Revitalising rural services through social innovation

Bill Slee

The Rural Development Company

Emeritus Fellow, The James Hutton Institute

SIMRA (Social Innovation in Marginal Rural Areas)

- A four year Horizon 2020 project with over 20 partners
- Examining social innovation as a means of supporting rural revitalisation and regeneration
- Based on 20 + case studies of social innovation (from list of 150+) using a common evaluative framework
- Working together with the practice community to promote successful social innovation and up and out-scaling

The situation in rural Europe today

Three (or four) sectors-

- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- (Quaternary)

Delivered by-

- Markets
- Public sector
- Third sector
- Hybrid entities, e.g. partnerships

Services are the biggest growth sector of the modern economy

But service provision is a real issue in many rural areas

ICT provides something of a lifeline but not for all

A crisis-driven reorganisation of economic activity is taking place

- Small private services businesses are closing
- Other large-scale businesses are closing village branches (esp banks)
- Public sector cutbacks are leading to service decline
- Privatisation of some services (housing, libraries, social care) threatens delivery to remote areas

- The third sector often seeks to "plug the gaps"
  - Housing
  - Transport and mobility
  - Retail services
  - Social care
  - Energy
  - Banking
  - Training
  - Recycling
  - Hospices
  - Tourism services

What triggers social innovation in services?

- Normally closure of a keystone service (school, post office, only shop, bus service, garage)

- Decline in quality of a service (esp social care)

- Sometimes (but less frequently) recognition of an unrealised opportunity

- *A collective response by the community*

- *A willingness to invest time and resources to resolve the problem*

One recent example

The small village of Banton in Lanarkshire had lost its pub, its post office and shop in recent years. With help from the Scottish Government, this pub will become a post office, a café, a pub (and a hub) again in community ownership

"I'm chair of my local community owned pub. When it was closed down three years ago, **it was the last facility in the village**. Now the pub is **community owned**, it provides **a home for a cafe, a small shop, community rooms and one Sunday a month a church**. But the pub makes the most money and without it, the other services to our community would not be viable. Good luck to the community of Banton."

From BBC Scotland website

What enables social innovation in services?

- Strong social capital/trust
  - Bonding (working together)
  - Bridging/linking (reaching out to sources of support)
- Institutional support
  - Support policies and enabling legislation
  - Groups at village level-formal and informal
  - Partnerships or other collaborations
- Benefits arising (to provider, to beneficiary, to both) greater than those arising from the public or private alternative

The Scottish Local Development Trust as a good model

- Owned and managed by the local community
- Seeking sustainable regeneration
- Independent but seeking to work in partnership with other private, public and third sector organisations
- Aiming to generate income through enterprise and the ownership of assets.
- Reinvesting in the community.
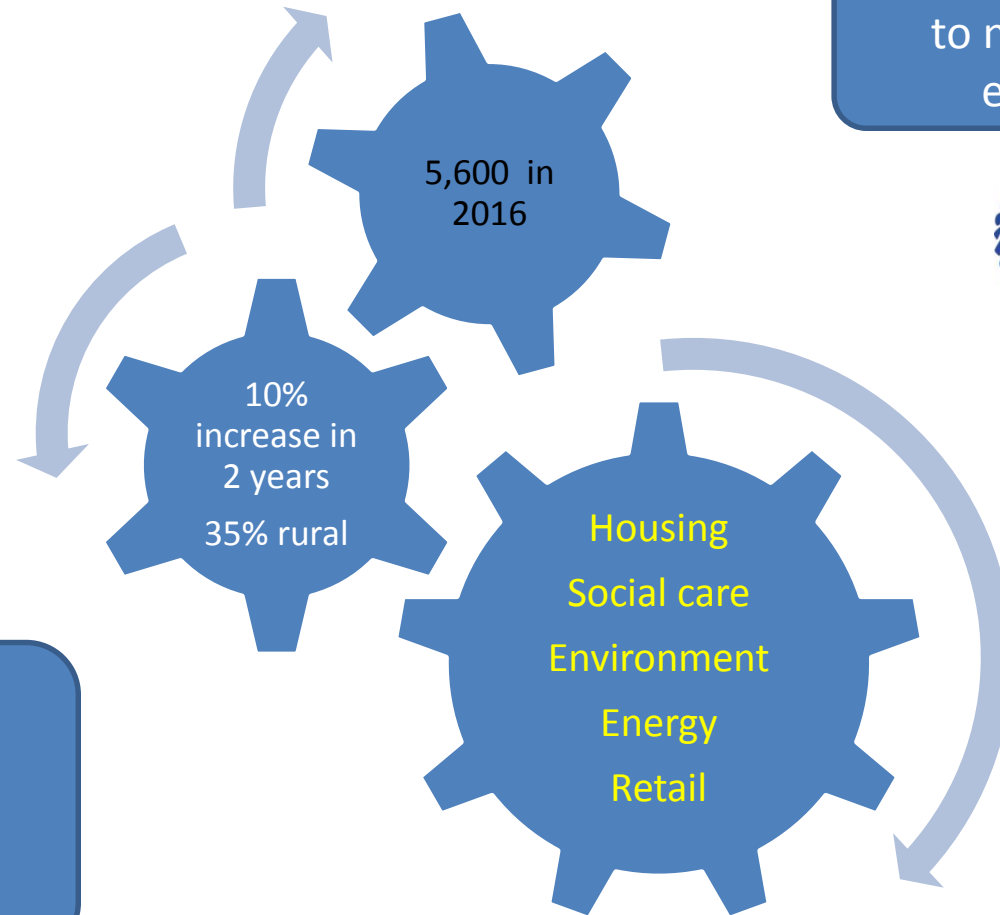
Local scale development trust activity in Scotland

Udny

Portsoy

Five affordable homes on community owned land, Mull

Woodland for timber and recreation, Mull

New village hall, Skye

Community Shop, Canna

The scale of third sector activity in Scotland

5,600 in 2016

10% increase in 2 years

35% rural

Housing

Social care

Environment

Energy

Retail

Even social enterprises to nurture social enterprises

InspirAlba

vital spark

Others include:
Community centres
Festivals
Arts/creative sector
Finance
Land (farms forests)

simra
Social Innovation in
Marginalised Rural Areas

rural development company ltd

Regional-scale social care in South Tyrol

- In 2006 day care cooperative for young children formed by women farmers: individually adapted care for up to 6 children per farm (Now 106 day care "mothers")

- 2014 elderly care pilot project (Now 33 women farmers involved)

The challenges to the third sector

- Pulling together a winning team

- Running out of steam

- Taking a step (or two) too far

- Accepting failure (the Laggan shop)

- The ability of advantaged places to perpetuate advantage (and vice versa)

- Getting an income stream to support the community

- Getting the scale of intervention right (Youth Borders)

To conclude: why service innovation matters so much

- Smart villages are at the leading edge of service innovation

- Social enterprise is a seedbed for creativity

- "Locally owned" services means a virtuous cycle of spending; reinvestment builds linkages and slows down leakage

- Enhanced capacity can be redeployed in new arenas of concern: the hub-satellite model like Portsoy

- Social innovation is vital in the renegotiation of the "social contract" between rural communities the state and markets: **communities should not be passive**