

Practices enhancing spatial justice: provision of services fulfilling basic needs and enhancing political change-agency

- Both cases provide basic services and social spaces beyond their main work. E.g. Youthwork has opened a village shop and both cases co-organise yearly events with residents.
- Maintenance of the spaces in old buildings is dependent on both long-term volunteering of residents and income from catering sales. Youthwork also rents their spaces for other actors beyond their field such as a museum.
- Both organisations facilitate peer-learning across age- and hierarchy levels in daily work:
 - In Daycare national / capital standards as measurement: focus on increasing families' interest in literacy and high education, reducing backward image of the region.
 - In Youthwork focus on existing capacities in the region: co-manages political education program for rural civil society co-designed by participants themselves. (see quote)

“We did a panel discussion with politicians [...] the point was to understand the political structures, who do we vote for, where do we have a say ourselves [...] and then reality check I mean, what are our actual experiences [...] and the main theme, where do we want to make a constructive proposition [...] I have a feeling at the opening event it was, that so many people // needed a forum to express their frustration. And this is changing now strongly, to the direction // we can change something if we are prepared // if we present ourselves with courage we are also heard, there are possibilities. But this was only the first year.”

(B112 Project worker 23.7.2019 Pos. 114)

... which mitigate but do not fully overcome spatial inequalities

- In Brandenburg there are more private funding, regional & local public support and layers of independent regional governance available than in Alentejo. Daycare is in precarious state and economically dependent from decreasing national funding in comparison to diverse project funding at Youthwork.
- Project funding in Youthwork is managed by professionals in a regional network of civil society organisations often with connection to or studies in Berlin. Daycare in Portugal is poorly connected to capital city and has major troubles finding highly educated professionals.
- However, Daycare's projects have been acknowledged in national competitions among the few peripheric winners.

Challenges from unattended privileged trajectories, spatial discourses and economic precarity

- In Youthwork, responsibilities are clearly divided between legal and strategic leadership, professional staff and ad-hoc volunteers. Volunteers are supported by professionals, there is an intention to provide stable perspective for central, long-term freelancers although not always successful.
- Strong faith on everyone's capacities to learn in right, supportive framework and on innovativeness in periphery.
- In Daycare, management is voluntary although work requires fulltime commitment. Mainly local & fully paid service workers do not acknowledge precarity and value of the leadership position adequately.
- High-educated managers from outside build on top-down leadership trajectory without noticing it and devalue current educational work.
 - Clash and resignation of leaders, major challenge of finding new skilled and committed people.

Leader of Daycare:

"So we [board members] tried to have a very opened and share way of working [with educational staff] but they prefer not to propose [ideas for innovative projects] and when they don't, we do. I don't think we had an discouraging attitude, but we tried to put the barrier high [...] for this last project, we needn't really ask [the workers] about a applying for it. We though this is our opportunity to get the educators, to get them to do training on a social and emotional skills. They need a lot of professional training. They have done their degree in leisure mainly. Which is very, its not demanding. You know, they can do to all degree without knowing English." (A112, 24.4.2019 #00:55:26#)

Educational Staff at Daycare:

Worker 1: But we are ambitious, we're like that.

Worker 2: We participate in large nationwide projects for example [...] This year we did not participate [because] it's a lot of work and we decided to take a break for a year to gain strength for the next. We are investigating. #00:26:27#

[On question about non-paid leadership position]

Worker 2: I think being the way it is, those who come here are those who have a spirit keen for missions and those who want to help the institutions [...] It's not daily work. (A114, 28.5.2019 #00:34:42#)

Summary:

- Social enterprises may be able to provide basic services in areas where public and market actors retreat, in long-term, but..
- Strong and involuntary economic, demographic and institutional degrowth may also hinder organisations from firstly, enhancing economically just and stable working conditions and secondly, from accessing supportive collaboration networks (Salemink et al. 2017).
 - Social enterprises may succeed in attracting highly educated young people to move back to the countryside, mainly in areas with good connection to cities.
 - Especially basic, local services in strongly peripheral areas need public support independent of innovative development work (Haunstein 2019).
 - Degrowth as (regional) political strategy should be designed with sensitivity to such regional disparities.
- Daily collaboration between diverse stakeholders with diverse backgrounds and privileges may enhance justice..
 - ...As lived and situational experience of empowerment and ability to influence on one's own conditions.
 - ...If volunteering is supported by professional structures and ongoing precarity is tackled.
 - ... If diverse privileges, responsibilities and long-term conflicts between participants are openly reflected and regularly negotiated with mutual respect.
 - ... If participants are able to recognize and learn from possibly conflictive working relations (Dunham 2010; Samers 2010).

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