Depopulation in rural areas: future perspectives and how social innovation can address current challenges

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Observation:

- A continent wide pattern of reducing populations in rural areas

Map based on data from NASA, UN adjusted figures from 2000 to 2010
Key demographic processes

1. Out-migration & ageing
2. Population drift from more remote places into villages/towns:
   - Closure of services
   - Threatening capacity for endogenous development;
3. Diversification & restructuring
4. Changing infrastructure
5. Changing lifestyles

They interact with macroeconomic settings ➔ societal segmentation
**Key challenges of depopulation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Greece</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Netherlands</th>
<th>Scotland, UK</th>
<th>Spain</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public services concentration &amp; decline, labour force &amp; social capital challenges</td>
<td>Farming structural weaknesses, ageing, labour inequalities, land abandonment, poverty, declining services</td>
<td>Land abandonment, stresses to social capital &amp; service delivery</td>
<td>Falling income, rising costs, stresses to social capital &amp; service delivery</td>
<td>Changes in agriculture, decreased access to housing &amp; services, fuel poverty</td>
<td>Regional disparities, land abandonment, poverty, declining services, labour force &amp; social capital challenges</td>
<td>Accessibility, road maintenance costs, distance to markets, labour force &amp; housing challenges</td>
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</tbody>
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**To address the challenges:**

Support small businesses & entrepreneurship (new business models); local/short food supply chains; infrastructure and services; valorising ecosystem services; bio-economy; exploit green spaces; digital growth; fiscal incentives; new collaborative actions …
novel response to challenges for quality of life and well-being... through

• new social relationships & collaborations,
• new governance mechanisms
• new economic opportunities...

...a mechanism to address sustainability and social justice.
Social innovation in rural areas

• To explain and promote social innovation (SI)

www.simra-h2020.eu
SIMRA's database of SI examples

Geographical distribution of SI examples

Western Europe: 108
Southern Europe: 84
Eastern Europe: 28
Northern Europe: 14
Non EU Mediterranean: 8

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Palace symposium “Depopulation of rural areas: analyses and perspectives”, Amsterdam, June 15, 2017
Examples of social Innovation

Community renewable projects

Care farming in rural areas

This project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement No 677622

Palace symposium “Depopulation of rural areas: analyses and perspectives”, Amsterdam, June 15, 2017
What have they done in Braemar?

http://braemarhydro.org.uk/scheme/

community
hydropower

community restoration

community managed tourism

social care
L’Olivera care farming

Social Farming cooperative, Vallbona de les Monges, Catalonia Spain

- Employment
- Professional skills
- Social/personal skills
- Work therapy
- Social inclusion

www.olivera.org

This project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement No 677622
Kinderbetreuung child care

South Tyrol, Italy

- Social cooperative
- Child care
- Education
- Personal development
- Empowering farm women
- Additional income
- Elderly care

Picture: http://www.kinderbetreuung.it/
Medical service cooperative

Lochcarron

- Medical service (2 hrs drive)
- Now community health centre
- Challenges: to secure funds

- Medical service, care home & day care
- Place to meet
- Library
- Bus service to Inverness
- Employment (25 part time, family friendly)
Local sustainability: Benefits to the local community

- Willow weaving
- Dry stone walling
- Tree pruning
- Professional training and skills development
- Kirkton woodland Heritage group
- Heritage, education & well-being
- Local employment & income

Kirkton woodland Heritage group
- Tree house
- Potter
- Woodturner
- Crofts
- Wood turner
- Kiki's craft corner

Professional training and skills development

Lochcarron Community Development Company
- Lochcarron Community Development Company is a community-led organisation, managing local woodland, a tree house, cultural, environmental and heritage projects, training and employment for local sustainability.

Kiki's craft corner
https://lochcarroncommunity.wordpress.com/
Local sustainability: what makes it possible?

Dedicated volunteers & people with a vision

Skills & Networks

Alternative business models

Seed money, funding, match funding

Opportunities !!!
Integrating refugees

Amal (‘hope’) project in Aberdeenshire

- Organised by volunteers
- ‘Kitchen’ – Syrian food to newcomers & community
- ‘Garden’ – meeting place, practicing language & building confidence

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Some challenges

- Dependence on volunteers - volunteers “fatigue”?
- Adequate funding and support
- Building capacities and developing new relationships and collaborations

Possible questions to discuss with you

- What are challenges to social innovation in the Netherlands?
- Can socially innovative rural communities become victims of their success?
- What needs to be done to revive the communities and bring prosperity to rural areas?
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