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What future for LEADER as a catalyst of social innovation?

Laura Secco, Elena Pisani, Catie Burlando and Asimina Christoforou

Introduction

This book has demonstrated how Local Action Groups (LAGs) can support social capital and related governance aspects through specific actions and practical activities. In this chapter, we hypothesise that LEADER is well placed to support social innovation as well (Bosworth et al., 2016; Dax et al., 2016). While social innovation has not been a central focus of the evaluation method developed in this book, this chapter delineates paths for future research that would provide a better understanding of the role of social capital and its related governance aspects in LEADER, by connecting it to perceptions and policies of social innovation.

Innovation is often a stated aim in development strategies and projects. The same applies to LEADER, which was specifically designed to support innovation in rural development. The EU 2014-2020 regulations for Community-led Local Development (CLLD) reiterate the role of LEADER in “includ[ing] innovative features in the local context, networking and, where appropriate, cooperation” and in the local development strategy (Regulation (EU) 1303/2013, Art. 32 and Art. 33, L347/355–356).

The global crisis and some of the limitations of Schumpeterian and technological innovation approaches to address new and unmet social needs and challenges have led to renewed interest in social innovation rather than innovation alone. In international policy settings, social innovation is considered an effective approach to develop novel solutions, make better use of scarce resources, promote an innovative and learning society, and support the EU2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (BEPA, 2011; 2013). Despite emergent attention toward this concept by academics and policy-makers, an unambiguous definition is still missing. To delineate paths for future research on the role of LEADER as a catalyst in social innovation, the chapter is structured as follows: section two describes various meanings of the term in rural development. Section three outlines the key internal features of LEADER which may support social innovation, while section four reflects on some of the opportunities that LAGs may use or promote to support social innovation. Section five discusses potential challenges and limitations while section six draws some conclusions for rebuilding LEADER also as a catalyst of social innovation in rural areas.

Social innovation: where are we and where should we go?

While there are multiple meanings for social innovation, a clear and uniquely accepted definition is far from being agreed upon (e.g., Moulaert et al., 2013; Nicholls et al., 2015). Neumeier states that “the different ways of defining social innovations constitute a broad and inconsistent range of meanings – descriptive, heuristic, voluntaristic or normative” (2012, p. 54). In this section, we focus on the most common understandings of the term as used in the literature on rural development and in the context of the EU policy. Researchers highlight how social innovation is “innovation in needs-revealing processes, forms of cooperation, communication and good governance” (Moulaert & Nussbaumer, 2005, p. 58) and “an opportunity to do something better, to create social value and to respond to local circumstances” (Bosworth et al., 2016, p. 5). It “improves the macro-quality of life or

extends life expectancy” (Pol & Ville, 2009, p. 882) and refers to “new ideas manifested in social actions leading to social change and proposing new alternatives and new social practices for social groups” (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014, p. 44). In practice, social innovation can manifest itself through: (i) new institutional environments and arrangements such as formal or informal rules and new administrative procedures; (ii) decision-making processes based on new public and private governance arrangements; (iii) new fields of activity comprising social entrepreneurships and social enterprises; (iv) new actors’ relationships and interactions, which may be enshrined in new collaboration and networks, and new attitudes, values and behaviours.

Even in absence of a clear and commonly agreed definition, it has been argued that, in the face of declining or insufficient support from the welfare state, social innovation involves the introduction and mobilisation of novel ideas, the reconfiguration of institutional and governance arrangements, as well as creativity in social and entrepreneurial practice and action (Neumeier, 2012; Moulaert et al., 2013; Nicholls et al., 2015). These changes do not occur in a vacuum. Instead, social innovation relies on cooperation and collaboration across sectors and levels, shared values and vision, as well as on the capacity to overcome and reshape stratified power structures, by proposing creative initiatives that allow individuals and groups to challenge path dependency and institutional, economic and social constraints. As this book has sought to demonstrate, collaborative action is key to building and strengthening social capital, and social capital itself has been identified as one of the roots for social innovation (see Chapters 3 and 5). However, while social capital is the social substratum required for innovative social ideas to take shape, it does not constitute a sufficient pre-condition. Other factors facilitate and constrain how actors may engage in collective action around novel ideas, including governance structures and arrangements.

Part of the conceptual ambiguity in understanding and analysing social innovation derives from a policy-driven (institutional) interpretation of “... innovations that are social in both their ends and

their means”, defined as “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” (BEPA, 2011, p. 7). This twofold meaning implies that, from the perspective of policy-makers, social innovation might occur as a process, outcome, or both. Supporting and evaluating social innovation and its impacts will therefore require attention to both processes and outcomes. As this book has demonstrated, the proposed evaluation of social capital has brought together diverse theoretical strands for analysing the tangible structures and intangible resources and processes which lead to collective action, and developed a conceptual approach to operationalise the assessment of these resources, processes and outcomes in local development. The method proposed could therefore contribute to shed light on some of the issues in the context of the evaluation of social innovation processes and/or outcomes – an interdisciplinary process currently under study.¹

Researchers and practitioners have focused on both processes of change, as well as effective and equitable outcomes (Moulaert et al., 2013; Bosworth et al., 2016; Katonáné-Kovács et al., 2016; Neumeier, 2016). From a process-based perspective, social innovation may emerge out of the interplay between actions of individuals and groups seeking to address specific social needs, and the institutional structures and social systems in which these changes are sought (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014). Outcomes relate to new practices, changes in social context, and new ways of knowing and valuing. These ‘immaterial’ effects may be driven by diverse moral and ethical values, worldviews and knowledge systems, and may be institutionalised in new social arrangements, governance structures and entrepreneurial activities (Moulaert & Nussbaumer, 2005; Neumeier, 2012; Baker & Mehmood, 2015).

European policy-makers, while not yet agreeing on a specific definition for social innovation, also acknowledge attention to both process and outcomes: “[s]ocial innovation relates to the development of new forms of organisation and interactions to respond to social issues (the process

dimension). It aims at addressing the following outcomes: social demands that are traditionally not addressed by the market or existing institutions and are directed towards vulnerable groups in society” (e.g., elderly, youth, women, people with disability, immigrants); societal challenges in which the boundary between ‘social’ and ‘economic’ becomes blur, and which are directed towards society as a whole; the need to reform society in the direction of a more participative arena where empowerment and learning are sources and outcomes of well-being (BEPA, 2011, p. 43). Common social demands by vulnerable groups include work placement, social inclusion, health services and care, and diverse educational opportunities in both rural and urban areas. Examples of urgent or emerging societal challenges include climate change, ageing and migration flows. Finally, the need to reform society stems from the State (as the public authority) having to develop a new relationship with other actors who are representative of more vulnerable segments of society (social enterprises may be considered as both ‘business’ and ‘community’), without relinquishing responsibility for citizen welfare to the private sector and community associations. Thus, the state may shift from traditional top-down approaches to a network governance approach (see also Chapter 5), but this shift should increase the quality and quantity of social services. Social innovation “should [...] concern innovative approaches and outcomes that provide more than the baseline level of services. These approaches should also be centred on community engagement and participation at a local level” (Bosworth et al., 2016, p. 5). Bock suggests that “innovations should be ‘social’ in the sense of socially acceptable, relevant and ethically appropriate” and that the innovation of society “is underlined by the purpose of creating a better society with more equality, social inclusion and social justice” (2016, p. 3).

As with complex concepts such as sustainability and governance, “social innovation” risks becoming a fuzzy and catch-all term. Indirectly, these interpretations lead to assumptions that social innovation can (very likely) be activated just by involving the community and thinking in a novel way; and further, that any social innovations per se is positive. However, we perceive a risk of a new system

rhetoric in descriptions of social innovation, which highlight its positive connotations. In our opinion, these assumptions should be verified by detailed assessments, which define the term and distinguish between the processes that determine (or are) social innovation from its possible outcomes. While we posit potential in the use of this concept, not the least because we suggest LEADER could play a role in spurring initiatives under this rubric, we also call for further studies on the concept and its application, especially when referring to rural areas.

How can the key features of LEADER support social innovation?

Since its introduction in the early 1990s, the LEADER Approach has sought to foster novel ideas in rural development initiatives, funded by the European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds, and implemented by a locally-driven territorial development process (Ray, 2006; Shucksmith, 2010; Dax & Oedl-Wieser, 2016; Dax et al., 2016). Within a multi-pronged European rural policy environment, LAGs have provided on-the-ground support for territorial actors (see Chapters 3 and 4). Despite the promise for LEADER to promote innovation, previous programming periods led to fragmented results, with innovation outcomes generally limited, both in terms of process and outcomes (Pollerman et al., 2013; Navarro et al., 2015). However, in this section we argue that the LEADER Approach and its LAGs have a significant potential for enhancing and restoring *social* capital and thus (likely) also supporting *social* innovation, as evidenced by the burgeoning interest in the topic (Dargan & Shucksmith, 2008; Neumeier, 2012; Dax et al., 2013; Bock, 2016; Bosworth et al., 2016; Dax et al., 2016; Katonáné-Kovács et al., 2016; Neumeier, 2016). Dargan & Shucksmith state that “in the practical experience of LEADER [...] [innovation] is more likely to be understood by local actors in terms of social innovation (encouraging local linkages and collective learning cultures) and cultural innovation (improving the rural milieu) rather than in the sense of science policy and technological innovation ... that dominates national policy discourses” (2008, p. 274).

Since the beginning, LEADER initiatives have been characterised by key features which can support social innovation. They include: (i) area-based approach; (ii) bottom-up approach; (iii) local action group (public-private partnership); (iv) innovative approach; (v) integrated and multi-sectoral approach; (vi) network and (vii) cooperation.² On the one hand, LEADER supports those structural elements of social capital, i.e., partnerships and inter-sectoral collaborative networks, which may enable the emergence of novel ideas, practices and arrangements in the territory. As Pollerman et al. state, “A general assumption in the context of LEADER is that the networking and cooperation of stakeholders from different sectors play an important role in creating new ideas and advancing innovations” (2013, p. 112). On the other hand, LAGs may also purposefully use their social capital or network governance capacity to strengthen a culture of social innovation. By fostering dialogue for project development, both internally among its members, and externally with beneficiaries and other territorial actors, they may be able to identify opportunities for social innovation that address unmet and emerging needs. First, LAGs could devote specific attention to the process dimension of social innovation, by supporting social learning in their networks (High & Nemes, 2007; Sol et al., 2013). By bringing together public and private actors from different sectors, LAGs could support the identification of needs and opportunities for actors who hold diverse perspectives, knowledge, values and interests; build trust and vision around common social demands and challenges; and foster commitments for collective action. Second, LAGs could support specific criteria as part of the assessment and selection of potential initiatives and beneficiaries which address social inclusion (Shortall, 2008). Third, LAGs could invite representatives of more disadvantaged economic and social sectors to join the membership, providing guidance and direction on the implementation of the local development strategy, pointing out emerging needs, suggesting possible resolutions and identifying opportunities and trade-offs in programme priorities, funding criteria and selection of beneficiaries (Navarro et al., 2016).

So far, these opportunities have been suggested but not demonstrated by enough empirical evidence. Yet, among the EU programmes for local development, LEADER may be best suited to foster social innovation because of the sharing of common features across the EU, as well as its territorially-specific implementation. Of course, key questions for future research remain. These may include attention to the drivers and conditions for fostering social innovation through LEADER, in terms of the types of policy intervention (if any) which would likely nurture conditions for its emergence, while limiting those which would constrain it. Other key questions would ascertain the impacts of social innovation: “what social value is created?”, “for whom is it created?” and “to what extent can it deliver enduring change beyond?” (Bosworth e al., 2016, p. 14). Overall, for LAGs, shifting from innovation to social innovation may mean shifting from a focus on criteria for profitability and commercial development to criteria for well-being and social value generated by new and innovative entrepreneurial activities. This may mean a shift in attention from economic initiatives focused on the growth of a specific economic sector or value chain, to the social and environmental relations that underpin development activities in a determined local context. We now turn to an examination of the ESI funding measures and approaches which support the creation of networks, a key feature for enhancing social capital and likely social innovation.

Reflecting on possible opportunities for supporting social innovation through LEADER

The previous section identified the internal characteristics of LEADER and LAGs, such as partnerships and inter-sectoral networks, which may support processes of social innovation. LAGs may also promote or activate as part of their local development strategy other opportunities such as new funding measures, contractual agreements or other legal instruments to foster network building and collaboration. These opportunities support network governance, a specific form of governance which favours novel modes of collaboration among economic, social and environmental actors, across the

public and private spheres, and through horizontal and vertical linking (Chapter 5), which represents the backbone of social innovation. Specifically, the Measures for Cooperation (Art. 35) and LEADER (Art. 42) established in the EU Regulation 1305/2013 are designed to facilitate the creation or consolidation of collaborative and network-based relationships among actors working in rural areas. The Measure for Cooperation supports cross-sectoral cooperation approaches, clusters and networks, as well as the European Innovation Partnerships (EIP) (EU Regulation 1305/2013, art. 35.1). More specifically, it supports “the development of new products, practices, processes and technologies in the agriculture, food and forestry sectors”, horizontal and vertical cooperation for the development of short supply chains, joint action for mitigating or adapting to climate change, agro-environmental initiatives and drawing of forest management plans, as well as the “diversification of farming activities into activities concerning health care, social integration, community-supported agriculture and education about the environment and food”, key themes in social innovation (Regulation (EU) 1305/2013, Art. 35.2.k, L 347/516).³ Depending on the Rural Development Program (RDP), partnership development may include a first preparatory animation phase to create the partnership and a second phase to deliver on the commonly identified actions. While only an *ex post* evaluation and more in depth research assessment can draw conclusions on the impacts of current measures and tools, the relationships created may support local players who are ready to socially innovate, even if regional (or national) institutional organisations may still be following more rigid command and control approaches and tools.

LAGs may also use in their local development strategy or promote to their beneficiaries different legal instruments which lead to the creation of cooperation groups. For example, in Italy, network contracts were introduced in legislation in 2009 to address the reciprocal interests and benefits of members on a step-by-step process, through: 1) a common management body; 2) an asset fund; 3) a clear procedure for collective decisions (Abatangelo et al., 2016). Network contracts have been

identified as a tool that can be adopted flexibly and can greatly simplify the contractual obligations of partners, by focusing exclusively on common goals and agreed upon activities.

Moreover, there are other tools, such as group certification schemes, or collective forms of land tenure, which support networks and collective action, and thus, enhance social capital and (likely) social innovation. For example, in the forestry sector, the third-party certification scheme of the Forest Stewardship Council has introduced, since 1997, a “group certification” option for small and community producers that qualify for certification in small or low-intensity managed forests, to reduce their certification costs (FSE, 2016). The forest certification scheme of the Programme for Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) later extended the same option to forest owners. In Spain, legislative proposals have encouraged the re-utilisation of long abandoned or unproductive lands, as well as collective forms of land tenure where farmers cooperate and agree on commitments negotiated with the public administration. Territorial management contracts of this type have been used as a tool to enhance the sustainability of farming practices in sloping and mountainous areas (Rocamora-Montiel et al., 2014).

These examples were innovative when they were first introduced. Attention to social innovation may help to re-evaluate the role that these instruments initially had, by fostering reflection on the continuous role of collective action and shared values in further promoting social innovation. LAGs may be able to vehicle these and other opportunities toward promoting social innovation if they are appropriately organised, managed and targeted, and the intangible factors underlying social capital, network governance mechanisms and social innovation are recognised and implemented locally. In the next section, we discuss the limitations and the ways forward for LEADER to catalyse social innovation in rural territorial development.

Limitations and way forward in adopting measures for social innovation

As argued above, there are promising conditions for supporting social innovation through LEADER, due to its flexibility, its network-based structure and opportunities offered through, e.g., the Cooperation Measure and legal instruments described in the previous section. However, some limitations are already evident and may practically emerge during implementation. For example, as already studied for the 2007-2013 programming period, conventional command and control style of public decision-making and hierarchical administrative structures, or, conversely, risk-averse and cautious organisational cultures of administration, may work against cross-sectoral and multi-level governance arrangements, constraining the ability of LAGs to support processes which seek to address emerging needs (Pollerman et al., 2013; Navarro et al., 2016). Legal and institutional frameworks, which place an increasing role on bureaucracy rather than fostering creativity, may endanger cooperation and innovation initiatives. Moreover, closed systems lacking mutual awareness, communication, networking and trust, and associated with pre-existing clientelistic power relations may also hinder social innovation in rural development. Other factors may include: reduced institutional trust and collective action, limited horizontal and vertical coordination among actors implementing activities which may be related to social innovation within the policy domain, and limited skills, resources and infrastructures. As evidenced in this book, these features strongly relate to the availability of social capital in a territory and the governance capacity in operationalising networking.

Bottom-up processes, which are frequently promoted by non-traditional business organisations and usually start from a limited size, often characterise socially innovative initiatives. And yet, these same characteristics may not be perceived as self-sustainable and/or replicable (as their business-driven counterparts) and may therefore fail to attract the necessary interest. The ideas and practices of both citizens and entrepreneurs may also be ahead of public policy and funding priorities and criteria, proving that rather than a specific funding tool, the institutional culture lies at the basis of any required

change. Furthermore, insufficiently stable and sustainable funding throughout the stages of the innovation cycle; lack of specific funding policy for social innovation in the rural development sector; and reduced public funding for local development may also hinder novel initiatives. Limitations in the bureaucratic system, including strict requirements without attention to early phase innovative experimentation, may simply dissuade otherwise socially oriented actors from applying for funding. Pollerman et al. (2013) explain how in the 2007-2013 programming period, innovative ideas stalled before being implemented. They observe that “(a) the possibilities of funding experimental or innovative projects via LEADER depend very much on the extent to which the RDPs are able to provide a suitable framework to fund projects outside the standard menu of measures; and (b) with the mainstreaming of LEADER; compared to the former funding periods the beneficiaries face many administrative obstacles” (Pollerman et al., 2013, p. 116). Finally, the concept of what social innovation is and how it can be evaluated may pose difficulties for adoption by the same LAGs, who may invest in efforts to promote cooperation and thus (likely) social innovation, yet lack instruments for understanding and assessing social innovation as a process of social change. More work is needed to understand how the added value of LEADER as a generator of social innovation can be assessed and thus recognised.

What are the elements, then, which may help change LEADER, as a neo-endogenous approach to development, from a potential to a real catalyst of social innovation? While research on this role needs to be greatly expanded, we suggest three factors which are derived from the results of analysing social capital and governance in the book. Firstly, real and open-ended collaboration between public and private actors and across vertical and horizontal levels may be paramount, signalling willingness to forego long-standing relations of power in favour of decentralisation and a shared vision for actual change (Terluin, 2003; Scott, 2004). We recognise that this may be a challenge in the case of LAGs where clientelistic and entrenched power relations dominate. However, as this book has sought to

demonstrate for the case of social capital, partnership-based governance structures, which are connected and multi-layered, engage and facilitate coordination among actors and institutions at multiple levels, and support local decision-making bodies, may also support social innovation.

Secondly, the context of the territory matters. Territories where formal and informal networks are already present and active in informational exchange, collaboration and trust may display higher levels of social capital. These factors may be connected to a higher propensity at experimenting with novel ideas and practices that respond to specific social needs or societal challenges, as well to a changing role of the public authorities in relation to private actors. As Cajaiba-Santana argues, “what underlies the path of social innovation is not a social problem to be solved, but the social change it brings about” (2014, p. 44).

While the book has not focused on the dimensions of leadership for fostering social capital, we posit that a third factor of relevance may relate to the role of the leader or innovator in proposing, supporting, legitimising as well as scaling up novel and untried ideas (Moore & Westley, 2011; Horlings, 2012). Leaders may be capable, charismatic, creative, and committed leaders as well as entrepreneurial people who inspire others (Raagmaa 2001; Moore & Westley, 2011; Cajaiba-Santana, 2014; Horlings, 2015). They may draw from a combination of different knowledge forms, such as technical and expert knowledge with local and lay knowledge, a well-developed network and interpersonal trust to mobilise others and lead to change. Agency may derive from any actor within the network, the territory or, as shown in some cases, from actors external to the territory (Scheffran et al., 2012). The question of whether the neo-endogenous approach is most suited to the analysis of situations in which actors inside and outside the territory play the role of innovators remains still open. In the literature, Bock (2016) introduces new theoretical hypotheses and suggests the opportunity to shift toward a nexogenous approach, to address also the role of the (external) innovator in rural development initiatives. However, leaders capable to innovate can also be expressed by the local

community. Thus, by supporting leadership and sense-making on the processes of social change and their impacts on well-being, LEADER could become an enabling institution for social innovation.

Taken together, these factors are unlikely to address the core drivers and the deep folds of uneven development. However, by helping to steer new visions, networks and practices, as well as new values, they may lead to changes at the heart of local rural development practices. We are only at the pioneering stage of putting light on this topic in European rural contexts, and further research is needed.

Conclusion

This chapter discusses how key features of LEADER – most importantly its actor and cross-sectoral network-based approach – could support social innovation, contributing to foster further research and development strategies in this emergent policy field. It suggests possible routes for future research, policy and evaluation for assessing the core features of development processes in the context of LEADER and rural development programmes in general. Thus, it offers ways to enrich the method presented in this book by incorporating emerging concepts such as social innovation.

However, a few words of caution are needed. First, despite an early focus on innovation (European LEADER Observatory, 1997), LEADER has not always lived up to expectations for supporting innovation. As recent research has sought to demonstrate, LEADER could probably provide a much sturdier platform for supporting social innovation, but this is yet to materialise. Therefore, we need to carefully assess whether LEADER can live up to possible expectations as a catalyst for social innovation and avoid raising expectations too high in this regard. A second consideration lies with the factors that affect the processes behind the creation of social innovation. LEADER is embedded within a rigid funding structure which may be inadequate to sustain the dynamics of social innovation. The

criteria, timing, and funding allocated through the measures of the RDP, combined with a rigid institutional culture and resistance to change by public institutions may well clash with social innovation dynamics, which depend on environments favouring creativity and change. In addition to these internal and external drivers, in the European context, an evaluation framework capable of capturing the richness of processes, social interactions and practices, acquired knowledge and skills, which specifically derive from promoting partnerships, networks and collaborations for social innovation, has not been fully developed (see Chapter 6; EENRD & European Commission, 2014). The evaluation question for LEADER is yet to capture the more intangible features of increasing social capital and even more so social innovation. At present, evaluation criteria for projects may be able to assess “adaptive, problem-solving initiatives but they are much less likely to capture more creative, opportunity-led developments” (Bosworth et al., 2016, pp. 14-15).

For these reasons, researchers, evaluators and practitioners more broadly need to look deeper into the social processes that underpin private-public partnerships and governance structures to understand how local actors act collectively to organise the economy and pursue development through social innovation. This book develops a theoretically informed and field-tested method to assess social capital and related governance in neo-endogenous rural development institutions such as the LAGs of the EU LEADER Approach. In doing so, it provides a tool for researchers, practitioners and evaluators to assess how social networks and intangible norms and values may support social capital, network-based forms of governance and rural development. The book stresses that LAGs can support social capital by adopting a systematic and systemic approach to the way in which they lead their initiatives and design their development strategies. By doing so, the book has also laid the ground for moving forward on how we understand and utilise the capacity of organisations such as LAGs to catalyse innovative pathways in order to address emerging needs – especially in the social, but also in the

interconnected environmental and economic spheres – and to foster purposeful action and attention to intangible resources such as networks and a culture of learning and trust.

Of course, there are still many issues to be addressed in order to capture the multiple dimensions of social capital and local development, to improve our understanding of these complex relations and to articulate proper methods to analyse and assess them, as argued in Chapter 18. With this book, we hope to have spurred reflection on the intangible features which underpin local development processes in rural areas and which might be recognised as key drivers of a more socially-inclusive rural paradigm for the future. At the end of the day, development depends on our capacity for *social* innovation, that is to say, our capacity to reflect on and change our values and institutions, theories and methods, and promote social awareness, participation, ethical engagement and mobilisation. Ultimately, the aim of this project is to encourage people to actively seek for opportunities of change, to take action for tackling problems of participation and development, and more importantly to understand that cooperation and inclusion are at the core of this process and that no solution is viable unless we consider the vision, interests and needs of other individuals and groups in society in this generation and the generation to come. In this way, engagement is seen not only as a privilege, but mainly as a responsibility to act, collaborate and trust in order to determine the values, institutions and principles of development that include and benefit the whole of society.

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1 The European Union is dedicating increasing attention to the topic of social innovation, with several calls in the Horizon2020 funding programme related to it. Social Innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas (SIMRA) is a 4-years research and innovation action (RIA) project recently launched to advance understanding of social innovation and innovative governance in agriculture, forestry and rural development, and how to boost them, particularly in marginalised rural areas across Europe, with a focus on the Mediterranean region (including non-EU) where there is limited evidence of outcomes and

supporting conditions. SIMRA includes 26 partners throughout Europe and the Mediterranean region (including non-EU), and a growing network of stakeholders, which is planned to expand over coming years. Further information is available: www.simra-h2020.eu.

² Currently, the LEADER Approach includes an eighth element: decentralised administration (http://www.elard.eu/en_GB/leader-approach).

³ “2. Co-operation under paragraph 1 shall relate, in particular, to the following: (a) pilot projects; (b) the development of new products, practices, processes and technologies in the agriculture, food and forestry sectors; (c) co-operation among small operators in organising joint work processes and sharing facilities and resources and for the development and/or marketing of tourism services relating to rural tourism; (d) horizontal and vertical co-operation among supply chain actors for the establishment and the development of short supply chains and local markets; (e) promotion activities in a local context relating to the development of short supply chains and local markets; (f) joint action undertaken with a view to mitigating or adapting to climate change; (g) joint approaches to environmental projects and ongoing environmental practices, including efficient water management, the use of renewable energy and the preservation of agricultural landscapes; (h) horizontal and vertical co-operation among supply chain actors in the sustainable provision of biomass for use in food and energy production and industrial processes; (i) implementation, in particular by groups of public and private partners other than those defined in point (b) of Article 32(2) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, of local development strategies other than those defined in Article 2(19) of Regulation (EU) 1303/2013 addressing one or more of the Union priorities for rural development; (j) drawing up of forest management plans or equivalent instruments; (k) diversification of farming activities into activities concerning health care, social integration, community-supported agriculture and education about the environment and food” (Regulation 1305/2013, Art. 35.2, L 347/516).