SOCIAL INNOVATIONS IN MARGINALIZED RURAL AREAS
AN ANALYSIS OF FIVE SUCCESSFUL ITALIAN CASE STUDIES

Master's Thesis

by

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I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this work. No assistance other than that which is permitted has been used. Ideas and quotes taken directly or indirectly from other sources are identified as such. This written work has not yet been submitted in any part.

Dori Zantedeschi, 22/10/20

Acknowledgements

Abstract

This thesis analyses the emergence of five social innovations in Italy that deal with the problem of depopulation of rural areas. In Italy, marginalised rural areas are mostly located in the mountain areas, which have been subjected to a phenomenon of depopulation since the 1930s. Social innovations have been identified as a potential approach to tackle the problem. In a first step, the thesis collected 18 successful social innovation projects from which five ways of tackling depopulation have been identified: 1) allowing space for different actors to meet, think about ideas and work together; 2) giving places a new use and connecting the new users with the owners; 3) creating a network of producers that value the territory; 4) creating new common spaces where to build a community identity; and 5) educating people to start a business in the mountains based on local resources. For each group, one project was chosen as a case study to investigate the following research question: what factors made these cases successful? Do the success factors highlighted by previous studies on social innovation apply also in depopulation cases? Inductive and deductive approaches were combined, carrying out interviews and analysing the factors from a literature review in each case study. Common facilitating factors found in the case studies and in the literature include bottom-up approaches, good relationships within the innovation group and with the stakeholders, high education, good abilities and leadership skills of the innovators and socio-emotional bonding to the project area, importance of external funding and of administration support. The study concludes that the factors favourable for the emergence of social innovations are observable also in the depopulation cases and it stresses in particular on the importance of collaboration between social innovators and public administration and between public and private institutions in supporting social innovations.

Diese Arbeit analysiert die Entstehung von fünf sozialen Innovationen in Italien, die sich mit dem Problem des Bevölkerungsrückgangs in ländlichen Gebieten befassen. In Italien befinden sich die marginalisierten ländlichen Gebiete hauptsächlich in den Berggebieten, die seit den 1930er Jahren einem Phänomen des Bevölkerungsrückgangs ausgesetzt sind. Soziale Innovationen können als ein möglicher Ansatz zur Lösung des Problems angesehen werden. In einem ersten Schritt wurden in dieser Masterarbeit 18 erfolgreiche soziale Innovationsprojekte gesammelt, aus denen fünf Lösungsansätze für den Bevölkerungsrückgang abgeleitet wurden: 1) verschiedenen Akteuren Raum geben, sich zu treffen, über Ideen nachzudenken und zusammenzuarbeiten; 2) Umnutzung vorhandener Immobilien und die neuen Nutzer mit den Eigentümern zusammenbringen; 3) ein Netzwerk von Produzenten schaffen, die die Region aufwerten; 4) neue Räume schaffen, in denen eine gemeinsame Identität aufgebaut werden kann; und 5) Menschen ausbilden, wie auf der Basis lokaler Ressourcen in den Berggebieten Unternehmen gegründet werden können. Für jede Gruppe wurde ein Projekt als Fallstudie ausgewählt, um die Forschungsfrage zu untersuchen, welche Faktoren diese Fälle erfolgreich machten? Gelten die Erfolgsfaktoren, die in früheren Studien zu sozialer Innovation festgestellt wurden, auch im Fall des Bevölkerungsrückganges? Induktive und deduktive Ansätze wurden kombiniert, indem zu jeder Fallstudie Interviews durchgeführt und Faktoren aus einer Literaturrecherche analysiert wurden. Zu den fördernden Faktoren, die in den Fallstudien und in der Literatur gefunden wurden, gehören Bottom-up-Ansätze, gute Beziehungen innerhalb der Innovationsgruppe und zu den Interessengruppen, gute Bildung, gute Fähigkeiten und Führungsqualitäten der Innovatoren und sozio-emotionale Bindung an das Projektgebiet, externe Finanzierung und Unterstützung durch die Verwaltung. Die Studie kommt zu dem Schluss, dass die für die Entstehung sozialer Innovationen günstigen Faktoren auch in den Fällen des Bevölkerungsrückganges zu beobachten sind, und unterstreicht insbesondere die Bedeutung der Zusammenarbeit zwischen der öffentlichen Verwaltung und den sozialen Innovatoren sowie zwischen öffentlichen und privaten Institutionen bei der Unterstützung sozialer Innovationen.

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1. Introduction

1.1. The problem of depopulation and degradation of the rural areas

In Italy, the phenomenon of depopulation of marginalised rural areas is known since the 1930s (Macchi Janica, 2016) when a research conducted by the National Institute of Agricultural Economy and the Geographical committee, pointed out the problem and the possible solutions. The reasons why people were abandoning rural areas were, for instance, lack of sanitary service, lack of viability between neighbouring towns and lack of minimum number of children per class. These are possibly still the causes that concern the more substantial problem of our days (Macchi Janica, 2016). The rural areas affected by the phenomenon are mostly the historically poor and isolated areas, many of which are in the Apennine and the Alpine region. They have been defined as *demographic desert* by Macchi Janica (2016), as *internal areas* by Barca (2015), and as *the bones* by Bevilacqua (2002). The term *demographic desert* refers to the concept that the areas lost the capability to attract residents and cannot retain the original population so that the socio-economic dynamics are impoverished. The term *internal areas* refers to the geographical location of the abandoned zones that are in the internal part of the peninsula compared to the coastal zones. The term *bone* highlights that these internal, deserted areas are an important part for the whole system, as they can affect the denser populated areas on the coasts and lowlands. The connection will be elaborated after.

Along with the already mentioned cause of lack of services, responsible for the non-attractiveness of these areas to incoming people and residents, the demographic decline and the decreased birth rate (I.Stat, 2020) are also to be considered as causes responsible for the loss of original residents (Macchi Janica, 2016). These factors bring those who can, to migrate to the cities, leaving behind an ageing population.

In the framework of the Regional Policy of Cohesion, Italy has identified in the rural areas a resource for economic growth. Since 60% of the Italian territory is characterized by the presence of small municipalities (Figure 1), developing them has a big share in developing the whole country (Cavallo et al., 2018). The internal areas do not only serve as a tool for economic growth, but they also exert pressure on the towns in the valley, which are more productive and populated. The towns in the higher regions must be in balance for the safety of the valley areas. Settlements and people are needed to monitor and contain the erosion to prevent floods and landslides, and to

protect the hydrological heritage (Bevilacqua, 2016). In this perspective, promoting the return of the population in the internal areas assumes a crucial role.

For these reasons, in 2012, the National Strategy for the Internal Areas was issued. The objectives of the Strategy are to increase the quantity and the quality of the school system, the sanitary and the viability services and to promote the natural and cultural heritage for the years 2014-2020 ("Strategia nazionale per le Aree interne | Dipartimento per la programmazione e il coordinamento della politica economica", 2020).

According to Bevilacqua (2016), one way to implement the natural and cultural heritage would be to support the cultivation of ancient and traditional varieties of plants and crops. This would help the products to find a share in the market, and to depart from a model of intensive and conventional agriculture, which destroys the resources and the economy more than helping them. It would also reduce the gap between the consumer and the producer, increasing social interactions and interest in the culture and traditions.
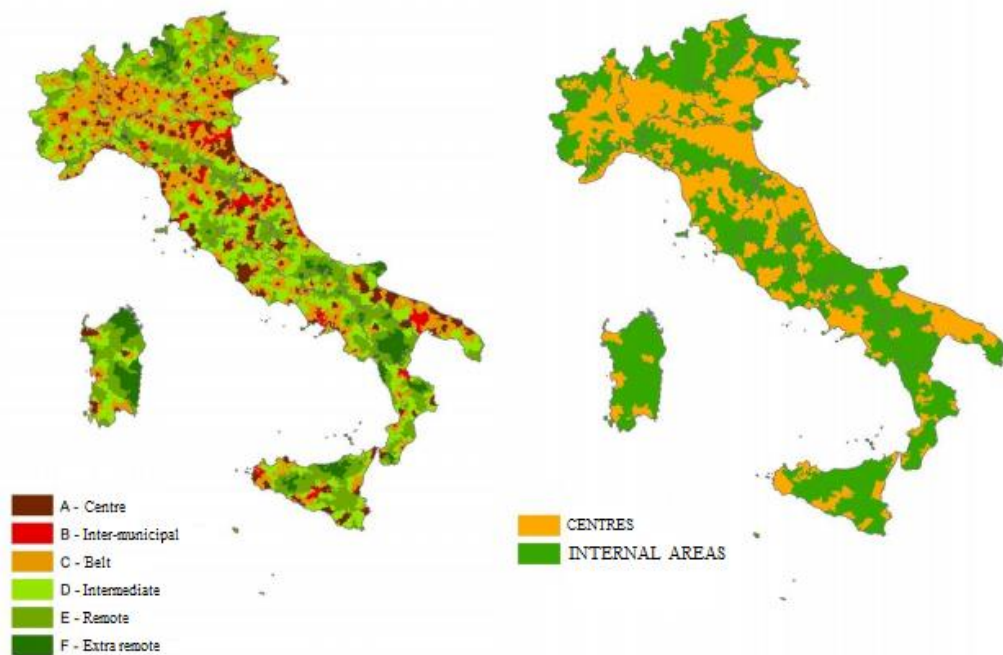
Figure 1. Classification of the internal areas according to the National Strategy for Internal Areas (Barca et al., 2014). The centre (A) is composed of municipalities or those aggregate of neighbouring municipalities (B – inter-municipal centre) that can offer simultaneously: the whole secondary education offer, at least one hospital place of the emergency department and first-level acceptance, and at least one train station. The rest of the municipalities are classified based on the distance from the centres in terms of travelling time as follows: Belt (C) less than 20 minutes distance, intermediate (D) between 20 and 40, remote (E) between 40 and 75, extra remote (F) more than 75. The municipalities have been aggregated in CENTRES (A+B+C) and INTERNAL AREAS (D+E+F). Source: Agency for territorial cohesion as cited in Barca et al, 2014.

Other solutions identified to develop the internal areas and to encourage people to move there include: promoting the participatory processes; valuing the role and the skills of the tertiary sector; incrementing the multifunctionality of the internal areas and promoting the scientific research; developing fruitful relationships with the urban areas; reusing existing buildings to not expand soil sealing (Fondazione Cariplo, 2020).

1.2. The need for social innovations

These solutions could be addressed by reconfiguring the social practices that have characterized the mountain areas so far, including habits, cooperation models and decision-making processes (Howaldt et al., 2015). If this kind of reconfiguration is applied, we talk of social innovation. In Italy, social innovations are applied in the following sectors: healthcare, social care, career development, environment improvement, sustainable mobility, sustainable tourism, cultural development, urban and peripheral areas regeneration and sharing of knowledge (Caroli, 2015). Applying new solutions, like social innovation, could help decreasing socio-economic problems, including depopulation (Gretter et al., 2019). In this view, understanding what makes the already-existing projects successful, can boost the emergence of more. Many studies investigate the factors of success, including the recent European-funded project called *Social Innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas (SIMRA)*. It was funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. The objective was to better understand what makes social innovations in rural areas and innovative governance in agriculture, forestry and rural development successful.

1.3. Aim and objective

This study aims at broadening the knowledge about the factors that make a social innovation successful. The target of the thesis is Italian projects that address the depopulation problem. The research question investigated is the following:

What factors made these cases successful? In how far do the success factors highlighted by previous studies on social innovation apply also in depopulation cases?

1.4. Structure

In the next chapter, I will provide an overview of social innovations in rural development and an overview of the current theories about the factors of success (Chapter 2). The methodology used will be reported, including the motivation behind the approach and the choices made (Chapter 3). After that, the results will be reported in an inductive way (Chapter 4.1), analysed highlighting the factors in the literature found in the case (Chapter 4.2) and compared (Chapter 4.3). Finally, the

limitations of the method and the relation of the results to previous findings in the literature will be discussed (Chapter 5).

2. State of knowledge and conceptual approach

2.1. What social innovations are

The term *social innovation* can sometimes be unclear since it can comprise a wide umbrella of projects touching different aspects with different nuances. To define the boundaries of this wide umbrella, many definitions of social innovation have been given by different authors (Polman et at., 2017). There is a difference between innovation and social innovation. The first one can be the idea of an individual, implemented by and affecting the same individual only (Polman et al., 2017). A social innovation, on the other hand, usually needs more people (often working in different fields) to implement the idea and affects more people. The idea doesn't need to be completely new, but it can be combinations, or hybrids, of existing elements (Mulgan, 2007). Furthermore (Murray et al., 2010; Phills et al., 2008; Saul, 2011), social innovations respond to social problems and create value for society. They begin with an idea to solve social problems, develop to a pilot, stabilize into initiatives and eventually create systemic change (Polman et al., 2017). The change might comprise new products, services, models, social relationships and institutions (Murray et al., 2010). Even if they can generate economic growth and business opportunities (Saul, 2011), profit maximisation is not the core motivation, as it would be in business innovation (Mulgan, 2006). Social innovation prioritizes the increase of social value that may be well-being, social inclusion, quality of life, environmental quality, solidarity, citizen participation, health care, educational level of society, or efficiency of public services (Carvache-Franco et al., 2018).

According to Polman et al. (2017), the most important social needs that social innovations in rural areas have to address, are societal well-being and quality of life. In their study, they define social innovation in marginalized rural areas as following:

The reconfiguring of social practices, in response to societal challenges, which seeks to enhance outcomes on societal well-being and necessarily includes the engagement of civil society actors (Polman et al., 2017, p.12).

The social practices that are being reconfigured are relationships, collaborations, networks, institutions (formal or informal), governance arrangements. The societal challenges, namely the fields of application, can be the society, the economy or the environment. Finally, the civil society actors are among the active actors, namely those who push the innovation and without whom the innovation could not take place. It is relevant to note that two other categories of actors exist,

namely the awaiting actors (those who are not very reactive and prefer to wait and see), and the rejecting actors (those who are against the innovation) (Polman et al., 2018).

For an analysis of supportive policies, three fields of activities in social innovations in rural areas have been identified (Ludvig et al. 2018):

- ❖ Social innovations that deal with the inclusion of vulnerable social groups, like youth, migrants, elderly, unemployed, single mothers, socially excluded people and others;
- ❖ Social innovations that deal with societal challenges in integrated regional and rural development, like unemployment or lack of infrastructure;
- ❖ Social innovations that deal with societal participation, institutional change and inclusion of civil society actors, like facilitating processes of institutional development and changes in the relations between stakeholders and also between stakeholders and public institutions (Ludvig et al., 2018).

In this thesis, the focus will be in particular on the second field of activity, since the main topic is to develop rural and regional marginalized areas to mitigate depopulation. However, elements of inclusion of vulnerable groups and inclusion of civil society actors will also be present, since the fields of activities may always overlap (Ludvig et al., 2018).

2.2. Factors for depopulation processes

According to Barbera and Parisi (2018), urbanized centres facilitate innovative processes, because of the exchange of knowledge and the presence, at the same time, of services and spaces for informal exchange. However, rural areas can also be places for the realization of social innovations far from services, such as green communities, social housing, valorisation of agri-food sectors, shared mobility, search for low-profit lifestyles (Barbera & Parisi, 2018). The same authors state that in the mountain areas there are projects able to combine economic value, active citizenship and territory. An example are those projects that rework local knowledge implementing a business that responds to the current market trend and at the same time is rooted in the territory and is sustainable from a social and environmental point of view.

Merino et al. (2020) stress on economic factors as a cause of depopulation and as a tool to reverse the trend of depopulation. They conclude that economic structure and income are the most relevant appeals for migrants to rural areas, for which the public intervention is necessary, for example through economic policies that will have a permanent effect on long-term economic growth. At a local level, infrastructures (cultural centres, sports facilities, parks and green areas) can be

implemented, improving the quality of life of people living in small cities. In this way, depopulation can be prevented. However, the improvement of life quality is not as efficient in attracting migrants as increasing economic activity and disposable income, especially if the depopulated town is far from a big city. In particular, the closeness to large cities influences the increase of the population (Merino et al., 2020). In the case illustrated by Torres-Elizburu (2015) about the Basque Country, young families with children moved to small towns for the cheaper cost of houses but chose the location according to the closeness to big cities. For the rural areas far away from the big cities, Pinilla et al. (2008) studied a case in Spain (Spanish Autonomous Community of Aragon) where rural areas were net receivers of population because of a) new job opportunities because of ageing of the local population, and b) arise of the touristic sector, while Gosnell and Abrams, (2011) reported the choice of middle-aged families or retired with a higher purchasing power move to rural areas looking for an isolated place with better amenities.

2.3. Conceptual approach

Stages and factors in social innovation

The process of social innovations is non-linear, meaning that progress does not occur steadily, which make social innovations unpredictable and unique (Oeij et al., 2019). Nevertheless, there are some common patterns in the social innovation process, which are divided into three phases by Garud et al. (2013): *invention*, *development* and *implementation*. The invention period starts with a period where the idea is in gestation, characterized by a series of coincidences that trigger the concentration of the efforts and the planning to obtain resources. The development period is where the efforts are concentrated to make the idea become reality, and it is the period of activities and complex interactions. The implementation period can end with the abandonment of the idea or with the adoption and the institutionalization of an ongoing program or business (Van de Ven et al., 1999/2008). Eventually, social innovation could *scale-up* or not. Scaling-up implies that the innovation becomes institutionalized as a sustainable social practice of the system itself, while to not scale-up means that the innovation serves the target group but does not achieve dissemination of social/societal change (Howaldt & Hochgerner, 2018; Oeij et al., 2019). For each phase different skills and actors are necessary (Garud et al., 2013). Finally, social innovations may encounter barriers and hindering factors on the way.

The variables that make social innovation successful and the barriers have already been the subject of study of various researchers. In this section, an overview of the foundations and the theories presented in the scientific literature will be given.

Three tiers of factors

Neumeier (2017) groups the factors that make social innovations in rural development successful into three tiers, the first one of which is a summary of previous work by Rogers (1983):

1. factors important for the success of the overall innovation process;
2. factors influencing the *room to manoeuvre* for the social innovation actor's network;
3. factors influencing the actual participation process.

Overall innovation process

For the factors for the success of the overall innovation process, Neumeier summarizes the work of Rogers (1983) on the diffusion of innovations. Rogers identifies five factors relevant to the adoption of innovations:

❖ *degree of advantage*, that is the advantage of the idea behind the innovation perceived by the actors;

❖ *compatibility*, that is the degree to which an innovation is consistent with existing experiences/needs/values;

❖ ease of use/simplicity, that is the degree of complexity or simplicity of the idea;

❖ *trialability*, that is the degree to which the idea can be experimented with on a limited basis;

❖ *foreseeability*, that is the degree to which actors can estimate the potential results of a new form of action.

Similarly, to the foreseeability and the degree of advantage, Rodriguez Herrera and Alvarado (as cited in Carvache-Franco et al., 2018) talk about the *sociality*, the fact that the social innovation benefits a group of people. Buckland and Murillo (2013) call this *social impact*, which is the achievement of social transformation and the solving of a problem addressed.

Room to manoeuvre

The factors influencing the room to manoeuvre take effect throughout the whole innovation process and influence the likeness of the development of the innovation. They are the opportunities and constraints that go beyond the responsibility of the actors involved in the participation process (Neumeier, 2017). These are advantageous or disadvantageous external determining factors such as:

❖ funding;

❖ readiness of public administration to get involved;

❖ organizational structure;

❖ judicial conditions to which a rural development process is subjected.

Rodríguez Herrera and Alvarado (2008) call the room to manoeuvre *exogenous factors*, the ones related to the environment and the context in contrast to the *endogenous factors* related to the articulation of one's own resources. The exogenous factors include the development of a network that allows mobilizing the knowledge and expertise of different actors and the development of a network with the public sector to broaden the impact of the innovation beyond the local level. The endogenous factors are the ones related to self-organization and the articulation of one's own resources and knowledge. The precise identification of the problem, the precise identification of what has to be changed and the presence of a cooperative leader group of action are also endogenous factors.

Policies and institutional structures become particularly important since they constitute the environment and the context social innovations are surrounded by and have to coexist with. They can be supporting or hindering. Often, policies and public actors do not address social innovation specifically, so that they have to register as social enterprises to have support encountering restrictions and limitations (Rogelja et al., 2018). Ludvig et al. (2018) report that social innovations are seen as an alternative to policies especially when, during an economic crisis and a crisis of social support system, cuts to public spending occur. However, social innovations do not have the resources and the function to replace policies. They should rather be a tool for policies that in turn, should support the emergence of social innovations. Theoretically, governments have an interest in supporting social innovations, since they improve social well-being where it lacks (Ludvig et al., 2018). In particular, a range of different types of policies may be relevant, including social policies addressing vulnerable groups, rural and regional development policies, and policies supporting participation (Ludvig et al., 2018). Therefore, when analysing the case studies, it is relevant to understand the role of policies and institutions, if they are supporting or hindering, and how policymakers can improve them.

Participation process

The factors influencing the actual participation process are those that achieve the involvement and the active participation by all actors. It is crucial to trigger this active participation because it is necessary for the existence of innovation since, without the commitment of people, the innovation would sink (Neumeier, 2017). The participatory process is more likely to occur the smaller the region is because the potential actors have socio-emotional bonding to the region itself (Neumeier, 2017). Also, the quality of the relations between actors and the support given to them by local stakeholders is very important for success. According to Butkeviciene (2009), the way an

innovation process is initiated plays a role. The most effective are a bottom-up approach, when the innovation is started by local actors, and called *genuineness* by Rodriguez Herrera and Alvarado ways (as cited in Carvache-Franco et al., 2018), and a down-up approach, when external actors facilitate local institution's capacity to develop an innovation. Studies by Weiss et al. (2017) and Nijnik et al. (2019) call the down-up approach the combination between top-down and bottom-up approaches, which include local initiatives and social innovations as a solution to tackle challenges faced by marginalized rural areas. The top-down approach on the other hand, when external actors are responsible, has not been proven to be effective. According to Peter and Pollermann (as cited in Neumeier, 2017), the level of participation is related to the level of education, where the graduates are most likely to get involved and the blue-collars and the unemployed persons are less involved. Even if there are a few factors that can influence the participative process, it is not one single factor, but the interplay with other factors and the adaptation to the context and the situation that determines the success (Neumeier, 2017). Summarizing a broad range of factors, six key factors for successful participation process can be identified (Pollermann, 2004; Fürst et al., as cited in Neumeier, 2017):

- ❖ commitment of the participating actors, and especially the continuity of the commitment;
- ❖ abilities and skills of the actors;
- ❖ organizational structure to ensure good communication and coordination;
- ❖ quality of the functional concept, that is defining a common vision shared by the actors;
- ❖ climate of acceptance of the process by the actors and a climate of fair and constructive cooperation;
- ❖ access to financial support, both the resources of the actor's network the social innovation process is based on and external support.

Neumeier (2017) adds that innovation is more successful when the active actors have different backgrounds, that is to say, they have different knowledge. Buckland and Murillo (2013) add the inter-sectoral collaboration of the actors, namely that there are different actors in the initiative and that they relate to each other. Rodriguez Herrera and Alvarado (as cited in Carvache-Franco et al., 2018) highlight the *associativity*, the ability to organize and mobilize groups, especially the participation of active actors. Collaboration across public and private types of actors and across different sectors is important for innovations in general (Rametsteiner & Weiss, 2006, Pollermann, 2006).

Barriers

Factors of success include also the reduction of possible barriers such as the following (Dro & Therace, as cited in Neumeier, 2017):

- ❖ regulatory practices which do not fit the task;
- ❖ risk-averse and cautious organisational cultures of administrations;
- ❖ closed systems favouring single-issue solutions developed within clusters of organisations lacking mutual awareness, communication, networking and trust;
- ❖ having fragmented capacities and skills;
- ❖ insufficient stable, seamless and sustainable funding throughout all stages of the innovation cycle.

Regarding the last point, Weiss (2013) and Rametsteiner and Weiss (2006) also point out that often the support is limited only to the starting phase. A theme that emerges from studies of innovation or social innovation is the role of financial (or economic) support (Kubeczko et al., 2006; Ludvig et al., 2018; Rametsteiner & Weiss, 2006; Weiss et al., 2017). Economic support may be available from private or public sources. Private sources may have a commercial background (i.e. bank loans) or non-commercial (i.e. supports from non-profit organizations). Furthermore, public support can be distinguished between local, regional, national, or EU level. A combination of public and private sources plays a role especially when an innovation has a cross-sectoral nature, such as in the case of non-timber forest products (Weiss et al., 2017) which seems applicable also in social innovations. Regional and local policies are especially effective when sectoral policies that put a specific innovation theme into focus are lacking (Weiss et al., 2017).

Furthermore, Carvache-Franco et al. (2018) name factors that may constitute barriers for the innovation: lack of sufficient confidence in innovation by the management team; lack of experience in innovation; passivity of stakeholders and society; difficult or complex administration and bureaucracy; absence of a legal framework for the execution of the project; lack of access to information needed.

Sustainability and scalability

The last possible step of social innovation is its endurance or longer-term success, often referred to as *sustainability* (Buckland & Murillo, 2013), and its spreading, often referred to as *scalability* (Carvache-Franco et al., 2018). According to Carvache-Franco et al. (2018) and Buckland and Murillo (2013), the scalability is deeply connected with the *replicability* that is the capacity of the innovation to be replicated elsewhere in a different situation, called *expansiveness* by

Rodriguez Herrera and Alvarado (as cited by Carvache-Fanco et al., 2018). Finally, social innovation can be successful even if it does not scale-up if the *sustainability* is guaranteed that is the continuity over time, and especially the economic sustainability also stressed by Buckland and Murillo (2013) and by Rodriguez Herrera and Alvarado (as cited by Carvache-Franco et al., 2018). Nikula et al. (as cited in Neumeier, 2017) say:

The success of any social innovation is dependent on the active participation and support of the stakeholders at local level. Furthermore, the sustainability of a social innovation is dependent on the support and commitment from partners outside the local community.

Oeij et al. (2019) illustrate the barriers encountered by social innovations in becoming sustainable as following: limited access to finance; limited examples of scaling; insufficient skills and formation/staff; missing networks and intermediates. Other authors added legal restrictions and insufficient political support (Howaldt et al., 2016) and lack of organizational and leadership capabilities (Dhondt et al., 2018).

In conclusion, from the literature, a distinction can be made between internal and external factors. The internal factors are dependent on the active actors, while the external are outside the control of the active actors. The innovation process follows three phases (invention, development, implementation), for each of which different knowledge, skills and networks are relevant. Funding and therefore the support of institutions and policy is very important. Finally, a distinction can be made between innovations that at the end of the process scale-up and innovations that do not. The latter issue will not be a matter of investigation later on, since the focus of this thesis is rather on the rise of social innovations and the factors that make them successful (a social innovation is considered successful even if it does not scale-up).

Organization into themes of variables

The factors/variables identified from the literature review will be taken into consideration in the analysis of the case studies in thematic groups (Tables 1-7).

One group includes all the factors that influence the motivation of the core actors. It represents a basic group of internal factors that impact the adoption of social innovations (Table 1).

Table 1. Variables from the literature review grouped into the theme of motivation.

Theme	Variables	Definition	Source
Positive motivation	Perceived advantage, benefit and impact	Advantage of the idea perceived by the actors and perceived ability to benefit a group of people and to achieve social transformation	Rogers (1983) Rodríguez Herrera & Alvarado (2008) Buckland & Murillo (2013)
	Compatibility	The degree to which an innovation is compatible with existing experiences/needs/values	Rogers (1983)
	Simplicity	The degree of complexity or simplicity of the idea	Rogers (1983)
	Foreseeability	The degree to which actors can estimate the potential results of a new form of action	Rogers (1983) Rodríguez Herrera & Alvarado (2008)
	Trialability	The degree to which the idea can be experimented with on a limited basis	Rogers (1983) Rodríguez Herrera & Alvarado (2008)
	Socio-emotional bonding	Socio-emotional bonding to the region itself	Neumeier (2017)
	Commitment	The commitment of the participating actors, and especially the continuity of the commitment	Pollermann (2004)
Negative motivation	Disbelief in innovation	Lack of sufficient confidence in innovation by the management team	Carvache-Franco et al. (2018)

The thematic group of knowledge contains factors about skills and competencies that are necessary to implement the projects (Table 2).

Table 2. Variables from the literature review grouped into the theme of knowledge.

Theme	Variables	Definition	Source
Positive knowledge aspects	Level of education	Level of education of active participants	Peter & Pollermann (2004)
	Actor's abilities	Abilities and skills of the actors, like specialist know-how, social competencies and actor's willingness to innovate	Pollermann (2004) Rodríguez Herrera & Alvarado (2008)
	Different competencies	Different backgrounds, and different knowledge of the active actors complementing each other	Neumeier (2017)
Negative knowledge aspects	Lack of experience	Lack of experience in carrying out social innovation projects	Carvache-Franco et al. (2018)
	Lack of expertise	Insufficient skills and formation/staff	Oeij et al. (2019)
	Lack of access to information	Lack of access to information needed	Carvache-Franco et al. (2018)

Another group contains variables about the way of organisation. This has important impacts on the success of social innovations (Table 3).

Table 3. Variables from the literature review grouped into the theme of organization structure.

Theme	Variables	Definition	Source
Positive organization structure aspects	Solid organization	Organizational structure to ensure good communication and coordination	Pollermann (2004)
	Precise objective	Precise identification of the problem and the precise identification of what has to be changed	Rodríguez Herrera & Alvarado (2008) Pollerman (2004)
	Cooperation	Presence of a cooperative group of action and cooperative leadership	Rodríguez Herrera & Alvarado (2008)
	Inter-sectoral composition	Presence of different types of actors in the initiative and relationship between each other	Buckland & Murillo (2013) Rametsteiner & Weiss (2006)
	Availability of financial resources and revenue streams	Resources of the actor's network support	Pollermann (2004) Buckland & Murillo (2013) Rodriguez Herrera & Alvarado (2008) Oeij et al. (2019)
Negative organization aspects	Poor organization and leadership	Lack of organizational and leadership capabilities	Dhondt et al. (2018)

The relationships and interactions form another group of factors for social innovations (Table 4). They connect internal and external factors since networks and relationships are to some extent an exogenous precondition which pre-exists and is altered only in a limited way, but the ability to manage relations and cooperation is also an internal quality.

Table 4. Variables from the literature review grouped into the theme of interactions.

Theme	Variables	Definition	Source
Positive interaction features	Quality of relationships	Quality of the relations between actors and the support given to them by local stakeholders	Neumeier (2017)
	Acceptance	Climate of acceptance of the process by the actors and a climate of fair and constructive cooperation	Pollermann (2004)
	External communication	Public relations and communication method	Pollermann (2006)
	Outside support	Support and commitment from partners outside the local community	Nikula et al. (2011)
Negative interaction features	Unsolid connections	Organizations involved lacking communication, networking and trust	Dro & Therace (2010)
	Passivity	The passivity of stakeholders and society	Carvache-Franco et al. (2018)

External factors include external economic support, which may come from private and public sources (Table 5).

Table 5. Variables from the literature review grouped into the theme of economic support.

Theme	Variables	Definition	Source
Supportive economic aspects	Support in early phases	Subsidies, instruments or support designed to provide incentives for overcoming barriers to change and counteract resistance to change	Rametsteiner & Weiss (2006) Kubeczko et al. (2006)
	Type of support	Type of financial source distinguished between private or policy support (local, regional, national, European)	Rametsteiner & Weiss (2006) Ludvig et al. (2018) Weiss et al. (2017)
Non supportive economic aspects	Deficient funding	Having non-continuous and insufficient funding throughout all the stages of the innovation	Dro & Therace (2010) Rametsteiner & Weiss (2006) Weiss (2013) Oeij et al. (2019)

External factors also include policies (Table 6), since public policies and public actors may have various supportive or hindering roles for social innovation.

Table 6. Variables from the literature review grouped into the theme of policy support.

Theme	Variables	Definition	Source
Supportive policy impact	Readiness of involvement	The readiness of public administration to get involved	Neumeier (2017) Ludvig et al. (2017)
	Bottom-up approach	When the innovation is started by local actors	Butkeviciene (2009) Rodríguez Herrera & Alvarado (2008)
	Down-up approach	The combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches. When external actors facilitate local institution's capacity to develop an innovation	Butkeviciene (2009) Nijnik et al. (2019) Weiss et al. (2017)
Hindering policy impact	Hindering regulations	Regulatory practices that hinder the innovation	Dro & Therace (2010)
	Unwillingness of risk-taking	Cautious administrations that are unfavourable to take the risk of giving support without knowing the outcome of the innovation	Dro & Therace (2010) Ludvig et al. (2017)
	Bureaucracy	Difficult or complex administration and bureaucracy	Carvache-Franco et al. (2018)
	Absence of a legal framework	Absence of a legal framework for the execution of the project	Carvache-Franco et al. (2018)
	Unfavourable policy	Legal restrictions and insufficient political support	Howaldt et al. (2016) Ludvig et al. (2017)

Several variables are important for a scaling up of social innovations (Table 7). Those factors are not analysed, however, in this study since it focuses on the emergence of social innovation.

Table 7. Variables from the literature review grouped into the theme of scalability.

Theme	Variables	Definition	Source
Positive scalability aspects	Sustainability	The continuity over time, and especially the economic sustainability	Carvache-Franco et al. (2018) Rodríguez Herrera & Alvarado (2008) Buckland & Murillo (2013) Neumeier (2017)
	Replicability	The capacity of the innovation to be replicated elsewhere in a different situation	Carvache-Franco et al. (2018) Rodríguez Herrera & Alvarado (2008) Buckland & Murillo (2013)
	Development of a network	Development of a network that allows mobilizing the knowledge and expertise of different actors and development of a network with the public sector to broaden the impact of the innovation beyond the local level	Rodríguez Herrera & Alvarado (2008)
Negative scalability aspects	Limited examples	Limited examples of scaling	Oeij et al. (2019)
	Absence of network	Missing networks and intermediates	Oeij et al. (2019)
	Restrictions and non-supportive policies	Legal restrictions and insufficient political support	Howaldt et al. (2016)

3. Methodology

3.1. Research approach

For this study which aims at understanding the social innovation process in projects fighting rural depopulation, a qualitative approach is taken. This approach was chosen because it allows the understanding of processes, the integration of interviewees' personal experiences, the documentation of intent and the motivation for why people act as they do (Kalof & Dan, 2008).

The frame of the study is a combination of inductive and deductive approaches. The inductive approach is applied when a theory is produced from the data collected (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). It is often used when there is very little knowledge about the topic that is going to be studied. A deductive approach is used when a hypothesis needs to be verified through the collection of data (Kalof & Dan, 2008).

The literature on social innovations is sufficient for formulating hypothesis that can be tested in case studies, namely if variables of success found in previous researches about social innovation apply to cases of social innovations in rural areas with strong depopulation trends. The intention, though, was to keep opportunities to find new or more detailed insights and factors regarding the depopulation problem and social innovation processes, avoiding the limitation of a tunnel vision (Kalof & Dan, 2017). Therefore, the case study approach was chosen to first gain an in-depth understanding of the social innovation projects and the process of emergence, which constitutes the inductive and explorative part. A multiple case study format was preferred to a single case study because it enables more accurate and generalizable explanations (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). After understanding the case studies in depth, patterns across them referable to the literature are discussed, which constitutes the deductive part. The most important factors were highlighted, with the final goal being to see if the factors from the literature apply in the depopulation cases and to what extent.

The investigation of the case studies was conducted utilizing semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allow to go in-depth on the cases, to ask follow-up questions if clarification or more elaboration on a matter is needed, and thanks to open-ended questions, it allows the emergence of unpredicted topics (Adams, 2015), such as new variables. With this, the interviews fit the double strategy of combining inductive and deductive analyses steps.

3.2. Methods

3.2.1. Choice of case studies

For the selection of appropriate case studies of social innovations aiming at mitigating depopulation trends, a search of cases in Italy was conducted through the internet. To identify which projects were social innovations, the checklist for defining social innovation by Polman et al. (2017) was used. According to Polman et al. (2017: 13), three requirements are needed to identify social innovation as a process:

❖ Presence of a process of reconfiguration of social practices (e.g. relationships/collaborations/networks/institutions/governance structures) in response to societal challenges;

❖ Appearance of the novelty/reconfiguration in new geographical settings or contexts, or concerning previously disengaged social group(s);

❖ Involvement of members of civil society as active participants in the process of novel reconfiguration.

A considerable number of projects that deal with depopulation was found all over Italy. They were merged into five groups according to their problem-solving strategies. The focus of the first group *Labs* (Table 8) is on gathering people together to think of new solutions to address depopulation. The relevant characteristics are creating space for the elaboration of ideas and the cooperation between different actors for the development of the ideas and solutions, similar to laboratories.

The second group *New common space* (Table 9) tends to create or to awake a sense of community and identity, which can generate social well-being and increase the quality of life in communities. These projects favour the socialization and the creation of an identity of the community.
The third group *Adoption of space for new uses* (Table 10) focuses on changing the use of spaces that can be stretches of land or buildings. The projects in this group give new life to existing places and tend to create connections between the owners and users of a location/space.

The fourth group *Co-operation and networks of producers* (Table 11) aims at creating a network between producers operating in marginalised areas, valuing the territory and creating something unique and competitive on the market. Therefore, the focus is on cooperation as a strength for production and commercialization.

Table 8. Name of the projects under the Labs *group and their description.*

Project	Characterization
LAMO	Laboratory about mountains that joins students and local public administration in the Trentino region, in the Alps, to think about innovative projects to develop the region and to make it more attractive. The projects proposed by the teams of students include photography contests among tourists; develop of hiking paths that pass through the local supply chain; formation of young people by the local supply chain; creation of a consortium of the cheese producers to cope with the competition in the cities; attract a special kind of tourism with the introduction of electric wheelchairs and electric bikes.
Active Areas	Project that takes care of two marginalized regions with two projects. 1st) Oltrepò (BIO)diverso, is carried out in a small area in central Italy. It seeks to improve biodiversity as a tool to compete with the attractiveness of the cities. The biodiversity is understood as social, cultural and of-activities biodiversity. They aim to promote scientific research related to the particular local species and breeds, to strengthen the local business, to promote start-ups, to offer more opportunities to young people, immigrants and women. 2nd) Resilient valleys implemented in two valleys in the Alps. The aim is to make two valleys in the Alps cooperate to create services for companies and citizens, to promote the employment of young people and residents, and to strengthen the touristic offer.
Rural Making Lab	Association of young people under the age of 35, born because a PhD student in internal areas wanted to put into practice what he had learnt. They make projects aimed at increasing networks and furthering social development. So far, they restored some abandoned realities in small towns in Calabria (the *toe* of Italy). They restarted the social structure around these realties, making people participate in the process. Once started, they let the projects under the management of local associations. In doing so, they also activate an economic chain for the development of the areas.

Table 9. Name of the projects under the New common space *group and their description.*

Project	Characterization
Herbs' home	Movement founded by Maria Sonia Baldoni. It currently supports about 40 herbs' houses that are a social space, kept always open by the members, where people can dry their plants, collect and cook them together, organize events and formation activities. Through the socialization people appreciate a typical activity of the rural areas, keep the knowledge and the traditions.
Public oven	Once common in every village, the municipality of Rognano (central Italy), and a private owner in Casamassina (in the *heel* of Italy), opened a public oven for the community to promote social aggregation and conviviality. Many young families moved in Rognano thanks to this fresh initiative, and on Christmas Eve, people were in the square to taste the sweet bread offered by the municipality.
CapraUnica's Island	Project born by chance by the choice of a couple to buy two abandoned and crumbling houses and start a co-working project to repopulate and give life again to the abandoned village in the mountains of Liguria. Socializing with the old residents, a continuous flux of people coming and going, the project of an animal sanctuary and a festival gives visibility and life again to a marginalised village.
Succiso	Very small town in the Apennines that in 1990 was about to dye when the last bar closed. A group of young people created a cooperative and managed a new bar, a sheep farm to produce Pecorino cheese, a minimarket and more services. They founded the first Italian community cooperative owned by half of the population of Succiso (all the residents in total are 65). The economy began to flow again bringing tourists and jobs thanks to the cooperative that became a model to fight depopulation.

Table 10. Name of the projects under the Adoption of space for new uses *group and their description.*

Project	Characterization
Adopt a terrace in Brenta channel	Association that takes in loan of use the abandoned terraces from the owners (that moved abroad or just do not cure them) and give them in adoption to the associates. The associates can have a small agricultural activity only paying a membership while contributing to the valuation of the area.
Ancient lands young projects	Project started by an old couple that could no longer take care of the lands they owned. They decided to give them in loan of use to young people through a notice. They created occupation for young people creating economic activity. After their example, other owners joined the project.
Houses for 1 euro	Initiative taken by some Italian municipalities to combat depopulation and degradation in rural areas. People who buy a house for 1€, are obliged to renovate the house. Like this, *Value country walks and paths* is an initiative aimed at renewing the public structures (old guesthouses and inns, towers, small old stations, ancient castles and monuments) along the walking paths of Italy. These structures are meant to become touristic infrastructures such as bed and breakfast and restaurants to stimulate slow tourism on foot and bicycles. The structures are granted free.
Diffuse hospitality	Concept of slow tourism. It can include houses scattered throughout one town used as guest houses for tourists instead of a hotel to give utility to the already-existing houses (i.e. in Valle Camonica); taking part to some traditional activities (local cheese making, baking local pastries with a chef, etc) (i.e. in Vermiglio). It aims at making the towns attractive for tourists, involving them in the community and making them feel home.
TERRAVIVA	Project that faces the problem of abandoned terraces in Borgomezzavalle (in the Alps). They renovate these terraces and make them available at no cost to farmers who want to restore them. In doing so, they put together the private and the public stakeholders and institution through a participatory approach making them feel engaged.
You Farmer	Project that aims to bring people in urban areas closer to farmers in rural areas. People living in the first ones *adopt* a portion of a nearby ecological and biodynamic farm paying a fee. The fee amount corresponds to the extension of the portion of land they have adopted. The farmers grow the food and deliver the products every week to the adopter.
Pentedattilo	Little town in the Calabria region in the south of Italy, famous for its beauty but also for being a ghost village. Thanks to associations and volunteers' camps, it has been brought back to *life* again: there is only one stable resident, while all the houses are artisan and artist shops. It also hosts many events in the summer.

Table 11. Name of the projects under the Co-operation and networks of producers *group and their description.*

Project	Characterization
Butéga Valtellina	Start-up that operates in Valtellina valley in the Alps. It was born from a group of students who, when they finished studying, returned home in Valtellina, and chose to live there to develop the valley. They created a network of local, virtuous, small producers whose products they promote, support and commercialise.
La Bandita	Cooperative responsible for the repopulation of the small town Gerfalco. It involved the young people from a nearby eco-village for the creation of a business based on the old traditional method of treating chestnuts. It also supports sustainable tourism and cultural and traditional activities like local town parties.

The fifth group *Information and training* (Table 12) focuses its project on training, knowledge-sharing and education on how to start a business or working in rural areas. Innovators of this group aim at making a living in rural areas as easy and accessible as possible for those who are interested.

Table 12. Name of the project under the Information and training *group and its description.*

Project	Characterization
A Nursery for Social Farmers	In the Apennine area around Bologna, Francesco Penazzi farm hosts two interns every year and provide them with knowledge in sustainable agriculture through a learning-by-doing approach. The project aims to encourage young people to become farmers and start a farm in the area, or to take over existing farms that need a generational turnover. The depopulation of the area is fought by giving concrete skills and encouraging the birth of new farms.

One project from each group was selected to be analysed more in-depth. Choosing five different strategies allows more variability in the analysis. The five projects serve as a sample to correlate the factors from social innovation literature to depopulation cases. The choice fell on the projects that seemed most representative for each group:

* ❖ *Rural Making Lab* for the group of Laboratories;
* ❖ *CapraUnica*'s *Island* for the group of New common space;
* ❖ *Terraviva* for the group Adoption of space for new uses;
* ❖ *Butéga Valtellina* for the group of Cooperation and network of producers;
* ❖ *A Nursery for Social Farmers* for the group of Information and training.

3.2.2. Semi-structured interviews

For each project, semi-structured interviews were carried out during summer 2019 and one in spring 2020. Most interviews were conducted in person at the project's location (Table13). The interviews related to *Rural making Lab* project and a few more interviews were conducted by phone when it was too difficult to organise a personal meeting with the interviewees. In total, 11 people were interviewed, each lasting between 30 minutes to an hour. The informants comprise at least the initiator of each project or additional representatives from the case studies.

The interviews were done and recorded with prior agreement, either written or oral, of the informants. A few interviews were not recorded because they happened in an informal and spontaneous setting. Anyway, the consent to use the information was always asked, even though it is used anonymously. The full names of the persons mentioned by the informants are given whenever they can be found also in other online sources. Otherwise, their surname is not mentioned.

Table 13. List of interviews conducted for the study for each project. For the interviews conducted in person, the location is provided. Some took place in an informal setting and were not recorded.

	Reference	Interviewee	Date	Modality	Location
Rural Making Lab					
On phone	Int 1	Giuseppe Mangano	12/8/2019	Recorded	
	Int 2	Consuelo Nava	29/3/2020	Recorded	
CapraUnica's Island					
In-person	Int 3	Luca Andrea Marazzini	25/07/2019	Recorded	Caprauna, CN
	Int 4	D.	26/07/2019	Informal	Caprauna, CN
On phone	Int 5	Daniel Tarozzi	30/07/2019	Recorded	
Terraviva					
In-person	Int 6	Lucia Pompilio	18/9/2019	Recorded	Viganella, VB
	Int 7	Ivano De Negri	18/9/2019	Recorded	Varzo, VB
	Int 8	Claudio Minacci	18/9/2019	Recorded	Varzo, VB
Butéga Valtellina					
In-person	Int 9	Giorgio Gobetti	26/06/2019	Recorded	Tirano, SO
	Int 10	Producers (three)	26/06/2019	Informal	Tirano, SO
On phone	Int 11	Giorgio Gobetti	17/10/2019	Recorded	
A Nursery for Social Farmers					
In-person	Int 12	Francesco Penazzi	29/7/2019	Recorded	Rocca Corneta, BO

The same interview guide (Annex 1) was used for all the interviews, to obtain comparable data, but it was adapted to the case study and to the role of the interviewee in the project. It was not followed strictly to allow a spontaneous flow. For a better understanding of the cases, where possible, more than one person was interviewed. The interview guide comprised seven main questions about 1) emergence of the project, 2) actors involved and their role, 3) particularly supportive factors, 4) information needed and process to obtain it, 5) difficulties encountered, 6) changes noted after the project, 7) plans. More sub-questions helped to stay on the topic and lead the conversation.

Besides interviews, other sources of information were used for the investigation of the cases. These include the projects- websites, online articles and other material that refer to the projects or helpful to understand the context of the projects (Table 14).

Table 14. List of sources used to integrate the interviews. For each project, the type of source and the citation as given in the text is given.

Project	Source type	Citation
Rural making Lab	Pensando Meridiano website	"Pensando Meridiano website", 2020
	PMopenlab website	"PMopenlab website", 2020
	Giuseppe Mangano's doctoral thesis	Mangano et al., 2019
	Article on website	Mangano, 2018
	Pamphlet	Pensando Meridiano, 2018
	Association statute	Mangano et al., 2013
CapraUnica's Island	CapraUnica's Island website	"CapraUnica's Island website", 2020
	Articles on website	Maraini, 2019 Tarozzi, 2017 "Economia in Liguria", n.d.
	Crowdfunding campaign	Produzioni dal basso, 2017
	Podcast	Casarin, 2016
Terraviva	Terraviva website	"Terraviva website", 2020
	Call for projects	Fondazione Cariplo, 2017
	YouTube video	Fondazione Cariplo, 2017, March 3
Butéga Valtellina	Butéga Valtellina website	"Butéga Valtellina website" 2020
	Article on website	La provincia di Sondrio, 2018 Cliclavoro, n.d.
	Iconographic timeline rappresentation	Time.graphics, 2017
A Nursery for Social Farmers	Call for projects	Grameen Italia, 2017 ISMEA, 2019
	YouTube video	Penazzi, 2017
	Articles on website	Aledda, 2019 Bolognacares, 2020 Baratta, 2019 SIMPROIMI, 2020
	Social Challenge Innovation Platform	https://www.socialchallenges.eu/en-GB/community/4

3.2.3. Analysis

The interviews were transcribed, and wherever there was some missing or unclear information, the interviewee was contacted again. The projects' websites, articles and other material found online were used to integrate the interviews and obtain a complete picture. Through coding, patterns of variables were identified. Reports (Chapter 4.1) were produced containing the detailed reconstruction of the projects' processes which constitute the inductive part of the study. The reports are organized into eight sections:

- ❖ Core activity, that explains what the project is about;

- ❖ Background and problem, that provides the context;

- ❖ Motivation and knowledge, that contains information about the motivation and knowledge's themes of variables from Chapter 2;

- ❖ Organizational aspects and interactions, that contains information about the organization and interactions' themes;

- ❖ Economic and policy support, that contains information about the economic support and policy's themes;

- ❖ Supporting and hindering factors, that reports the interviewees' opinions about what worked better or worse;

- ❖ Plans, that contains how the project is expected to develop;

- ❖ Conclusions, that contains some additional considerations.

As it may be noted, all the variables' themes from the literature review were taken up in the study except for the scalability, since this thesis aims to focus on the factors responsible for the emergence of the innovations. In the analysis of each project, which constitutes the deductive part (Chapter 4.2), each variable of each theme was considered separately project by project and evidenced through quotes or inferred when a quote was not present. The relevance of each variable for each project (Chapter 4.2) was assessed according to the author's perception of all collected data. Finally, in the comparative analysis (Chapter 4.3), all the variables' assessments of each project were compared.

3.2.4. Validity and reliability

Validity and reliability are common criteria used in quantitative research to assess the quality of the results (Mikkelsen, 2005). Reliability is the production of similar results after the observations have been repeated using the same instruments under identical conditions. Validity is the assurance that what is measured is accurate and reflects the truth or reality (Mikkelsen, 2005). In qualitative research, validity and reliability are often replaced by similar concepts, which capture the same issues: *trustworthiness, refutability, neutrality, authenticity, transferability, applicability, credibility, consistency, dependability, confirmability* (Mikkelsen, 2005; Shenton, 2004). One of the tools used for checking validity is triangulation (Shenton, 2004), which is seeing the same issue from different directions, may it be by engaging different data collection methods (method triangulation), interviewing different persons within the same case (data triangulation)or involving different people in the data collection and analysis (researcher triangulation). In this thesis,

triangulation was ensured by checking the information from the interviews with other information found online, interviewing more people related to the same project when possible. Frequent debriefing sessions with the supervisors of this thesis helped to define the best way of approach and to broaden the view (Shenton, 2004). Assessing the reliability of a qualitative study may be problematic, because often research in the same topic is not present, and because the observations are dependent on the situation when the study was carried out (Shenton, 2004). A detailed description of the processes within the study and the transparency of the procedures engaged in this study enable future researchers to repeat the investigation and foster public confidence in the data (Mikkelsen, 2005; Shenton, 2004).

4. Results and analysis

4.1. Case study reports

In this section, the case studies are presented in reports after the information has been collected through interviews and resources found online.

4.1.1. Rural Making Lab

The Rural Making Lab is a method that aims to trigger reasoning, processes, and sustainable social innovation, and at the same time regenerate physical parts of the territory. The idea was born in 2016 in Calabria region, in the south of Italy.

Core activities

This tactic was applied during temporary experimental laboratories (or workshops) in three internal and marginalized villages, which are Zagarise, Belmonte, and Gallicianò for the duration of a maximum of five days.

Figure 1. Map of Italy showing the different regions with the location of Reggio Calabria marked.

The laboratories aimed at the physical restoration of the territory and the landscape, such as deteriorated and devalued items: an old historical fountain, ancient wash basins, walking trail, a cave full of trash. Some of the items restored were given a new purpose or new use. The restoration of the territory was accompanied by communication and territorial marketing such as the installation of informational panels for the use of visitors and tourists, as well as the involvement of the local communities. Before the actual laboratory, a much longer learning phase took place in Reggio Calabria (Figure 2), in the headquarters of the association. In this phase, young people from Calabria and other regions of the south of Italy under the age of 35 met to co-work, co-design and to study the

places. The history, the cultural commitments, the landscape and maps were studied and, sometimes visits to the places beforehand took place. The project was implemented by the association Pensando Meridiano that carries out activities about cultural and social innovation, one of which has been Rural Making Lab ("Pensando Meridiano website", 2020). The association Pensando Meridiano was founded in 2013 by five young people. Currently, the members include three founding members, 16 ordinaries, and four supporting members. The ordinary members are active and constituted by people under the age of 35, while the supporting members are occasional participants constituted by people over the age of 35 (Mangano et al., 2013; Pensando Meridiano, 2018). The members are students, PhD students or graduated. Giuseppe Mangano is the president and founder of Pensando Meridiano. He is the initiator of Rural Making Lab together with professor Consuelo Nava, the projects' scientific coordinator of the association, and researcher at the Department of Architecture and Landscape, and responsible of the *ABITA* centre (Bioecological Architecture and Technological Innovation for the Environment) at the Mediterranean University of Reggio Calabria. Rural Making Lab became Mangano's PhD project at the University of Calabria in the Department of Science and Engineer of Environment, Constructions and Energies.

Some of the members, Giuseppe Mangano included, work now in the start-up *PMopenlab*, born in 2017 from the experience of Pensando Meridiano ("Pensando Meridiano website", 2020).

Background and problem

In Calabria, the phenomenon of depopulation does not only occur in marginalized areas but spreads across the whole region. The interviewee mentioned a problem that relates to the whole south of Italy, namely the poor competitiveness and initiative, which causes a lack of businesses, lack of funding, lack of foresight (Int 1). This leads to a weak economy with the consequence that many people move to the north of Italy or abroad. The abandonment and the consequent lack of care led to the impoverishment of the territorial and human capital. In 2018, Calabria was the region with the highest migration rate within Italy. The flux regards mostly young people with high educational levels that move to the north of Italy leaving an old and decreasing population behind (SVIMEZ, 2019). According to the National Institute of Statistics, the average age in Calabria in 2020 is 44, while the total growth rate per thousand inhabitants is -7.9 (I.Stat, 2020). Regarding internal areas, 77.80% of Calabria's territory is classified as internal, with approximately half of the population living there (Pensando Meridiano, 2018). In 2015 Calabria adopted the National Strategy for the Internal Areas and developed the Regional Strategy for the Internal Areas. The main focuses of the strategies are on the protection of natural and cultural resources, the landscape, and agriculture.

Other areas that require resources are tourism, craftsmanship, sustainable energy, and social mobility (Pensando Meridiano, 2018). It is on areas selected as internal by the strategies, that Rural Making Lab chose to act on. The three places of activity are small and old villages. Belmonte counts about 2000 inhabitants, Zagarise about 1500, and Gallicianò is a small district of 60 inhabitants, where ancient Greek is still the main language spoken. The first village is classified as intermediate (letter D in Figure 1), while the other two are classified as remote (letter E in Figure 1).

Motivation and knowledge

After graduation in 2013, Giuseppe Mangano and other young people decided to stay in Calabria but with a different perspective for the future compared to the regular academics. Therefore, they created the association Pensando Meridiano that innovatively applies their professions. The motivation was to offer employment to young people because it is the only way to avoid their departure outside Calabria (Int 1).

For his PhD research, Giuseppe Mangano gathered information through the internet, but also by getting directly in contact with the technical committee for the internal areas, those who wrote the National Strategy for the Internal Areas, actively participating together with them to the scouting phase that led to the identification of the internal areas (Int 1).

The members of the association acquire knowledge and skills through courses about photography, storytelling, 3d printing, laser-cut, or anything that the association needs. Pensando Meridiano covers the expenses of this education. By doing so, the association invests in its members' professional skills needed for the activities, instead of hiring professionals (Int 1). Apart from this education, the members acquired competencies and expertise through their university studies. Pensando Meridiano also relies on the experience of experts for guidance and counselling.

Organisational aspects and interactions

Rural Making Lab was active from 2016 to 2018. In every workshop organized there were four groups. One group took charge of researching on the territory and gathering all information such as socio-technical data, demographic and migratory flux data, landscape, cultural and economic values, and potentials in a dossier. A second group oversaw the storytelling aspect documenting the activity through photographs and video production used on the association's website and in presentations of the project. The third group called *eco-design* was dealing with designing, producing, manufacturing the materials used during the laboratories. The last group called *Creative Cultural Projects* was in charge of collecting all the information from the first group,

think of how and with which technology to transmit the knowledge to the visitors, and instructing the third group (Int 1; Pensando Meridiano, 2018).

The association Pensando Meridiano was already carrying out laboratories of social cohesion and sustainability in an urban context. Giuseppe Mangano then decided to apply the same methodology in his PhD project. He developed the idea of the Rural Making Lab together with professor Consuelo Nava, who was collaborating with the association as a scientific project coordinator. She leads the ABITA (Bioecological Architecture and Technological Innovation for the Environment) research centre of the Mediterranean University of Reggio Calabria, present also in many Italian universities on the topic of technology, architecture, and sustainable energy. ABITA has been a scientific partner of the association Pensando Meridiano since its beginning (Int 2). Professor Consuelo Nava followed Giuseppe Mangano as an external tutor for the whole period of his PhD (Int 2). Besides professor Consuelo Nava, Giuseppe Mangano had as tutors professor Girolamo Giordano at the University of Calabria (Mangano et al., 2019) and professor Franco Rossi, a regional councillor for urban planning in Calabria (Int 1).

The laboratories were carried out by young people under the age of 35. Some of them were members of the association, others were university students gathered through an open call. The fields of expertise of the participants were different, so they were landscapers, architects, jurists, journalists, experts in history and conservations, etc. The Regional Council of Calabria and the municipalities where the laboratories took place sponsored the activities and were economically and morally supportive from the beginning. The actors involved in the project's process are displayed in Figure 3.

Economic and policy support

Pensando Meridiano adopted an approach of managing its finances called *social funding*. It is a circular method for the management of the economy. Membership fees, external donations, crowdfunding campaigns, and reimbursement of expenditures like travel stipend, etc. obtained from activities commissioned by third parties, are employed in the implementation of more activities, maintenance of the communication channels, purchase of goods, and education of the association's members (i.e. participation to courses to acquire new skills). In short, every revenue the association generates is invested again in the association. Rural Making Lab was carried out at a very low cost because many instrumental resources used were already in possession of the association (Int 2). The activities were sponsored by the regional council of Calabria, through reimbursement of expenses that were invested in the purchase of equipment in line with the circular economy method. They were also sponsored by the municipalities that hosted the workshops.

Some enterprises with which they had collaborated and worked before also sponsored the laboratories providing projectors for light projections and giving them material which the members recycled to make information totems, temporary rooms, etc. (Int 1).
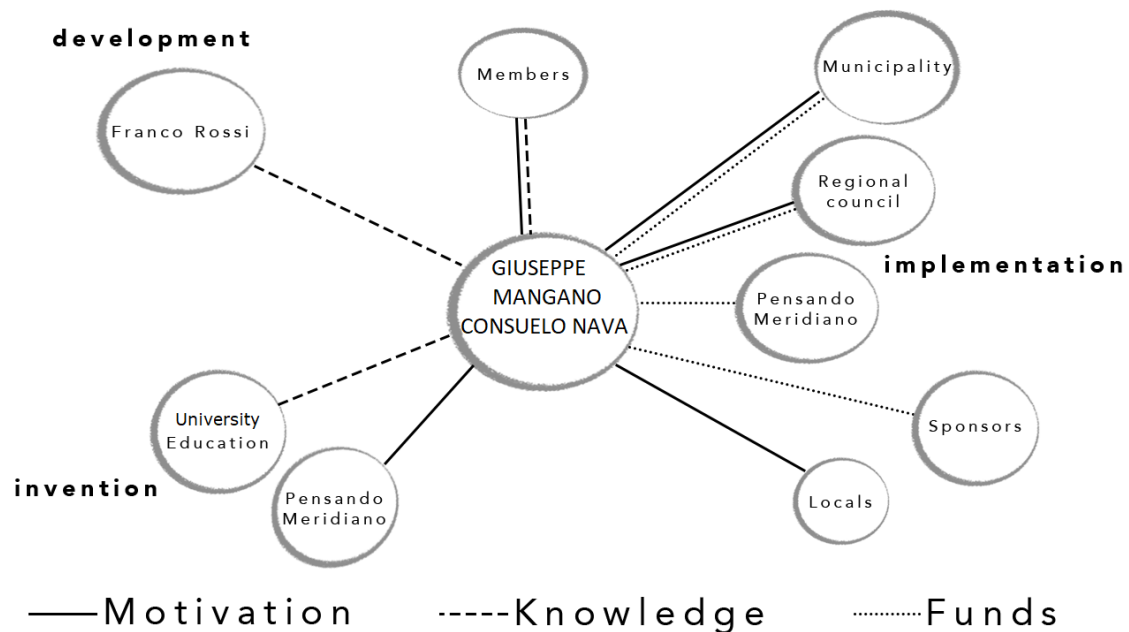

Figure 3. Relationship of the actors involved divided into 3 development stages. Invention in the left down corner, development in the left up corner and implementation on the right. The lines reflect the different type of contribution made by the actors.

Supporting and hindering factors

One supporting factor was the early involvement of the local institutions. Their involvement was easy because Giuseppe Mangano could quickly gain their trust. He said that proposing feasible, easy-to-handle projects make the institutions more likely to give their support rather than proposing too ambitious and big projects (Int 1). If they would have set too unrealistic goals, they would not have gained the institutions' trust. Moreover, activities that make people work together is in general supported by institutions, because they can stop depopulation in the whole region of Calabria. Also, the private sponsors' involvement was relatively easy because they were already part of Pensando Meridiano's network thanks to previous collaborations and working relationships (Int 1).

Another factor mentioned by one of the initiators was the participation of young people, who are open to innovation, to digital technologies and that are sensitive to the theme of sustainability, cities, and fragile contexts (Int 2). The careful planning of the laboratories, carried out by Giuseppe

Mangano, also played an important role. Giuseppe Mangano studied the National and Regional Strategies for the Internal Areas very well and set clear objectives. Besides, his ability to involve the active actors was determining (Int 2). Professor Consuelo Nava eventually mentioned that the fact that the experimentation of the Rural Making Lab was carried out in villages with communities very different from each other, gave interesting results in terms of transferability of this tactic (Int 2).

According to the initiators, major difficulties were not encountered. Professor Consuelo Nava talked about the difficulty in passing the experience of territorial laboratories and incorporating it into policies in a short time. The interviewee stressed that the findings of the territorial laboratories have not been transferred to regional planning, because of the lack of direct contact with the people in the right position. The risk is that the laboratories end in themselves, without being transferred in development models for the progress of internal areas (Int 2).

Plans

The project Rural Making Lab has been active from 2016 to 2019. The association Pensando Meridiano is now involved in other activities. Moreover, from the association, a start-up called PMopenlab was born, which transformed these projects and activities in employment services. Giuseppe Mangano is currently working for the start-up together with four people also involved in the association. PMopenlab is registered as an innovative start-up in the register of companies of Reggio Calabria since 2018 ("PMopenlab website", 2020).

Conclusions

Participation in the laboratories has been high. The members of the association found innovative the way of being on the territories and the sharing of a mission (Int 1). In Belmonte, there were 43 young people, in Zagarise 25 and in Gallicinò 18 respectively. The laboratories were also received very well by the local communities. There were 500 people in Zagarise at the inauguration of the installations. Through these projects, the innovators were able to value the natural and cultural heritage with physical restoration and to transfer the knowledge with the aid of informative posts and panels, to the participants and each of the local communities. They managed to make the places appealing for tourism and to increase the general well-being of the locals, and at the same time to make young people feel engaged and to boost their desire to be active on the land.

According to one initiator, the innovative aspect lays in the involvement of the stakeholders through obtaining their partnership, before beginning the laboratories. In this way, they ensured that the transfer of knowledge would not arrive top-down (Int 2). This made it possible for Rural

Making Lab to answer the strategies with a bottom-up approach, without being an activity planned by the strategies and therefore, without being financed by the strategies, but instead being born from the willingness of the people to act. The application of digital technologies to the themes of communication and social innovation was also innovative and required the collaboration of many fields of expertise (Int 2).

The Rural Making Lab project was also innovative as a PhD research because it addresses the issue of internal areas using regenerative actions through participatory processes, technology, and eco-design, while other PhD researches address it from governance, programming, and planning, or community cooperatives (Int 1). Rural Making Lab was successful to combine academic knowledge with practical application on the field experimenting a tactic that had been born before thanks to the commitment of many actors, students, and experts.

4.1.2. CapraUnica's Island

CapraUnica's Island (*L'isola di CapraUnica* in Italian) is a project designed to repopulate a village in the Alps through the renovation of houses in deteriorated state and the triggering of activities aimed at bringing people there.

Core activities

The first goal of this repopulation project was to restore the houses that were about to fall apart and to buy the abandoned ones to give them a new use. After that, the innovators generated an influx of people coming to the village for tourism and temporary residents. They did so organizing events like yoga and theatre workshops, hosting social dinners, welcoming volunteers, using one house as a co-working space that smart workers or artists use for short or long periods, and using one house to be rented to tourists. Thanks to this influx of people they hope to trigger the need of necessary basic services like bars and cafés, which in turn will give jobs to local people. This activates a virtuous cycle in which the increasing number of people leads to an increase in demand for services which in turn requires more people (Int 3; Maraini, 2019).

The project was started by a group from Milan, Luca Andrea Marazzini, Vittoria Bortolazzo and D. Luca Andrea Marazzini and D. were both working in the event business in the city and in 2015 they decided to purchase two houses in Caprauna and to go to live there, while Vittoria Bortolazzo, who had her private business in Milan, followed afterwards.

Background and problem

CapraUnica's Island got its name from the municipality in which the project is based, namely Caprauna, in the Alps of west Italy (Figure 4), in the province of Cuneo, in Piemonte region, even though it is part of Pennavaira Valley, which stretches mostly in Liguria region. It is about 30 km from Albenga, a seaside resort on the Ligurian coast. The main economic resource of Liguria is tourism ("Economia in Liguria", n.d.) while Piemonte is more dependent on the industry. The project involves only Ruora, the highest of the five districts of Caprauna's municipality. Caprauna was a village of goat shepherds (Int 3), with now only a few inhabitants left. Compared to 1960, the population decreased by 31%, and in 2018, only 104 people were registered in the whole Caprauna (I.Stat, 2020). The cause lies in economic reason because people move to cities in the search of a stable and secure income, a problem that affects many high parts of Italy. Now there are still 2 shepherds that have animals, but their activity is just of sustenance and to keep the tradition alive since they do not make enough income to create a business out of it. Most of the people in Caprauna are retired or work in neighbouring centres (like Ormea, Savona and Albenga). The only economic activity that takes place in Caprauna itself is a grocery store (Casarin, 2016).

In Ruora district it can be witnessed that the houses are one hundred years old or more with dry stone walls (Int 3), but many are deteriorating because of the disuse. The problem mentioned by the initiators is the fragmentation of the village because in between the few inhabitants there are abandoned houses, which makes it difficult to create a social fabric (Casarin, 2016).

One of the interviewed innovators does not see the decaying houses as a burden but as a potential (Int 3) for the beauty of the place, which has a view to the sea, and it is surrounded by the forest. The first objectives of the project were to restore the houses to make them habitable and to give visibility to the village. Therefore, they started to host some small events such as dinners and workshops that could

Figure 4. Map of Italy showing the different regions with the location of Caprauna marked.

bring people there in the hope that some might buy a house and move there revitalizing the village again. This program is mainly targeted at people with seasonal jobs, or anyhow flexible that are not bound to strict office hours. Even though three big cities (Milan, Turin and Genoa) are reachable in less than three hours by car, a characteristic that places Caprauna in a good location, commuting every day would be difficult.

Motivation and knowledge

Luca Andrea Marazzini knew about the place first of all because he had visited a friend there for about three years in a row with his camper (Int 3; Maraini, 2019). It was during these visits that he fell in love with the place and decided to buy a house there. The house he was interested in, however, was not on sale for an affordable price in the beginning. Later, the friend informed him that the house's price had been lowered, so Marazzini asked his friend and colleague D. if he wanted to share the cost for it.

The main driver for the innovators to buy the first house in Caprauna was to find a place of peace and happiness (Int 3; "CapraUnica's Island website", 2020), according to them, happiness means close contact with nature and freedom of creating and to decide of their time, they moved away from the city centre. In the beginning, the house was used as a summer house. Luca Andrea Marazzini then moved in permanently because of the birth of his first daughter, and the will to raise her in close contact with nature (Int 3; Maraini, 2019), while D. kept his house in Milan too for job reason, but began spending more time in Caprauna once they started the project. The driver that made them start a repopulation project, was the need of having other people around, to not feel too isolated (Int 3) since they are very social people.

Luca Andrea Marazzini and D. have skills regarding video-making for promotion, organization of events, etc from their profession. Marazzini himself is the owner of an event production company where he mainly directs and coordinates the tasks, a skill that was useful in CapraUnica's Island too (Casarin, 2016; Mariani, 2019).

For the structural and more technical works about houses renovation, they made use of architects and engineers, but mostly they worked first-hand (Tarozzi, 2017) with a learning by doing approach.

Organizational aspects and interactions

Luca Andrea Marazzini and D. know each other because of their work. They are both from Milan working as event managers (Int 3; Int 4; Maraini, 2019). The idea of buying the first two houses came from Luca Andrea Marazzini, but he needed D.'s help with splitting the cost. They bought

the first houses intending to use them as a summer house. The entry of Marazzini's partner, Vittoria Bortolazzo, determined the birth of the project of CapraUnica's Island intending to repopulate the area again. The creation of a family always brings long-term stability, so the three of them set out to create the project (Int 3). At first, they were not welcomed by the local community who found it hard to accept foreigners. An additional factor was that those houses were previously inhabited by a group of young foreigners who were smoking and using drugs. Luca Andrea Marazzini said that it was very important for him to feel accepted by the community, which happened eventually, and that the most relevant sign of acceptance came from the village's shepherd, according to Marazzini a gruff and surly man, who gave them his houses and fields (see also the economic support section below). In 2017, they met Daniel Tarozzi, journalist and editor director of the web newspaper *Italia che cambia* (Changing Italy) that writes about innovative realities in Italy (Int 5). Daniel Tarozzi was told about CapraUnica's Island by a friend and created a video and an article about the project (Tarozzi, 2017). This brought visibility to the project and, since Tarozzi lives six minutes by car from them, he continues to collaborate by bringing groups of visitors in guided tours (Int 5).

They also host volunteers that have helped them with the renovation. In particular, they have had five long-term volunteers. Two of them were a couple from France, who came through the web platform *Workaway*; two others have now bought a house nearby and moved there (Int 3). It was a big help to have these long-term volunteers, even though the relationship sometimes was a bit tense because of different expectations from the volunteers' side and unclear communication. However, the experience has taught them to be more prepared and organized at hosting people. The interaction with the short-term volunteers, on the other hand, was less complicated and no tension occurred (Int 3). Figure 5 is a scheme of all the actors involved in each stage of the project.

Economic and policy support

Almost every expense was self-funded by the three initiators, who kept their main income jobs in Milan trying to make it as flexible as possible since 2016 so that they could have more free time to invest in the project (Int 3; Maraini, 2019). To contribute to the purchase of the first two houses, Luca Andrea Marazzini sold his camper that had the same value of his share of the house. Even though the innovators did not make use of any public funds, they got some support from private sources. In fact, after the acquisition of the first two houses, they decided to buy the two ones in between, owned by the village's shepherd mentioned above. He gave them the houses for free along with the fields attached (Int 3; Maraini, 2019) and even paid the fee (about €2700) for the transfer from the rural land registry to the urban land registry (Int 3). Other two houses were sold

for €3500, and a third person gave them his field for free. For the whole renovation of a roof, they made use of crowdfunding that served to cover half of the work's cost, namely €6.000 in total. The crowdfunding campaign was published on an Italian platform, specific for crowdfunding called *Produzioni dal Basso* (Bottom-up productions). To make the campaign more appealing CapraUnica's Island made available some sort of reward besides the free donation option. For example, with €5 people could have their names written on a plate under the roof, and with €1000 they could be hosted for a weekend at the project (Produzioni dal basso, 2017).
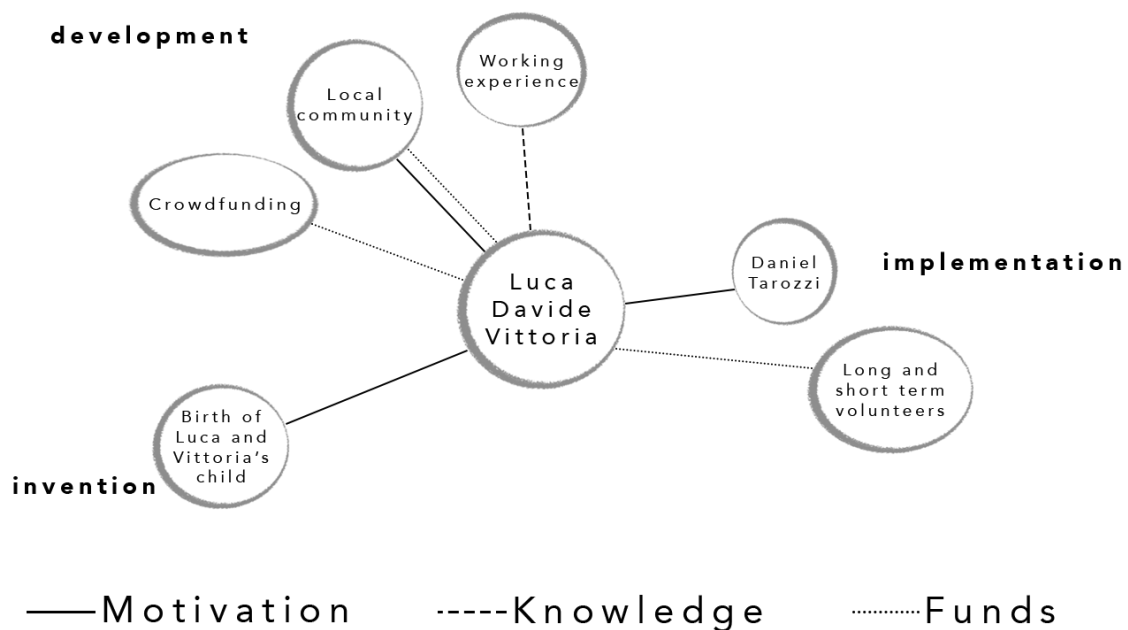

Figure 5. Relationship of the actors involved in CapraUnica's Island divided into three development stages. Invention in the left down corner, development in the left up corner and implementation on the right. The lines reflect the different type of contribution.

Besides self-funding, the way they use to sustain their economy comes from the events they organize for the project and from the offers from the people who stop by (not volunteers). They have been hosting people interested in the project and in the area, who have stayed just for one night, or people who wanted to try to live there that have stayed longer (Int 3).

No public economic support was used, partly because the local mayor was not willing to give his support (see the following section), partly because of the complicated bureaucracy. For example, the innovators lost the deadline of the call for tenders for the Establishment of Young People in Agriculture, edited by ISMEA, the Institute of Services for the Agricultural Market. The call provided for an economic contribution of €70.000 to newly established farmers under the age of

40 (Int 3; ISMEA, 2019). The innovators were eligible for this support because in the last few years they have begun growing white turnips which is a crop native to the region, becoming the second producers in Caprauna. Even if they asked the help of a professional to prepare the application to the call, they missed the deadline because of its complexity (Int 3).

Supporting and hindering factors

Maybe the most relevant factor for success lies in Luca Andrea Marazzini's charismatic personality. He put a lot of effort in getting integrated into the community, talking to locals and become known. The interviewee mentioned that having a baby helped to build confidence with the locals because a young family is much more trusted than the turbulent group that lived there before. Also, that not been alone in the project was fundamental (Int 3).

A hindering factor was the relationship with the local mayor (Int 3; Maraini, 2019). Together with Daniel Tarozzi, Marazzini had proposed to create a *Department of Happiness* that would have been in charge to bring together all the summer events of the four municipalities of Pennavaira valley, in a single three-months-long summer festival, with a common communication (Int 6; Int 8). The idea aimed at giving more visibility to the already existing events and to promote them also abroad, in France and Germany, since they are already attended by some foreigners. The proposal was welcomed by three of the mayors of Pennavaira valley's municipalities (namely Alto, Nasino, Castelbianco), but not by Caprauna's mayor who was not interested in this idea, thus the proposal was never put into practice. The rejection from the side of the mayor probably came from a misinterpretation of intentions: Luca Andrea Marazzini's dedication to the village's life (also political) and his fast-paced way of doing things was typical for the culture of Milan but not for Caprauna and was probably falsely misinterpreted as an intrusion.

Plans

The project now covers an area of about 1500 m2 that includes fields and a dozen buildings (Maraini, 2019; Produzioni dal basso, 2017). Some of the buildings are from the 1980s, once used as summer houses and later abandoned, so for these houses only a new owner and some renovation was needed. Three houses were older and at risk of falling apart, so the initiators did some important restoration. The plan now is to stop buying and develop these properties that they already have. One house contains two apartments that can be rented for holidays, another one is used to accommodate the volunteers, and the third is used as a co-working space with video-projector, printers, computers. Installation of a satellite and WiMAX connection allows for remote working (Casarin, 2016). They have hosted many short-term volunteers and five long-term volunteers, two

of which have settled in Caprauna even though they do not collaborate with the project anymore. Also, a family newly moved there and became part of the project (Int 3).

For the future, the goal is to make the community grow more, make the flux of volunteers and co-workers grow more (Int 3; Tarozzi, 2017), and to start more cultivations to use and develop the territory's resources. They plan to experiment with other types of products like hemp to increase the number of people that could carry on these new activities in the future (Int 3).

Conclusions

The evident aspect of CapraUnica's Island is that the community's drive relies on a few energetic people. Luca Andrea Marazzini has a very charismatic personality, and the whole project could not exist without him, because it was his will to move there at the beginning. The sign of the success of the project is that the mayor (even though he does not sympathize with Marazzini) built a new larger street leading to the Ruora district because he saw that people are starting to go to live there again.

As stated by the initiators, this social innovation aims to have a bottom-up approach, in the sense of facing the problem of the village abandonment taking action first-hand. They realized that a recovery plan is not existing for Caprauna, therefore they decided not to focus on institution's deficiencies, but on their own strengths (Produzioni dal basso, 2017). The social aspect is very strong in this innovation because of all the people who contributed to the project, and because of the good communication from the initiators with the locals that allowed them to gain the locals' trust and support toward the project.

4.1.3. Terraviva

Terraviva is the acronym for *Terrazzamenti a Viganella in Valle Antrona* (Terraces in Viganella in Antrona Valley). The term is also evocative since it can be translated as *alive land*. It is a project that has lasted for two years, from March 2017 until September 2019.

Core activities

The objective of the project was the economic and environmental recovery of 6000 m² of terraces in the little town of Viganella, in the municipality of Borgomezzavalle (Figure 6). For this purpose, the terraces were cleaned from the bushes and thorns, the drywalls were restored. Once these works were completed, they made a contract with two farmers allowing them to cultivate the terraces again without paying any rent. A second objective was to involve the local population so that once

the two-years-long project was accomplished, the terraces could continue to be taken care of. For this purpose, a land association called *Terraviva* like the project was created. Besides the involvement of the local population, also activity of environmental education was carried out in two schools. Children were taught the importance and the role of the terraces and took a school trip to Viganella to see them, to make the project and the topic known by many people.

The project was a collaboration between the *Natural Science Society of the Verbano Cusio Ossola Area* (a non-profit organization and leader of the project), the management body of the Ossola's protected areas (responsible for the *Natural Park Alta Valle Antrona*), the cooperative *Il Sogno*, and Borgomezzavalle municipality.

Background and problem

Viganella is a little town of 13,7 km2 in the Alps close to Switzerland, in the Italian region of Piemonte. In 2015, Viganella counted 162 inhabitants, about 40% less compared to 1960. In 2016, Viganella has been merged with Seppiana to create the municipality of Borgomezzavalle (Figure 6) that in 2018 counted 319 inhabitants (I.Stat, 2020). Viganella is included in the Natural Park Alta Valle Antrona, which in turn is part of the Ossola's protected areas. The municipality is surrounded by mountains, the hillsides of which were historically cultivated with potatoes and rye utilizing terraces. Most of the terraces are now abandoned and in many of them the forest is taking over with the consequence that the drywalls are crumbling (Int 7). The disintegration of the drywall can be dangerous for the villages under the slopes because it increases the risk of mudslides (Int 8). The terraces near Viganella have been studied by an architect a few years before the start of the project to check the conditions of the drywalls. Based on the findings of that study, the project of Terraviva was born (Int 6).

Figure 2. Map of Italy showing the different regions with the location of Borgomezzavalle marked.

The terraces are also subject to the problem of fragmentation of the properties (or pulverization), meaning that each property is very small (100 m2 the biggest) because

they were divided among the heirs at the death of the previous owner. Moreover, in some cases, a piece of land is registered to many owners (that can be uncles, sons, nephews, etc), who mostly live somewhere else, and not necessarily know where their properties lie (Int 7). The consequence is that these terraces remain uncultivated and unused.

Motivation and knowledge

One of the drivers behind the project was the environmental problems, which were addressed by the Natural Science Society. They had many ideas for possible projects and they were waiting for the opportunity to implement one. Their purpose with the Terraviva project was to demonstrate that an environmental recovery of the area could increase the biodiversity of the landscape (Int 6). The second driver was to protect the valley from landslides due to a combination of steepness and heavy rains. The reason why they wanted them to be cultivated was to recover their historical and economical use, but also to prevent that, once restored, they would degrade again in a short period. The purpose of the creation of the association was to ensure that the project would have continuity beyond this one project (Int 7).

The whole project was based on a call for projects by Cariplo Foundation. This call with the title *Comunità resilienti* (Resilient communities), aimed at giving funding to projects that enhance the territory, the local products or the quality of life (Fondazione Cariplo, 2017). Cariplo Foundation was already known by all the actors. The management body of the Ossola's protected areas (referred in the following as the *park*) had already participated to calls and had already been funded by it. The Natural Science Society itself had been keeping Cariplo Foundation's calls monitored for two-three years to find a suitable one to apply for (Int 6). All the innovators also had experience in carrying out and managing projects. What was completely new for them was the creation of the association, also because it was a new kind of association (called *land association*) just established by the Piemonte region to tackle the problem of land fragmentation. Terraviva contacted and met the few already existing associations of these kinds in Piemonte to gain information. They also contacted professor Cavallero from the University of Turin from the Department of Agriculture, Forest and Food Science, who had helped to draft the law about land associations. They invited him for a conference to explain how the law and the association work. They found Cavallero's name on the internet when they were searching for projects similar to Terraviva (Int 8).

Organizational aspects and interactions

When the president of the Natural Science Society, Lucia Pompilio, saw the call for projects from Cariplo Foundation, she saw the opportunity for a project. They partnered up with the park who had also interest in renovating the terraces. Lucia Pompilio and the Natural Science Society had

already worked with the park and its president Ivano De Negri in previous collaborations (Int 6). The park then involved the mayor of the municipality of Viganella, the cooperative Il Sogno and employed a project manager called Daniele Piazza. The call allowed only non-profit organizations to apply, which the Natural Science Society happens to be, so it became the leader of the project. The park had already worked with the cooperative Il Sogno and with Daniele Piazza in other projects and had already had contacts with the mayor since the municipality is part of the nature park (Int 7). The project was well organized from the beginning, including the division of duties between the actors. During the development of the project, a land association was created, the president of which is Claudio Minacci, who was one of the park's councillors and had been deputy-mayor when the project started. The actual work on the terraces was carried out by a company found through a call for tender. At the end of the project, a similar call was made to find two farmers who were willing to cultivate the terraces (Int 6). These actions were planned during the call-of-project application process. All the actors involved in the project are displayed in Figure 7.
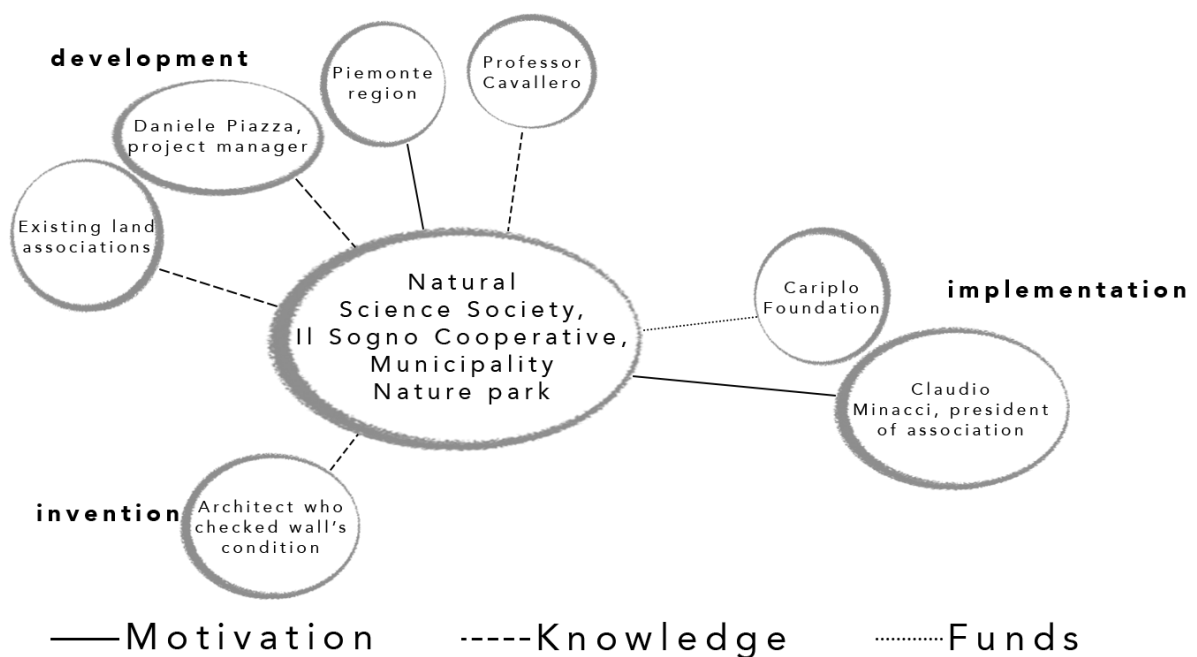
Figure 7. Relationship of the actors involved divided into 3 development stages. Invention in the left down corner, development in the left up corner and implementation on the right. The lines reflect the different type of contribution made by the actors.

Economic and policy support

The total cost of the project amounted to €200.000. Cariplo Foundation contributed 60% of the sum, while the 40% left was self-funded. This 40% was covered as the labour cost of the staff. All

the hours spent to prepare documents or make info meeting, have been reported as cost in the project. The Natural Science Society is a volunteering association without employees, so it contributed with a small amount of its budget (Int 6).

Once they will apply, the land association will receive financial aid of €2000 from the Rural Development Program (*Programma di Sviluppo Rurale*) (Int 7), which is a regional program to implement the objectives of the *European Agricultural Policy*. Terraviva land association was constituted in July 2017 ("Terraviva website", 2020). The structure of the land association includes the president, the council and the assembly of the members. The association's council is constituted by founding members and the representatives of the municipalities that gave the municipality's properties. The members of the assembly are all the landowners that signed the documents of the management permit for the association. The management permits can be given for all or part of the members' properties. They meet once a year in Viganella, where they can decide to take their land back if the land is not yet contracted to a farmer. By contract, lands are given for free to farmers, provided that they cultivate and keep the properties clean. The length of the contracts depends on the type of cultivation, from three to five years, and can be renewed. Even if there is no remuneration for the landowners, it is in their interest that their properties are cared for (Int 7; Int 8).

Supporting and hindering factors

The creation of the law establishing the land association has been defined as a fortuitous accident by the interviewees since it happened unexpectedly during the development of the project (Int 6; Int 7; Int 8). A land association allows the terraces' owners to grant the association their lands without losing the legal ownership of them. The land association, of which all the owners are members, can manage all the terraces and give them to other people for cultivation. The benefit of this is that the person cultivating the land will interact with one actor only simplifying communications and decision making (Int 7). At the beginning of the project, Terraviva's actors had the idea of creating an *organization*, still not well defined, with which the process to collect the lands would have been much more difficult (Int 6). The land association, on the other hand, guarantees that the landlords maintain the properties, which is important to highlight because at first people were reluctant to give their lands fearing to lose them. Indeed, this explanatory and reassuring process has been time-consuming, and many info meetings were necessary to explain to people how the custody of their lands to farmers worked (Int 7).

Another factor of success mentioned by every interviewee was the good cooperation between the actors. Everybody did their part and there was also good communication between them so that all

actors were up to date and each side had the opportunity to give their opinions on the other's duties and decisions. Ivano De Negri, the director of the nature park, mentioned that having the mayor as a partner of the project was very helpful to increase the reliability and trust on the part of the community (Int 7).

Plans

The Terraviva project is concluded, but a follow-up project, called *SociAlp*, was initiated with the same partners and the same funding institution. The new project has a more social focus. One of the actions is to hire disadvantaged people to work a few hours per week in the terraces. This action will have the effect of employment and social inclusion and the effect to help the two farmers cultivating the terraces. Claudio Minacci, the land association's president said that he is realising that the two farmers need help because of the difficult conditions in cultivating terraces. Other solutions he thought to implement are buying a tiller or building a monorail to ease the transportation of agricultural tools (Int 8). SociAlp has joined an event called *Lo Pan Ner. Il pane che unisce le Alpi* (The black bread. The bread that unites the Alps) to create a more united mountain community. Every municipality that joins the event organises something that deals with rye bread, like using an old common oven to bake rye bread, visits to old mills, hikes. The idea is to not only recover the land under an economic point of view with respect to the biodiversity (cultivating the terraces again and not intensively) but also to create a touristic flux around events like this (Int 7).

Regarding the land association, it is now growing, since other municipalities have joined and given their terraces. The new terraces acquired were given to the *Faculty of Agricultural and Food Science* of the *University of Milano* for experiments about the combination of crops with rye, which will be used to make the typical local bread (Int 7).

Conclusions

Restoring terraces can indirectly address the depopulation problem because people cultivating the terraces would need to live in the village, so new people are acquired for the community. The mayor of Borgomezzavalle put houses owned by the municipality on sale for €1, an action to encourage people to move to depopulated villages. This model has been adopted by many municipalities in Italy (Redazione Montagna.tv, 2018). Projects like Terraviva help to make the village more attractive also for buyers, because inhabitants have an interest in seeing the landscape beautiful, clean, and cultivated, and especially safe from rock-fall (Int 8). Terraviva has been a success because of the joint engagement of many institutions present in the territory, who were able to share a vision and to carry it on after the end of the project. It is also to be highlighted the

important role that is held by funding institutions like Cariplo Foundation, which makes possible these projects.

This social innovation added something new to the mentality of the inhabitants. One of the park rangers stated that Terraviva managed to overcome the individualism among rural people (Int 7). In an environment where every person was historically used to think of their own business, the association put together all their properties and gave them to someone else. This is a step forward in creating a more stable social fabric.

Another interesting aspect is that the collaboration between actors at a local level became a collaboration between actors at a regional level since other mayors joined the land association giving their municipality's properties. With the inclusion of the University and the participation to events such as *Lo Pan Ner*, shared in the whole Alpine region, this collaboration expanded not only to another region but also abroad.

This innovation is an example of public and private institutions joining efforts to build and improve a social tissue, underlying the importance of the involvement and support of public institutions like municipalities and the presence of funding institutions.

4.1.4. Butéga Valtellina

Butéga Valtellina is a start-up established to gather the small, local and attentive to the territory agro-businesses under an umbrella and provide services to them aimed at promoting their products.

Core activities

The ideation of the start-up began in 2017 with the subsequent establishment in 2018. The entrepreneurs are three young men, born in 1990 and raised in the small town of Tirano (Figure 8), Valtellina. After their studies in Milan, they all came back to their hometown: Giorgio Gobetti, Mattia Fendoni, and Francesco Bondiolotti, respectively with a degree in economics and marketing, communication design and with experience as a chef ("La provincia di Sondrio", 2018). After university and coming back to Tirano they decided to create a start-up to apply their skills and knowledge in service of the territory.

One of the main activities is to market the products of the different producers. They are doing so participating in fairs, organizing events, and establishing contacts with restaurants. The second main activity is the establishment of shared professional laboratories for the farmers to process the products.

Background and problem

Valtellina is a valley in the Alps of northern Italy close to Switzerland. It covers an area of 3212 km2, with approximately 180.000 inhabitants. The biggest city in Valtellina is Sondrio (21.590 inhabitants), about 130 km far from Milan, the closest big city. It is a touristic destination famous for skiing and the food, first and foremost *pizzoccheri valtellinesi* (a type of pasta made of buckwheat), and a connection point between Switzerland and Italy thanks to the famous *Bernina train* (*Trenino rosso del Bernina*) that connects St.Moritz and Tirano, going up and down the Alps through a very panoramic route. Between 2011 and 2019 the tourist flux has tripled (Int 9). The depopulation problem in this area is not very pronounced and unemployment is not very high (Int 10). The problem of this area lies in the exploitation of the terraces with intensive cultivation of apples, which eventually will cause a loss in soil fertility (Int 9). Many of the products sold in regional-typical shops, and many of the ingredients that restaurants use to prepare typical

Figure 3. Map of Italy showing the different regions with the location of Tirano marked.

traditional dishes, are not sourced from Valtellina but imported. An example is that most of the buckwheat used by restaurants for pizzoccheri is imported from Poland. Only two restaurants use buckwheat cultivated in Valtellina, but these restaurants do not tell the people (Int 9). In the interview with Giorgio Gobetti, one of the founders, it was often said that virtuous restaurants and producers exist in Valtellina, but they do not make themselves visible. The reason for this can be the lack of resources, ideas, and time, but also, as Giorgio Gobetti said especially for farmers, they tend to minimize their work, either for modesty or other reasons. Under virtuous restaurants and producers, they understand those people who have as the ultimate goal the quality of the products, respect for the territory, and biodiversity protection ("Butéga Valtellina website", 2020).

The problem that Butéga Valtellina is addressing is the devaluation of high-quality local production, which demotivates people to continue or to start good quality production. Butéga Valtellina wants to give virtuous producers visibility, through the organization of events of product presentation and tasting. So far, these events have been organized in public and private spaces, but Butéga Valtellina is currently building its own space finalized at hosting these kinds of events along with workshops and updating courses with experts for the producers. This space is a three-story building that will host laboratories that producers can share to process of raw material into their final products including honey, cider, jams, flour and more. Butéga Valtellina aims at tackling another problem found in Valtellina: 80% of the agricultural holdings are small family businesses run as hobbies that are not valued because they can only sell privately since they can't invest in laboratories according to the legal restrictions (Int 9). The possibility to use the space made available by Butéga Valtellina allows them to expand their clients and product quality. Regarding the visibility for the virtuous restaurants, they are collaborating with one to prepare a menu signed Butéga Valtellina as a guarantee of quality. The events organized by Butéga are not only aimed at giving visibility to the producers, but also at educating the consumers, showing them how the producers work, what it takes to process the raw material and to make them understand why the higher price of the products is justified.

Motivation and knowledge

The innovators had two main motivations to start Butéga Valtellina. The first is merely personal and coincides with the choice of not having strict working hours as an employee but being more independent. They had just finished university, every decision they would have taken would have affected their future positively or negatively (Int 9). They decided to invest their time qualitatively, creating something they would have been passionate about. The second main motivation lays in the will of doing something that could valorize the territory where they grew up. After coming home after the universities, they saw the territory with different eyes, realizing its potential. As Giorgio Gobetti said, helping his friends that had started an agricultural business or had continued the family business, was a great motivation (Int 9).

The first source of knowledge for the three innovators comes from the university. Not only for the actual education they got but also because to move away from their hometown changed their perspective towards their home. Since they all studied different subjects, they have different competencies that allow them to split the duties (Int 9).

Giorgio Gobetti takes care of the marketing and finance issues, Mattia Fendoni of the events communication part, and Francesco Bondiolotti, of the selection of the products, even though each

of them is involved in every activity. When they first started to think about the project, they collected data about Valtellina searching on the internet, asking for data reports at the municipality office. They measured the demand for typical products counting the people going in and out of specialized shops, and they collected opinions and needs from the producers through informal focus groups. They were in this process when they came across an announcement for the participation to a for free-3-months camp about entrepreneurship in the Alps called *RestartAlp*. They won a spot with their draft ideas and Giorgio Gobetti, who was not working at the time, went. There, he gained a greater understanding of how to run and structure a business. The camp included also a 10 days internship that Giorgio Gobetti spent at *Tascapan*, a business with a similar concept to Butéga Valtellina, that, in Giorgio Gobetti's own words, was a fundamental insight (Int 9).

Organisational aspects and interactions

The first driver was the friendship between the three innovators and five young producers from their group of friends who declared to be ready to be part of the project (Int 9). As Giorgio Gobetti said, close relationships were at the base of everything. To develop and to give a solid structure to the project, Garrone Foundation, Cariplo Foundation (as the organizers of the RestartAlp camp), and Mathieu Champretavy (as the owner of Tascapan) played an important role. In this phase, while they were searching for some data, they came in contact with professor Cattaneo, a member of the scientific committee of the research centre CRANEC at Cattolica University (Milan), and president of the scientific committee of SEV (Valtellina Economic Society). Professor Cattaneo together with Bormio municipality was organizing a series of conferences, called *Montagna 4.0*, to share knowledge about virtuous activities and best practices in Valtellina and invited them to participate (Int 9). As Giorgio Gobetti said, prof Cattaneo became their *mother hen*, supporting them and following their progress. During Montagna 4.0, they were noticed by an entrepreneur that Giorgio defined *enlightened* and as a *business angel*, who decided to invest in them by buying a building where they could create the laboratories for food processing. The rent will only be discussed after three years, and the investor has already made clear that his profit will be symbolic and very convenient for Butéga Valtellina. This was an unexpected twist in their plans since they would have expected to have a building for the creation of laboratories only after years, while in the beginning, they would have focused on the provision of marketing services only. They also gathered ten more producers, the majority of which acquired through their network of relationships. In Figure 9, the interactions between Butéga Valtellina and the actors are schematized.

Economic and policy support

Financially speaking, they could count on the money they got from winning the second price at the end of RestartAlp. The price included €20.000, plus 1 hour per month for 1 year of consultancy with Mr Ferrero, the camp tutor, plus €6.500 for extra consultancies expenses. They won €3.000 in the competition of ideas at the end of Montagna 4.0's series of conferences, approximately €2.000 from the mountain community of Sondrio, after the participation to a call for projects, and €2.000 after the participation to a call for local young entrepreneurs' business projects called *Mi prendo la briga di fare impresa* launched by *Sbrighes*, which is a project active in Tirano, with the purpose to stop the exodus of young people to big cities like Milan (Cliclavoro, n.d.). Sbrighes is a project of Cariplo Foundation and Welfare In Azione, and it is promoted by six institutions included Tirano municipality (Città di Tirano, 2017). This fund was enough for the innovators to organize events, prepare the laboratories, do the paperwork for the establishment of the start-up, without investing their own money so far, even though they are facing some financial challenges (Int 9) as explained in the next paragraph.
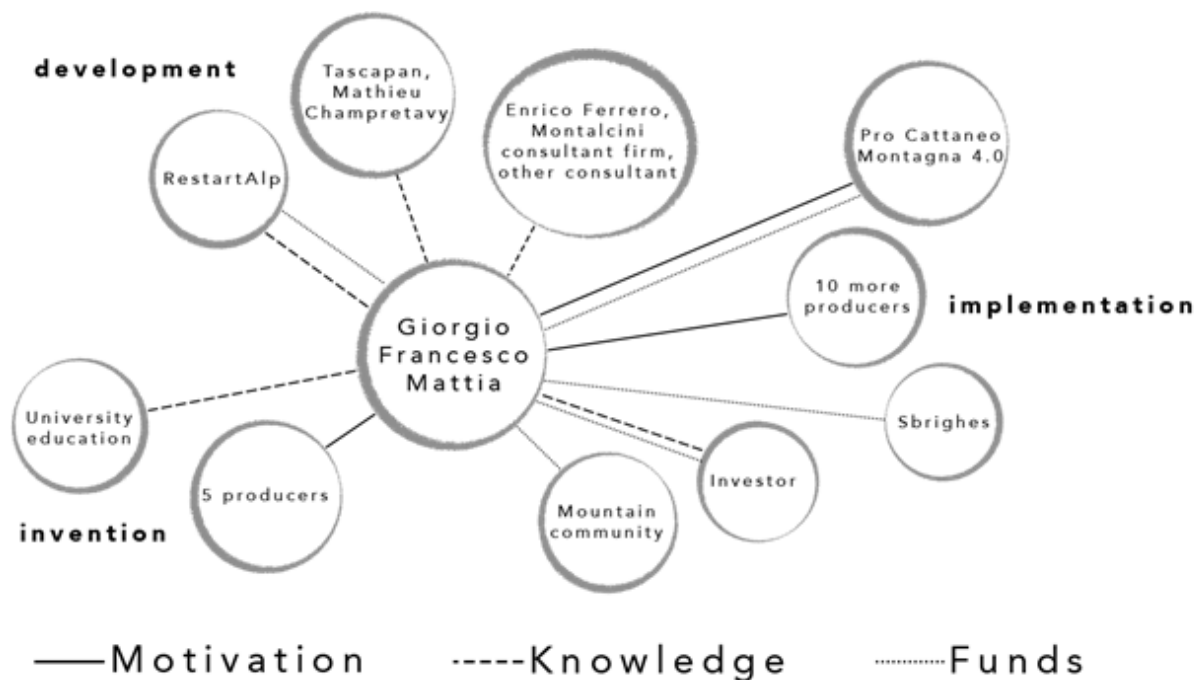
Figure 9. Relationship of the actors involved in Butéga Valtellina divided into 3 development stages. Invention in the left down corner, development in the left up corner and implementation on the right. The lines reflect the different type of contribution made

Butéga Valtellina is framed as SRL (Limited Liability Company). Two of the innovators still have other jobs as their main income source and can not work full time for Butéga Valtellina. The

producers do not pay any fee yet, even though the innovators are considering shifting to a business network with legal subjectivity. In this case, the producers will pay a fixed fee of participation to the network, which will be used to cover participation's expenses to fairs and exhibitions in exchange for the benefit derived from an enlarged pool of consumers (Int 11). The income of the company, at the present moment, is given by the fee people pay to participate in events of products tasting and by the sales of the products at fairs. This revenue covers the expenses, but in the future they plan to generate an income that allow the innovators to work only for Butéga Valtellina.

Supporting and hindering factors

According to the interviewee, the first relevant supporting factor consists of the deep and long-term friendships he has with his business partners and with the first five producers since they are all childhood friends. The second big contribution came with the camp RestartAlp, not so much for the financial contribution, but the information, learning, and the network it contributed. As Gobetti said, the participation to the camp was a fundamental kick-start, because it produced as an outcome a business plan in a much shorter time and much more solid than they could have ever done alone. He gained experience and awareness of the challenges. The third positive yet unexpected contribution was from the investor. His intervention changed the original business plan, where they planned to offer the producers marketing and publicity services only. The laboratory idea would have come into play many years later in their project, but it became tangible only one year after the establishment of the start-up (Int 9).

The interviewee mentioned the closed mentality typical of people who live in a valley. This, at times, leads to rejection from the producers to become part of Butéga Valtellina, as they preferred to continue working alone. Nevertheless, these cases constituted a very small proportion of the producers who were asked, because the target that Butéga Valtellina is focusing on, is mainly young producers, the majority of whom were open-minded. The only contrast they met in the relationship with the different actors happened to be with the municipality of Tirano when they had a disagreement regarding the organization of an event and during misunderstanding regarding the assignment of a registered office (Int 9). The most challenging factor they are facing is tedious, complicated and expensive bureaucracy necessary for the usage of the laboratories structure which involved the producers themselves. Some examples of requirements needed are the participation of a hygiene and first aid course each of which costs more than the producers can afford (Int 11).

Plans

Butéga Valtellina was established in August 2018, therefore many things are a work in progress. So far, the events they have organized have been promotional and commercial, and they have seen the participation of many people (one single event counted 500 participants) (Int 11).

As further development, Butéga Valtellina plans to finish the works in the building and to have the laboratories ready in 2020, to extend the umbrella to 25 producers, to sell and send the products in all parts of Italy and to include wine. By 2021 they plan to reach 40 producers, to export abroad, and to participate in fairs and events abroad (Time.graphics, 2017). Giorgio Gobetti also showed me the terrace of the building where they plan to have their restaurant, and so, to close the circle of the process (Int 9).

Conclusions

The depopulation problem in Valtellina is not very accentuated since it is a tourist destination, which makes the economy running. But if on one hand this is a positive aspect of tourism, it also has negative externalities on the territory. To maximize the profit, low-quality products and services are offered to tourists. The view of maximizing profits at the expense of quality is the reason why there is a loss of the traditional landscape, cultural practices and the territory value in favour of intensive agriculture and import. Butéga Valtellina wants to change this mindset. With the statement *to not export Valtellina but to import people*, the interviewee meant that his priority is not to make money but instead to prioritize the sustainability of the landscape (Int 9). Whoever would want to maximize the profit would have to market the products to be sold in any supermarket outside Valtellina, with no guarantee of authentic and quality products. This is not the case of Butéga Valtellina since its mission is to make people experience the true Valtellina, by making them come and visit. One plan they have is to export throughout Italy and abroad, but without compromising on their priority of the territory quality. The producers have been selected to be part of Butéga Valtellina network for their way of working, and each producer puts its own individual logo and name on the label of the product, by the will of Butéga Valtellina. This is to emphasize that it is a network of farmers, not a brand.

This shows the intention of Butéga Valtellina to create a collaborative environment between the actors for the territory's sake. After all, the love of their land was the motivation that the first group (three innovators and five producers) had in common when the three innovators decided to come back home, and Butéga Valtellina found a way to institutionalize in the shape of a start-up a way of working in respect of the territory and a view of collaborating rather than competing.

In this perspective this innovation offers people a good motivation to visit Valtellina and, as a producer, to stay in Valtellina more willingly. The social part of the innovation lies in the fact that Butéga Valtellina wants to change the mindset of producers about how to make business and that of consumers about how to choose what to buy and where. In summary, they aim to extend this value of not looking at each other as competitors, but as allies sharing space and knowledge to make their own products exclusive and qualitative to many other producers. They wish to teach consumers to recognize the quality of a product and the monetary value that it requires to produce. In doing so, Butéga Valtellina connects producers and consumers in a transparent and trustworthy way.

4.1.5. A Nursery for Social Farmers

A Nursery for Social Farmers is a project born within the farm of Francesco Penazzi, in Rocca Corneta, in the province of Bologna with the purpose of sharing knowledge and skills about the farmer job.

Core activity

The project is a part of a bigger undertaking that aims at enlarging the farmer community currently present with the final goal to repopulate the area. Therefore, the objective of the project A Nursery for Social Farmers was to hire two refugees as interns on the farm and teach them the job of the farmer. Along with learning the physical tasks of a farmer, they were also taught how to run a farm through theoretical lectures, and visits to other small-scale farms who work with microcredit. In the previous years, this learning-by-doing teaching format had already been applied by Francesco to other interns and volunteers (one per year), but the project *A Nursery for Social Farmers* enabled him to design a more structured teaching program and to take two interns instead of one.

The project was carried out in collaboration with Grameen Foundation Italia and the cooperative Lai-Momo, in 2017.

Background and problem

Rocca Corneta is a district of Lizzano in Belvedere, a municipality of 85 km^2 in the province of Bologna, in Emilia Romagna region (Figure 10). Lizzano is in the Appennines (at 640 MSL) and experienced a depopulation flux to the valley floor. Since 1960, Lizzano lost 36% of its inhabitants (I.Stat, 2020). Moreover, land use has drastically changed since 1930, when the urban area was about 10% of the entire municipality's area compared to the almost 50% of rural area, while in 2017 the proportions switched (Penazzi, 2017). Along with the loss of the rural areas, Lizzano has

also seen a loss of local farmers, since many people have moved in the past 30 years to the valley floor, and those who stayed are now retired (Int 12). Therefore, on one hand, the agricultural land is eroded by the paving and urbanization and on the other hand by the abandonment, which allows the forest to take over causing fertility loss of the agricultural land (Int 12).

However, since the 1980s, a community of farmers from outside has started to settle in Rocca Corneta. The one who started this community is a foreigner from the Netherlands called Simon van Hilten, who came in 1982, liked the place and started a farm of aromatic and medicinal herbs according to the organic methods, together with some friends. He triggered a spontaneous mechanism of inclusion, where friends, seasonal workers, WWOOF volunteers, who stayed and worked on his farm for some time decided to settle and start their own farm. This mechanism of inclusion was repeated through the newly settled farmers. The community now consists of nine farms, all of them growing vegetables for the local market and officinal and aromatic herbs for the European market, and none of them is native to Lizzano (Penazzi, 2017). One of these farms belongs to Francesco Penazzi, the initiator of the project.

Figure 4. Map of Italy showing the different regions with the location of Rocca Corneta marked.

In Lizzano there is also a small hospitality centre for refugees with room for seven people. This centre is managed by the social cooperative Lai-Momo, with the aim of the socio-economic integration of the refugees (SIPROIMI, 2020), for example by finding them a job. However, finding an occupation for them is not easy, because Lizzano is small, there are not many economic activities and the residents are wary (Int 12).

Motivation and knowledge

The main motivation for Francesco Penazzi was to bring people to Rocca Corneta with the hope that some may settle down and repopulate the area. For him and the neighbouring farmers, it was a necessity to avoid the collapse of the community. Also, the market's demand is higher than their production capacity. To satisfy the demand, it was more convenient to acquire new farmers as

neighbours than to expand their own farms by 8-10 hectares. They would have to employ more workers, increasing risk and complicating the management of the farm (Int 12). The second motivation was that Francesco Penazzi and his neighbours needed seasonal workers. Therefore, they welcomed everyone willing to learn the job and eager to help them during the growing season. Grameen Foundation Italia, on the other hand, had an interest in promoting microcredit and self-entrepreneurship and had the idea of starting to be active in rural areas.

Francesco Penazzi studied Agriculture and Technologies of Plant Production as a bachelor and Horticultural Science as a master, which is where his knowledge about agriculture comes from. Just after being graduated, he came to Rocca Corneta (summer 2013) and worked for three years in his friend Elia Beltrame's new farm before establishing his own farm buying 10 hectares of land from local owners too old to cultivate them (Bolognacares, 2020). When working with Elia Beltrame, he specifically gained experience about growing medicinal and officinal plants and about running a farm. Elia Beltrame himself had learned it by working for two years in Luigi Pavan's farm, who in turn moved to Rocca Corneta because he knew Simon van Hilten, the Dutch farmer mentioned above (Penazzi, 2017).

Organizational aspects and interactions

The project A Nursery for Social Farmers started with Francesco Penazzi winning the social challenge "Social Farming in the Appennines" in 2017. The cooperative Lai-Momo identified and selected the beneficiaries and the actual internship began in May 2018 and lasted for six months, until October 2018 (Bolognacares, 2020). A training course from Grameen Foundation Italia on how to make a business plan of a new farm followed.

The whole idea started when Mamadou, a refugee from Senegal, came to work as a seasonal worker in one of the farms neighbouring Francesco Penazzi's one in 2016. His presence triggered Francesco Penazzi's curiosity about the refugees' hospitality centres. Later that year he got into contact with the people working for Lai-Momo, the cooperative that manages the small hospitality centre in Lizzano, at a summer festival organized by his neighbour and friend Elia Beltrame in his own farm. The encounter gave the start of a collaboration between Lai-Momo and Francesco Penazzi, where some refugees worked for one or two months in Francesco Penazzi's farm. It became a real internship when Grameen Foundation Italia came into play. The internships of the project lasted six months, allowing enough time to follow the farm's activity from sowing to sale. Grameen Foundation Italia was in charge of the education about the economic part and the entrepreneurship of the trainees, Francesco Penazzi trained them on the practical part and Filippo Missiroli, Penazzi's employee, presented theoretical lectures about European agriculture, as well

as accompanying them in the management of their own vegetable garden (Int 12). All the actors that contributed to the project are shown in Figure 11.
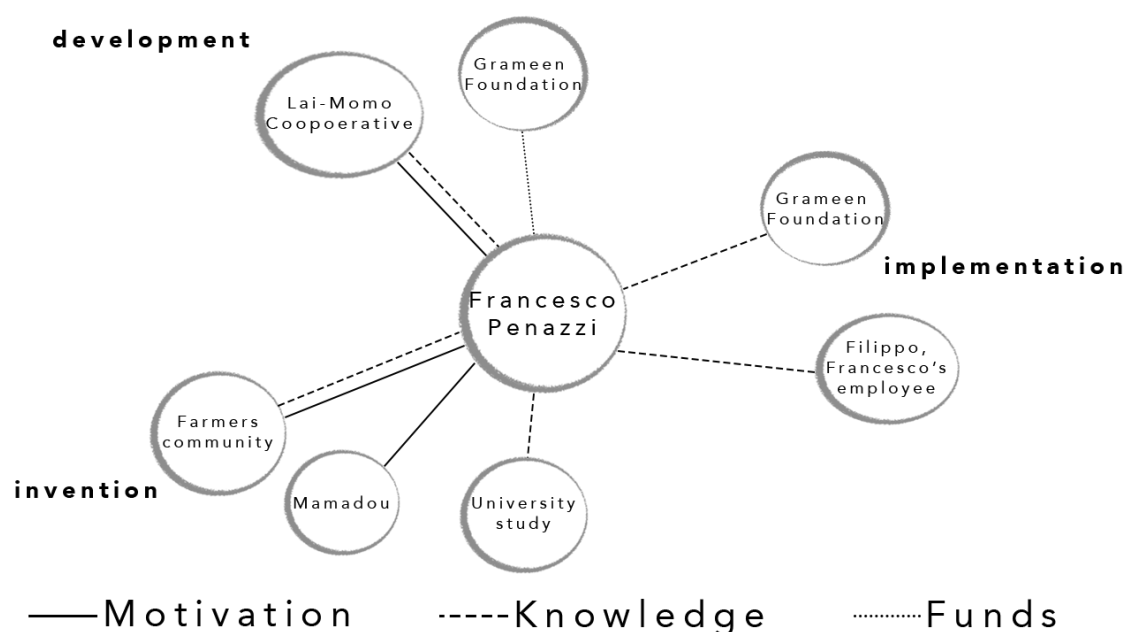

Figure 11. Relationship of the actors involved in A Nursery for Social Farmers divided into three development stages. Invention in the left down corner, development in the left up corner and implementation on the right. The lines reflect the different type of contribution made by the actors

Economic and policy support

Grameen Foundation Italia (based in Bologna) had applied to a call on the Social Challenges Innovation Platform, born in response to the European Horizon 2020 programme (Grameen Italia, 2017). The Social Challenge Innovation Platform (https://www.socialchallenges.eu/en-GB/community/4) selected 30 challenge proposals all over Europe to be funded, one of which was the one issued by Grameen Foundation Italia, called *Social farming in the Appennines*. Once its challenge was selected, Grameen Foundation Italia began promoting it looking for "start-ups, businesses and non-profit organizations willing to start or to develop small agricultural or extra-agricultural activities with social aims in the Bolognese Apennines" (Grameen Italia, 2017). So, they contacted Francesco Penazzi inviting him to apply to the challenge. Francesco Penazzi presented the project A Nursery for Social Farmers managing to qualify as one of the three funded projects (Int 12).

The funding that Francesco Penazzi got from winning the social challenge amounted to €30.000, was used to cover room, board and salary of the two interns for six months (€16.000), to organize meetings, lectures and visits to other farms and projects (€7-8000), and to redo the drying plant

and the greenhouse so that it was possible to expand the production and justify the presence of two trainees in the farm (€6-7000).

Supporting and hindering factors

One of the most supporting factors mentioned by the interviewee is the presence of the farmers' community and the fact that they collaborate. They all cultivate the same crops, have the same customers and help each other by lending out agricultural machines among each other. Since the environment is not competitive, projects like A Nursery for Social Farmers can take place (Int 12).

A hindering factor mentioned by the interviewee concerns the refugees' situation. The regulations of the hospitality centres are quite strict, in the sense that once every second day, Francesco Penazzi had to take the two interns back to Lizzano because they had to sign their presence at the centre with their fingerprint, and that was time-consuming. Besides, if on one hand refugees were very willing to have a job and work, it was more difficult to assess if they were interested in settling down in the area contributing to repopulate the marginalised surroundings according to the hope of Francesco Penazzi and his neighbours. One of the interns afterwards found a job in an agritourism, while the second one continued to develop a business idea of his own. The purpose of Francesco Penazzi is to continue this flux of seasonal workers that eventually might settle and get the necessary help in the farm (Int 12).

Plans

Once the period in the farm was terminated, Grameen Foundation Italia started a course in micro-entrepreneurship to which the trainees took part in (Penazzi, 2017). Even though none of the two interns decided to settle down in Rocca Corneta, Grameen Foundation and Francesco Penazzi still keep tabs on them. They found a job in an existing farm for one of the interns, and they are helping the second intern in the development of a business idea of his (Int 12).

Due to the actual Italian political situation, Francesco Penazzi is forced to consider changing the target group for his interns, since in late 2018, the hospitality centres that tried to integrate the refugees were closed down because of a government decree (Baratta, 2019), and in general it became more difficult to obtain refugee status. Given their precarious situation, for Francesco Penazzi it is not possible anymore to start a long-term project with them, so he is thinking of involving other disadvantaged people such as ex-convicts and young people coming out from institutions for minors (Int 12).

Conclusions

A Nursery for Social Farmers can be considered as a fragment of what has been going on since the arrival of Simon van Hilten in Rocca Corneta in the 1980s, namely the welcoming of people interested in agriculture. This process has succeeded in acquiring people for the community and with time, the rate of people acquisition has increased, reaching the two people a year (Int 12).

This innovation changes the mentality of the local population characterized by competitiveness and closure (Int 12), showing that a collaborative environment succeeds in attracting new inhabitants and most importantly young ones, which give new strength to a local community that gets old. A collaborative mentality does not only take place within the farmer community but also outside of it, as shows the example of Francesco Penazzi collaborating with the hospitality centre in Lizzano, giving a job to black people who are otherwise often marginalized. However, it took time to Francesco Penazzi to understand the resources of the territory, and, as he states, if this kind of projects would be initiated by locals, they would probably be more effective (Int 12).

According to Francesco Penazzi, relying only on the governmental support is not enough to start and maintain a farm, and the problem of many of those who start a farm from zero is that they start big business projects with the financing of the CAP (Common Agricultural Policy), but end up running a very fragile business, because they lack a clear idea of how much effort is needed to do agriculture. What the community of farmers in Rocca Corneta wants to promote instead, is to start with getting experience of the labour needed, start small and expand later.

4.2. Case study assessment

In this section the hypothesis of the presence of the literature factors in the cases will be analysed.

4.2.1. Rural Making Lab

Strong motivation existed among the project initiators. The innovators perceived the advantage of developing the internal areas as a model for future development, they stayed consistent with the existing National Strategy for Internal Areas and with their previous experience, where they successfully applied the same tactic of laboratories in a different environment, namely urban areas. They developed a simple idea which involved restoring some existing landscape features, and the activities were adjusted to the available resources and capacities. In the beginning, they predicted the outcome and the results of the project, stated in the doctoral thesis, which also determined the

commitment of the PhD student and innovator Giuseppe Mangano and all the association's members to the project. The socio-emotional bonding is present but not important in a decisive way since the project was carried out in Calabria, but with the bigger perspective of a national application in the internal areas in general. Finally, the innovators believed in innovation. Evidence is given in Table 15.

Table 15. Motivation variables (Chapter 2) related to Rural Making Lab project. The evaluation assessment is deducted from the interview's quotes, other sources and personal observations. The variables were evaluated according to a personal assessment as follows: very present, present, rather present, rather absent, absent.

Variables	Evaluation	Source
Perceived advantage, benefit and impact	Present	The objective is the economic growth and a new quality of life of the communities (Mangano et al., 2019); "We understand how some models for urban development have limits [...] we need to understand the future, by doing very attentive actions and also very full of potential in the future, now" (Int 2).
Compatibility	Very present	The doctoral thesis is entirely based on the National Strategy for Internal Areas and the experience of Pensando Meridiano; The laboratories can be effective drivers for the local development defined by the National Strategy for Internal Areas, also incorporated into the regional one (Mangano et al., 2019); "Concerning the regional strategy for internal areas of Calabria, which he [Giuseppe Mangano] followed very thoughtfully" (Int 2).
Simplicity	Present	"We made laboratories very much measured on what we could implement" (Int 2).
Foreseeability	Very present	Since it was a doctoral thesis, there were expected results; "Such innovation will implant production capacities comparable at a regional level, and it will bring internal valuables directly measurable and evaluable for the regional strategy of internal areas" (Int 1).
Trialability	Very present	"Pensando Meridiano had already implemented other laboratories of urban regeneration but in the city" (Int 1).
Socio-emotional bonding	Rather present	Socio-emotional bonding with Calabria, but not with the laboratories' smaller territories; "The young people come from all parts of Calabria and Sicily and they didn't know these territories, me [Giuseppe Mangano] included" (Int 1); "Some other people and I [Giuseppe Mangano], in 2013 after the graduation, decided to stay" (Int 1).
Commitment	Very present	"The main actors were the association's members, the young people, used to get involved for an important challenge" (Int 2).
Disbelief in innovation	Absent	The innovation was a founding theme of the doctoral thesis; "We want to act according to the strategies and the tactics referred to the processes and the projects of social innovation" (Mangano et al., 2019).

The innovators and the active participants were highly educated, having connections with the academic world. The initiators, Giuseppe Mangano and Consuelo Nava come from the architecture

field, but the other participants came from various backgrounds, which were able to cover all the project's necessities. The previous experience of Mangano and the other members in the activities of Pensando Meridiano, their university education, and the experience of Nava in research made them prepared to carry out the Rural Making Lab project in first-hand and to deal with authorities and institutions. The information needed for this particular project was collected successfully. Evidence is given in Table 16.

Table 16. Knowledge variables (Chapter 2) related to the Rural Making Lab project. The evaluation assessment is deducted from the interview's quotes, other sources and personal observations.

Variables	Evaluation	Source
Level of education	High	Giuseppe Mangano and Consuelo Nava are researchers, the association's members are graduated or university students.
Actor's abilities	Present	"Giuseppe, besides being very informed, has been an important propeller" (Int 2); "You mustn't propose to the institutions projects that can make look like that you want to change the world. You need to propose projects measured on the capability that institutions have to manage that process. So that they can feel reassured and can trust you" (Int 1); The association's members are defined *makers*, they built the information panels and maps etc; The devices used in the activities were designed and planned by the makers (Mangano, 2018).
Different competencies	Very present	"Everyone [the members] is under the age of 35 and they are architects, jurists, history experts, journalists, graduated in history and conservation, landscapers, in short, there are different figures and expertise" (Int 1).
Lack of experience	Absent	"The experience of Giuseppe Mangano as president of the association Pensando Meridiano began before the doctoral program" (Int 2); "I [Consuelo Nava] am a mentor of the association since its foundation" (Int 2).
Lack of expertise	Rather absent	The lack of expertise was related to not knowing the places of the activities. The expertise about the process of missing knowledge collection was present; "In this previous phase, we used co-working and co-design, to put all the young people together and study exactly on the sources. […] to prepare these young people to go there" (Int 1).
Lack of access to information	Absent	"I [Giuseppe] did all this action of knowledge also of study with the people who have proposed the strategy" (Int 1).

The Rural Making Lab project was carefully planned at the beginning and carried out accordingly. The problem and the objective were identified and stated clearly. The vision was shared by the actors, determining their involvement and collaboration. They also planned and calculated their financial resources. Evidence is given in Table 17.

Variables	Evaluation	Source
Solid organization	Very present	"The laboratories last for a few days, but they all have a phase that lasts much more. Two weeks, one month" (Int 1); "Giuseppe worked very seriously on the project planning, on planning the project in all its parts […] with great clearness of the objectives" (Int 2); "We carried out laboratories measured very much on what we could achieve" (Int 2).
Precise objective	Very present	"We need to avoid young people to leave, but young people don't leave only if they have a job. If they are employed in doing something" (Int 1); "The impoverishment of services, impoverishment of territorial capital, of human capital mainly, of the economy, from the abandonment, so lack of cure created by the depopulation" (Int 1); "We need to understand the future, by doing very attentive actions and also very full of potential in the future, now" (Int 2); "We have always met people, administrators that had at heart mainly the theme of regeneration" (Int 1).
Cooperation	Very present	"In this previous phase, co-working and co-design was needed, to gather all the young people to study the resources of the territories" (Int 1); "The members involve other young people and also other actors. Institutional actors, other associations, enterprises" (Int 1); "As head of the centre ABITA of the Mediterranean University, we have always been the scientific partners of the association Pensando Meridiano […] and we followed it […] in the projects on internal areas" (Int 2).
Inter-sectoral composition	Rather present	Collaboration between the University of Calabria, where Mangano carried out his Ph. D, Mediterranean University of Reggio Calabria, where Consuelo Nava is a researcher, and different institutions.
Availability of financial resources and revenue streams	Present	The way to fund the project was planned from the beginning "It has been carried out at a very low cost […] applying our circular method based on social funding" (Int 2).
Poor organization and leadership	Absent	"[Giuseppe Mangano has] a very good ability to involve all the actors" (Int 2).

The innovators made use of some connections that they already had, while they successfully established a good connection with new actors. The laboratories were largely welcomed in the places concerned. They documented the works with videos and pictures for better external communication and participated in conferences. There were also solid connections within the group of initiators. Evidence is given in Table 18.

Table 18. Interactions variables (Chapter 2) related to the Rural Making Lab project. The evaluation assessment is deducted from the interview's quotes, other sources and personal observations.

Variables	Evaluation	Source
Quality of relationships	Very present	"Pensando Meridiano had already worked with many of these enterprises, of these activities, businesses" (Int 1); "The network of connections helped us a lot, and also the welcome we had in these places" (Int 2).
Acceptance	Very present	"There has always been a big response from the association's members […]. Also, the response from the territories, from the communities has been very good" (Int 1); "Often the actors were communities of young people, associations of young people that found in the members of the association […] some same-age people to confront with and to share competencies and knowledge with" (Int 2).
External communication	Very present	The makers of the laboratory made multimedia innovative products (photographic project, video-doc, video drone) (Mangano, 2018); "All these innovative activities allowed us to be speakers at the Italia pavilion at the Venice Biennale and we have been called exactly as case studies for the south thanks to these activities" (Int 1).
Outside support and commitment	Very present	"Seeking a partnership with these actors way before activating the laboratory, and so involving the network of the actors before the start of the laboratory" (Int 2); "The president of the regional council of Calabria is a reference point not only political but also civil, he is a colleague, an architect" (Int 1).
Unsolid connections	Absent	Pensando Meridiano and ABITA centre have worked together for several years, it is a consolidated partnership, and they were able to build trust with the institutions.
Passivity	Absent	"We have almost always met people, administrators that had at heart the theme of the regeneration" (Int 1).

The innovators made use of very little external economic support, even if obtaining it would have not been a problem. Instead, they mostly used their own resources, thanks to the circular method of social funding. Anyhow, the project did not require large sums. Evidence is given in Table 19.

Rural Making Lab found very proactive administration and institutions, who were involved in the implementation of the project constituting a bottom-up approach. It was planned on a policy, namely the National Strategy for Internal Areas, and the innovators calculated what could be done very carefully, according to the available strengths, institutions and regulations, so that they could gain the institutions' involvement without difficulties. No unpleasant surprises regarding bureaucracy emerged later. Evidence is given in Table 20.

Table 19. Economic support variables (Chapter 2) related to the Rural Making Lab project. The evaluation assessment is deducted from the interview's quotes, other sources and personal observations.

Variables	Evaluation	Source
Support in early phases	Present	The innovation relied mostly on internal resources.
Type of support	Private and public - regional and local	They were sponsored by private businesses and by the public administrations.
Deficient funding	Absent	"We used those small contributions that […] we had as a cover for the expenses" (Int 2); "We did it with very modest economies, but not because we had little money, but precisely because we wanted to impact economically little" (Int 1).

Table 20. Policy variables (Chapter 2) related to the Rural Making Lab project. The evaluation assessment is deducted from the interview's quotes, other sources and personal observations.

Variables	Evaluation	Source
Readiness of involvement	Very present	"[The president of the Regional Council] has always been interested in activities that put young people together, that put in place projects of social inclusion" (Int 1); "In every case also the Regional Council of Calabria was there" (Int 2);
Approach	Bottom-up	"We transferred a method of an approach, a change from the bottom […] where the young people propose some activities with some mentors" (Int 1); "Without claiming to transfer the knowledge from the top, but involving the experience of the communities" (Int 2).
Hindering regulations	Absent	No hindering regulation was encountered.
Unwillingness of risk-taking	Absent	"Actions that make people work together are well regarded and liked by the institutions" (Int 1).
Bureaucracy	Not difficult	The bureaucracy was not mentioned as a difficulty.
Absence of a legal framework	Absent	Rural Making Lab was possible thanks to the patronage and the sponsorship of institutions.
Unfavourable policy	Absent	Rural Making Lab was created into the framework of the National Strategy for the Internal Areas.

4.2.2. CapraUnica's Island

The personal motivation of the initiators was a strong driver of the project. The innovators perceived the potentiality of Ruora district and the benefit that living in nature could have on people. The motivation came from their will to live away from the city, according to which they bought one house and tried to live there before starting the renovation project. For the project they stayed consistent with their values and with Ruora's past, therefore they restored existing old

houses, and made them available to people that wanted to visit and try to live there. The innovators predicted the repopulation of the village activating a virtuous circle of demand for services. The initiators come from Milan, nevertheless, when they settled in Ruora, they already knew the place. They were, and still are committed to the project, which could be lifelong. Also, they have an innovative, confident and open mindset. Evidence is given in Table 21.

Table 21. Motivation variables (Chapter 2) related to CapraUnica's Island project. The evaluation assessment is deducted from the interview's quotes, other sources and personal observations. The variables were evaluated according to a personal assessment as follows: very present, present, rather present, rather absent, absent.

Variables	Evaluation	Source
Perceived advantage, benefit and impact	Present	"This place that was abandoned had very high value" (Int 3); "The idea of repopulating these places, because for me they are the biggest richness now because there is peace, there is the possibility to work in tranquillity for us. I work through the internet, so with a good internet connection, all the jobs through the internet can be done here" (Int 3); We would like to get the new generations used to these places that, according to us, can guarantee to the human beings better well-being, without denying the cities that remain perfect places for sociality and work (Maraini, 2019).
Compatibility	Very present	The innovators restored existing houses; "Coming from Milan, I saw the peace around me" (Int 3); "I came to visit a friend with my camper, and I have come for three years" (Int 3); "I have always believed in the strength of living in nature" (Int 3).
Simplicity	Very present	The idea is to restore houses and to create a flux of people.
Foreseeability	Very present	"The necessity of services will come and so the necessity of a barista, of a gardener, of a carpenter will come activating a virtuous circle, because then a barista, a carpenter come to live here e more services will be needed" (Int 3); "All the people who can work with no fixed job, so with seasonal jobs that allow you to live here and to move" (Int 3).
Trialability	Present	"We give the possibility to people to stay in these houses for a certain period so that they can experiment if they like this place" (Int 3); "We bought the house with the idea of having a second house in the mountains, to begin to visit and live" (Int 3).
Socio-emotional bonding	Present	"We moved here, Vittoria and I full time, and D. comes for the majority of the time because otherwise, he has a place in Milan because of work" (Int 3); "Living in this place I began to see all the potentiality" (Int 3).
Commitment	Very present	"Mainly putting the heart, so beginning to live there for real" (Int 3); "You find me every day at work, now they laugh at me when I pass by because every time they say: you never stop" (Int 3); "You really need to be convinced about wanting to do it, and it mustn't be because you are escaping from the city" (Int 3).
Disbelief in innovation	Absent	The innovators believe very much in the innovation.

The level of education of CapraUnica's Island's initiators is high. They have skills in promoting and carrying out the project, and where they needed, they made use of professionals, for example for the structural works in the houses. Their competences are not so differentiated. The innovators were confident in the topic of innovation and they had access to all information needed. They lacked some experience in managing the flux of long-term volunteers, but they improved during the project. Evidence is given in Table 22.

Table 22. Knowledge variables (Chapter 2) related to CapraUnica's Island project. The evaluation assessment is deducted from the interview's quotes, other sources and personal observations.

Variables	**Evaluation**	**Source**
Level of education	High	All the innovators are highly educated and self-employed.
Actor's abilities	Present	"We wrote all the design part of the website, we made the website, the pictures" (Int 3); "We have internet in the DNA, because of the generation we belong to" (Int 3); The works are made first-hand, except for the structural works, for which they are supervised by architects, engineers, societies (Tarozzi, 2017); All the innovators are self-employed.
Different competencies	Rather present	"I [Luca Andrea Marazzini] work in the events' world […] D. also works in the event's world" (Int 3); Vittoria is the owner of a gourmet ice cream shop in Milan (Maraini, 2019).
Lack of experience	Absent	The initiators were confident in the topic of innovation because they had already worked on innovative ideas related to their jobs.
Lack of expertise	Rather absent	"In the beginning, we were not organized to manage a flux of volunteers. So sometimes we have had some difficulty. Now we are a bit more structured" (Int 3).
Lack of access to information	Absent	The innovators knew about the ownership of the houses asking directly to the people.

The target, the measures, the mission and the objective of the project were clear and shared by all the actors. The organization was structured along the way based on available resources, time and workforce. The relationship within the innovation group was good and personal which set the base for good cooperation. They also had to learn by doing how to manage and structure the workforce available as volunteers. They mainly counted on personal finances and on the cooperation within the group, which worked very well. Finally, the innovators have very good leadership capabilities. Evidence is given in Table 23.

Table 23. Organization variables (Chapter 2) related to CapraUnica's Island project. The evaluation assessment is deducted from the interview's quotes, other sources and personal observations.

Variables	Evaluation	Source
Solid organization	Rather present	The organization of the works in the houses was not planned from the beginning but depended in available resources.
Precise objective	Very present	"I [Luca Andrea Marazzini] saw closed houses there, I saw them as a great value in contrast to other owners that saw them as a burden" (Int 3); "The centralization in the cities and the industries […] appealed many people promising a safe salary, people that ended up living in buildings and leading a less healthy and less relaxed life" (Int 3); "The idea is to show the joy of living in this place, to share it on social networks and to try to slowly attract people" (Int 3); "We are working to make clear that it's not our intention to revive the urban model in this place" (Int 3).
Cooperation	Very present	"The main thing was the fact to be with a person willing to do it with me, who was D. at the beginning" (Int 3); "Vittoria, my partner and mother of my daughter, came in the project al helped economically" (Int 3).
Inter-sectoral composition	Rather present	The innovators collaborated mainly with volunteers and other private people. No institutions were actively involved.
Availability of financial resources and revenue streams	Present	Their job's income provided the economic resource, and the projects were based on private finances; "We put the majority of the budget, all personal investments" (Int 3); "In four years, we invested here around €170.000 of which only 3% was generated by the project" (Maraini, 2019).
Poor organization and leadership	Rather present	"In the beginning, we were not organized to manage a flux of volunteers" (Int 3); The innovators are good leaders. Luca Andrea Marazzini and Vittoria Bortolazzo are both business owners.

The relationships between the innovators and residents and administration were not so easy. The acceptance of the project by the local population was slow and difficult, but good results have been seen thanks to perseverance. The participation from the local population has been eventually positive. They established a good relationship with other types of actors, such as the journalist Daniel Tarozzi living in the neighbouring town, who was a supportive and committed figure. Also some of the neighbouring mayors were supportive towards one of the initiatives. The external communication about the project has been carried out constantly on social media and the project's website. Evidence is given in Table 24.

Table 24. Interaction variables (Chapter 2) related to CapraUnica's Island project. The evaluation assessment is deducted from the interview's quotes, other sources and personal observations.

Variables	Evaluation	Source
Quality of relationships	Rather present	"What unites us is a strong sharing of values, know that we are close, that we can rely on each other, that we participate in the activities" (Int 5); "Luca was wonderful also to go to the elderly, to create relationships […] slowly he is getting integrated into the place" (Int 5); "I participate in every municipal council. And they [the municipality] don't see it as my will to contribute, but as a form of control" (Int 3); "The municipality really did not help Luca" (Int 5).
Acceptance	Present	"The shepherd has been a very important element for my approach to this place […]. He invited me to his house, offered me a glass of wine that is their way of doing community" (Int 3); "To see a couple with a baby […] maybe gave, even more, the idea of our intention to repopulate the place and [the locals] began to love us even more" (Int 3); "Luca has been very good at going to the elderly and to create relationships" (Int 5).
External communication	Very present	They promote the project on the website of CapraUnica's Island and on social media where they are very active.
Outside support and commitment	Rather present	The innovators only sought the involvement of one institution, namely the municipality, which was unsuccessful, but they obtained the support of private people, i.e. the journalist Daniel Tarozzi.
Unsolid connections	Rather present	"The long periods [of volunteers] are the greatest problem to be managed and everyone's expectations and everyone's skills" (Int 3); "In reality, it is a complex activity […]. You need to be found in a world of economic demands, you need to explain who you are to give value and trust to people, you need to keep constant communication to show, to give back to somebody that gives you money" (Int 3); They constantly communicated to the people who contributed to the crowdfunding, the progress of the work accomplished with their money.
Passivity	Rather present	The integration in the town was slow. But there were episodes of acceptance; "[The municipality] invested €40.000 to re-do the road, widen the road and make a parking lot, because they understood that people are coming back to live here, so places are needed" (Int 3); "[A local] came and asked: "what are you doing on the internet? [the crowdfunding] […] These are my €5". It was a strong gesture because his €5 were like: […] I accept you and help you" (Int 3).

The funding is not continuous throughout the project, since the main economic source is internal and can vary. The project did not make use of any public economic support. Evidence is given in Table 25.

Table 25. Economic support variables (Chapter 2) related to CapraUnica's Island project. The evaluation assessment is deducted from the interview's quotes, other sources and personal observations.

Variables	Evaluation	Source
Support in early phases	Rather present	The innovators got support in the initial purchase of the houses from the local owners.
Type of support	Private	The locals gifted or sold for cheap their houses to the innovators; Volunteers helped them working.
Deficient funding	Rather present	The innovators do not have access to a stable external economic source. For the renovation of one roof, they made use of crowdfunding. The rest is donations and private investments; "We put most of the budget, all personal investments […] every year from our job we get out a part of income and we reinvest it here" (Int 3).

The local public administration was not ready to be involved and unwilling to take risks, so it didn't support the project. Nevertheless, things could change since, on its own initiative, the municipality improved the existing road to Ruora to favour the flux of people. No particular hindering regulations or unfavourable judicial conditions were encountered during the project. By choice, the innovators did not establish a legal framework for the project. Also, the initiators of CapraUnica's Island project found the bureaucracy to obtain funds complicated. Evidence is given in Table 26.

Table 26. Policy variables (Chapter 2) related to CapraUnica's Island project. The evaluation assessment is deducted from the interview's quotes, other sources and personal observations.

Variables	Evaluation	Source
Readiness of involvement	Rather absent	"I have always made requests to the municipality; the municipality has always ignored them" (Int 3); For an idea, they involved Caprauna's mayor, who was unsupportive and three neighbouring mayors who were supportive; "It was a bit of a shame because if you would have seen the enthusiasm of the other three…" (Int 5).
Approach	Bottom-up	The project was started by people that live there; "Without thinking too much about the institution's deficiencies in the restoration of abandoned places" (Produzioni dal basso, 2017).
Hindering regulations	Absent	No hindering regulation was encountered.
Unwillingness of risk-taking	Very present	"He [the mayor] was not willing to commit in something that could not work" (Int 3).
Bureaucracy	Rather difficult	"I have just lost a call […] because I could not manage to prepare all the paperwork […] because the preparation of a European or regional call […] is complex to do" (Int 3);
Absence of a legal framework	Rather absent	The innovators did not establish an association or similar. Nevertheless, they did not encounter limitations for this reason.
Unfavourable policy	Absent	"[The municipality] invested €40.000 to re-do the road, widen the road and make a parking lot" (Int 3); "Lately the mayor has become more open" (Int 5).

4.2.3. Terraviva

With regard to the motivational aspect, the initiators saw the advantage of unifying the terraces not only for potential farmers but also for the locals. The expected results were to restore the stability and the safety of the drywalls, and the biodiversity. The terraces' theme had already been in the spotlight of the discussion. The core idea of the project is simple, but it was not so clear under which legislation or actor the terraces had to be unified. The initiators live or work in the area and stayed committed until the end of the project. The innovation group believed in the project and spent many energies in convincing the reluctant landowners that eventually trusted the project. Evidence is given in Table 27.

Table 27. Motivation variables (Chapter 2) related to the Terraviva project. The evaluation assessment is deducted from the interview's quotes, other sources and personal observations. The variables were evaluated according to a personal assessment as follows: very present, present, rather present, rather absent, absent.

Variables	**Evaluation**	**Source**
Perceived advantage, benefit and impact	Present	"We could put together the lands of everybody and we could build something" (Int 8); "The association can manage the lands as only one piece, so the farmer that has to do a contract to have a piece of land to cultivate […] has only one actor that can legitimately do a contract" (Int 7).
Compatibility	Very present	"When it rains very much, there is run off and the stones fall on the houses where we live" (Int 8); "An architect had already done a census of the drywalls etc to see what were the spots that needed maintenance care" (Int 6); "There has been a big interest in the latest years of rediscovery. One or two years ago it was the international year of the terraces, then here in Ossola, there has been a conference about drywalls" (Int 6); "The municipality had already in mind to do projects of valorisation on that territory" (Int 6).
Simplicity	Rather present	In the beginning, it easy not very easy to identify a method to group the lands. The law about the land associations simplified the process; It was also not very easy to identify and contact the landowners.
Foreseeability	Very present	"It's in my interest to see the land above to be nice clean and cultivated […], because if it is cultivated the forest doesn't come down in the first place, then there are all the problems of hydrological risk […] when it rains very much there is run off and the stones fall on the houses where we live" (Int 8); "Recovering the terraces means recovering their hydrological function for example, of territory protection" (Int 7); "An environmental recovery of the area restores better biodiversity of the territory" (Int 6).
Trialability	Absent	There was not any sort of trial period to the project
Socio-emotional bonding	Present	"I cared for it. I live in Viganella, in the square" (Int 8); "Here the territory is rather small, we as Natural Science Society have been here for many years, because we were founded in 2001, so they already knew us for other activities" (Int 6).
Commitment	Very present	The project lasted two years and a half, and all the actors were committed until the end and beyond.
Disbelief in innovation	Rather absent	The initiators believed in the innovation firmly; The landowners, on the other hand, were wary and reluctant in the beginning not trusting the innovation.

Terraviva project was successful because the innovators were competent and skilled. They divided the work according to their competences but also worked together. The only aspect that the innovators did not have experience with, was about the law regulating the land associations. This was because it was a completely new law, and the innovators could obtain all the necessary information. Evidence is given in Table 28.

Variables	**Evaluation**	**Source**
Level of education	High	The actors are highly educated.
Actor's abilities	Very present	"Daniele [the project manager] had already done other projects, so he knew how to work" (Int 6); "The park managed to be the aggregator between the municipality, cooperative, making possible that these actors could work together" (Int 7).
Different competencies	Very present	"The cooperative was in charge of cleaning the terraces. […] We [the park] are in charge of communication. Promotion and other similar things" (Int 7); "The Natural Science Society carried out the nature monitoring part before and after the interventions" (Int 6).
Lack of experience	Absent	All the actors had previous experiences in carrying out projects.
Lack of expertise	Rather absent	Every needed skill was present, the staff was enough.
Lack of access to information	Absent	"There were three or four more [land associations] in Piemonte, we contacted them, they came to meet us" (Int 8); "Professor Cavallero from Turin was the person who helped to make the law about land associations, and we invited him to do a conference to explain it" (Int 8).

The project had a solid organization because it was carefully planned from the beginning in all its parts. The mission of the project was shared by all the innovators, and the problem and the actions to solve it were clearly stated. The actors were different from each other, being a park, a non-profit natural society, a cooperative and a municipality, but they made of the collaboration and the communication their strength. The project was specifically planned on the call for projects and the funding from Cariplo Foundation, but they also made use of internal economic resources. Evidence is given in Table 29.

Variables	**Evaluation**	**Source**
Solid organization	Very present	"The project, as it was planned and designed, has been carried out closely" (Int 6); "The project actions were planned at the beginning" (Int 6).
Precise objective	Very present	"The aim is to involve more and more communities" (Int 7); "It [the area] was abandoned after the depopulation of the village […] Restore this area once cultivated to the use that it has had for centuries, that is agriculture" (Int 6); "In the latest years the problem is that the abandonment caused big problems to the terraces that began to cede" (Int 7); "We absolutely do not want intensive activities, because they destroy the territory, nature, biodiversity, etc." (Int 7); "A work of incentive of population and the local community, to create favourable and attracting conditions for the spontaneous use of these terraces" (Int 6).
Cooperation	Very present	"Everything that is done is communicated to the others, so everybody can participate in decisions" (Int 7); "Everyone did their part. […] The collaboration between the institutions [has worked well]" (Int 6); "We have built this project together" (Int 7); "We [Natural Science Society] already knew the park, the park already knew Viganella because it is part of its territory, and then the park new the cooperative" (Int 6).
Inter-sectoral composition	Very present	The core group was constituted of different institutions.
Availability of financial resources and revenue streams	Present	"The project was a project of €200.000 and Cariplo Foundation financed 60% of the project and the rest 40% was self-financed" (Int 6).
Poor organization and leadership	Absent	The project was structured carefully, and the structure was followed carefully; The innovators in the leader group of action had leadership capabilities because in their jobs they play roles of responsibility.

The cooperation and communication between the actors and the stakeholders were one of the main strengths of the Terraviva project. The network of the innovators was established based on previous relationships and collaborations in other activities. The public administration was involved in the project as one of the main actors, while the acceptance by the locals, especially by the landowners was more difficult. The innovators put much energy in the communication of the project to the local population and also outside. Eventually, the answer and the participation were rewardingly satisfying. Evidence is given in Table 30.

Variables	Evaluation	Source
Quality of relationships	Very present	"Now the mayor has changed, but we still have his participation, because he was vice-mayor, he used to come to the meetings, he had already been introduced" (Int 7); "Once the association was created, we assisted it" (Int 7).
Acceptance	Present	"Slowly, after many meetings, when [the landowners] understood the usefulness of the thing […], people trusted us and answered positively" (Int 8); "We have always tried to make it possible to involve all those who wanted to be involved because it helps the acceptance of the projects very much from all the territory" (Int 7).
External communication	Very present	"We organised some meetings in Viganella to present the project, there were always at least 30 people. […] There was an event called Lo Pan Ner […] that day on foot all the terraces have been seen, on that day there were 1000 people" (Int 6); "There has been also an activity of environmental education in schools […] explaining what terraces are, what they are needed for etc, and then taking the kids and the boys to Viganella to see the terraces" (Int 6); "We did some evening events for young farmers, to let them know that there was this opportunity" (Int 7); Some videos were also made and published on the website.
Outside support and commitment	Present	"We found a project coordinator, who is an agronomist that worked in the park in Lombardia and that has worked with us [the park] in other projects, so we have a close relationship" (Int 7).
Unsolid connections	Absent	"Everybody did their part and that has worked better […] the collaboration between the actors" (Int 6).
Passivity	Rather absent	"Doing activities, inviting people, other areas showed interest in joining the association" (Int 7); "The population not only of the town but also of the neighbouring towns knew about the project" (Int 6).

The project had sufficient funding to be implemented and they managed to cover the whole project, even though they could have made good use of more resources. The innovators waited appositely for this opportunity from Cariplo Foundation, but they also engaged some internal economic resources. Evidence is given in Table 31.

One of the big advantages of Terraviva was that the local administration, namely the municipality, was one of the initiators of the project itself, so it was present and supportive from the beginning. Some legal difficulties were encountered when it was unsure how to institutionalize the unification of the lands, but the issue was solved by the establishment of the land association's law. The bureaucracy to apply for the fund was difficult, but not a problem. Evidence is given in Table 32.

Table 31. Economic support variables (Chapter 2) related to the Terraviva project. The evaluation assessment is deducted from the interview's quotes, other sources and personal observations.

Variables	Evaluation	Source
Support in early phases	Present	The project was based on one economic source that lasted for the whole duration.
Incentives to engage in innovation	Present	The project was based on one economic source that lasted for the whole duration.
Type of support	Private - inter-regional, local	"Cariplo Foundation financed 60% of the project" (Int 6); "To be implemented within the territory of Lombardia or the provinces of Novara and Verbano-Cusio-Ossola" (Fondazione Cariplo, 2017).
Deficient funding	Rather absent	The project was based on a call for projects from Cariplo Foundation. The fund amount was known from the beginning, so the project was calibrated on the available amount; "A part of the communication's activity has been excerpted because Cariplo did not finance all" (Int 6); The fund Terraviva used was enough to cover all the project.

Table 32. Policy variables (Chapter 2) related to the Terraviva project. The evaluation assessment is deducted from the interview's quotes, other sources and personal observations.

Variables	Evaluation	Source
Readiness of involvement	Very present	"Viganella is inside the park and we [the park] have involved the municipality from the beginning" (Int 7).
Approach	Bottom-up	The project was initiated by local institutions; "Here the territory is rather small, we as Natural Science Society have been here for many years because we were founded in 2001" (Int 6).
Hindering regulations	Absent	No hindering regulation was encountered.
Unwillingness of risk-taking	Absent	The administration was present and helpful from the beginning; "The fact that the municipality is in the association, guarantees the owners that things are done correctly. […] If there is the municipality, it can help the aggregation of the properties" (Int 7).
Bureaucracy	Rather difficult	"Applying for funding at Cariplo Foundation is not very easy, there is a whole series of documents to prepare" (Int 6).
Absence of a legal framework	Absent	"The land association is recognized by the regional Rural Development Program, so there are funds available, and the advantage is that by law, the land association ensures the owner about his property, he is sure to not lose it" (Int 7); "Creating the association was fortunate, in the sense that Piemonte region made a law specifically" (Int 7).
Unfavourable policy	Absent	"When the calls of Cariplo Foundation came out […], we [Nature Science Society] saw that we could create a project" (Int 6).

4.2.4. Butéga Valtellina

Butéga Valtellina will benefit the small producers and ultimately the territory. The idea is consistent with the need of small producers to be competitive on the market and with the quality demand from buyers other than the innovators' value for the enhancement of the territory where they grew up. The idea is simple because it's about marketing already existing products. The innovators want to make Valtellina appealing for its offer of quality products. They also foresee how the business will develop over the years. The trialability variable is present in terms of adjustments of the plan according to problems and needs creation. They are very committed and confident in the innovation they are carrying out. Evidence is given in Table 33.

Table 33. Motivation variables (Chapter 2) related to Butéga Valtellina project. The evaluation assessment is deducted from the interview's quotes, other sources and personal observations. The variables were evaluated according to a personal assessment as follows: very present, present, rather present, rather absent, absent

Variables	Evaluation	Source
Perceived advantage, benefit and impact	Present	"Begin with who has already this mentality and then involve the rest. If we all work in this way, all the results are paid back to the territory" (Int 11); "The idea is to slowly manage to reclaim these lands to an obvious end" (Int 11).
Compatibility	Very present	"Needs, necessities emerged, where the primary need, basically in all sectors, is the one related to the dimension of the business" (Int 11); "There is a huge demand, exactly because the products are local" (Int 11).
Simplicity	Present	"You [producer] come here, process your product, we help you with the marketing, we help you with the advertising of the product. So probably instead of selling it for €8/kg, you manage to sell it for €10" (Int 11).
Foreseeability	Very present	"The consumer doesn't pay attention to the price, but to the exclusivity of the product" (Int 11); "So, production, distribution, marketing, communication and transformation. And this closes the circle, this in ten years" (Int 11).
Trialability	Rather present	The business plan is adapted to new needs and events on an ongoing basis; "If we are a restricted circle […] we can shape, build, do, undo, destroy, rebuild, modify without creating problems" (Int 11).
Socio-emotional bonding	Very present	"Three partners, all three from Valtellina, all three have studied outside with different competencies, and decided to come back" (Int 11); "To give our contribution to the territory where we were born, the territory that we love to relaunch what is a heritage with high potential, but undervalued" (Int 11).
Commitment	Very present	"Everything can be done, it's about finding the more effective way of working, but everything can be done" (Int 11); "I [Giorgio Gobetti] went to RestartAlp […], I put three months of my time […] I do it if after there is a continuation" (Int 11).
Disbelief in innovation	Absent	The innovators believe very much in what they are doing.

The three innovators are highly educated. They studied different disciplines, which gave them different competencies and abilities, further developed by working experiences. They did not have any experience in innovation and starting-up a business, but they obtained appropriate knowledge and information regarding it. Evidence is given in Table 34.

Table 34. Knowledge variables (Chapter 2) related to Butéga Valtellina project. The evaluation assessment is deducted from the interview's quotes, other sources and personal observations.

Variables	Evaluation	Source
Level of education	High	All three innovators are graduated.
Actor's abilities	Very present	They have abilities in marketing, communication, promotion and food processing thanks to their studies and working experience.
Different competencies	Very present	"The innovators are a marketing expert, a graphic designer and a chef; Mattia takes care of all the part of communication both online and offline […]. Francesco is the chef, he takes care of the products selection" (Int 11).
Lack of experience	Rather present	The innovators are young graduates at their first experience in innovation.
Lack of expertise	Rather absent	The innovators obtained appropriate skills during RestartAlp campus.
Lack of access to information	Rather present	Sometimes they could only find outdated data. or the obtaining of data was not free to access.

Butéga Valtellina bases its structure and organization on a business plan. Even if adjustments and updates occur, the innovators always follow the latest version. The profile of the producers they want to include in the project is well defined and the mission is shared by the actors and the stakeholders. The problem is well outlined and the solutions to it are defined in clear objectives. Collaboration is present within the initiators' group and they received help and support from different types of outside actors. The economic sources are found in the process. The innovators don't have a much personal revenue to invest, so they apply for funding as they see opportunities. Evidence is given in Table 35.

Variables	Evaluation	Source
Solid organization	Present	The innovators have a business plan. Even if it gets modified, it defines the strategy and the structure of the project.
Precise objective	Very present	"The businesses are very small companies, often family-owned […] but represent a very rich sector. This fragmentation risks to determine deterioration of the competencies, of the quality, and of the values that they represent" (Int 9); "Preserve these kinds of companies and really support the producer in not abandoning, in giving him the possibility to continue and actually to develop" (Int 9); "To educate the restaurateur and the processor in the use of quality raw material" (Int 9); "The big change is to shift from an individualistic logic to a network logic" (Int 9); "Because the producers are aware of where the actual management system has led, they say no, we need to change" (Int 9); "To bring people, not to export the territory, but to import people" (Int 9).
Cooperation	Very present	"It's flexible figures, everybody does a bit of everything" (Int 11).
Inter-sectoral composition	Present	"Enrico Ferrero, his association is called *Ideazione S.R.L.* that does territorial marketing in Piemonte. He followed us, he was our tutor" (Int 9); "Mathieu was the first real tutor that we had because […] he gave us a complete vision" (int 9); "I explained to Professor Cattaneo what we were doing, and love was born" (Int 9); "Sbrighes played some tricks on us" (Int 9).
Availability of financial resources and revenue streams	Rather present	"The moment that I propose something, obviously I commit to find a financing source, but I hold something strong, financing this strong thing is not a problem. Money, in a way or the other, come" (Int 9).
Poor organization and leadership	Absent	The innovation is based on a business plan; "RestartAlp helped us to question, to establish the criticisms, to establish the threats, to assess opportunities, to use, give a sense, a business model to our project" (Int 9); The innovators have very open and charismatic personalities.

The relationship between the innovation group and the stakeholders became close and constant. They only had problems in the relationship with one actor, but it did not compromise the project. They also collaborate and involve the producers in some decision-making creating an environment of acceptance. They make themselves known participating in fairs, being active on social media, having a website and making events that were very participated. They can rely on committed outside partners with whom they established a trusty and communicative relationship. Evidence is given in Table 36.

Table 36. Interaction variables (Chapter 2) related to Butéga Valtellina project. The evaluation assessment is deducted from the interview's quotes, other sources and personal observations.

Variables	Evaluation	Source
Quality of relationships	Present	"The firsts with who the project was born were the 5 friends producers. Today they are 15, they got consolidated, anyway, there were personal relationships" (Int 9); "The base of five/eight producers, they talked, look, I know him, he works well, he works with me, he does the same" (Int 9); "Professor Cattaneo took us under her wing" (Int 9); "I [Gobetti] hear from the entrepreneur every week. We meet, we confront us, we understand how to move, he gives us great publicity" (Int 9); "Sbrighes did not respect our agreements [...] so I [Gobetti] cut the contacts" (Int 9).
Acceptance	Very present	"An event with a participation of 500 people, it was a sort of producers' market" (Int 11); "With them [Francesco and Mattia] and with the initial five producers we have always been friends [with Giorgio Gobetti]" (Int 9); "I [Gobetti] heard from the producers and we did a map. So, we looked at what producers were on the territory" (Int 9).
External communication	Very present	"We began to do events, so divulgation" (Int 9); "We went to the job festival" (Int 9); They have a website, social media profile and participate in many fairs and events.
Outside support and commitment	Very present	"In those ten days I was there [with Mathieu] I saw everything […]. He tried to frame in the time I was there an activity for every line that he offered" (Int 9); "With professor Cattaneo we went to the job festival together, we did a speech about the territory and innovation, we did Montagna 4.0 with her" (Int 9); "I [Gobetti] hear from him [the entrepreneur] every week. We meet, we confront us, we understand how to move, he gives us great publicity2 (Int 9);
Unsolid connections	Absent	"With Mathieu we are still in contact" (Int 9); "Let's keep in contact because you [Butéga] is doing it, we [Cattaneo] are trying to make someone doing it, so we are on common ground" (Int 9); "The system is based on trust and the involvement of the producer" (Int 9).
Passivity	Absent	"He [the entrepreneur] came to us" (Int 9); "We are saying no to other producers that come to knock on our door" (Int 9).

Butéga Valtellina found enough support to start the project. The innovators made use mostly of private funds, namely from a national initiative and from local actors. They also got a private investment from the entrepreneur, while they did not have any initial budget available to invest. The project does not generate a profit yet. Financing sources on the territory are present, even though the innovators struggle to keep up with all the expenses they have to face since the funding is deficient. Evidence is given in Table 37.

Table 37. Economic support variables (Chapter 2) related to Butéga Valtellina project. The evaluation assessment is deducted from the interview's quotes, other sources and personal observations.

Variables	Evaluation	Source
Support in early phases	Present	"We won the second price [of RestartAlp], which was a contribution of €20.000 for starting the start-up, one hour per month of counselling with Ferrero […] and €6.500 to spend in counselling" (Int 9); "Three years during which we have full enjoyment of this building without any costs" (Int 9).
Type of support	Private – national, local	"Today we haven't invested even €1 in Butéga Valtellina […]. All that we earned was to cover the expenses. We haven't put and gained a single euro from Butéga Valtellina" (Int 9); "We participated with Sbrighes to a couple of contests promoted by them, by Tirano's municipality" (Int 9); RestartAlp was a national campus, Montagne 4.0 and Sbrighes were local.
Deficient funding	Rather present	"We spend something like €4000 only for the mandatory courses" (Int 11); "We don't have the economic strength now to resolve all these deadly necessities" (Int 9); There are economic sources, but they are not or just enough; "These are the main criticalities, the bureaucracy and the part of the budget cover" (Int 11).

The public administration, in the form of Sbrighes, was ready and willing to get involved in the innovation, even if their intervention was not very supportive. The regulation that constitutes the legal framework for the execution of the project was a hindering element, for all the requirements the innovators have to fulfil in terms of cost and bureaucracy. Anyhow the policy is favourable in the sense that it offers opportunities to start projects. The approach is bottom-up since the innovation was initiated by local actors. Evidence is given in Table 38.

Variables	Evaluation	Source
Readiness of involvement	Rather present	The public administration had a supportive role through the support of the project Sbrighes, but it was not very committed.
Approach	Bottom-up	The innovation was initiated by local actors.
Hindering regulations	Present	"There are a series of obligations, courses, permissions, certifications that fall not only on us but also on the producers" (Int 9).
Unwillingness of risk-taking	Absent	No unwillingness from the authorities was met.
Bureaucracy	Very difficult	"The step that we are talking through at a bureaucratic level is actually about the constitution of the network" (Int 11); "I would put all the bureaucracy in the first place [as disadvantage factor]" (Int 11); "These are the main criticalities, the bureaucracy and the part of the budget cover" (Int 11).
Absence of a legal framework	Absent	The project is registered as a start-up.
Unfavourable policy	Rather absent	"There are opportunities to build something, to get information, to have the chance to say your opinion in society. They are hidden […] there are multiple lines, like RestartAlp, Cariplo Foundation's activities, the mountain community" (Int 11).

4.2.5. A Nursery for Social Farmers

The motivation for the project A Nursery for Social Farmer was for a personal and a social need. The innovator saw the advantage for himself, namely, to get the help needed in the farm, the advantage for the beneficiaries and the territory. This project was consistent with the already activated process of encouraging the coming of a flux of people, the needs of the farmer community to grow, and the value of openness to foreigners at the base of their presence in Rocca Corneta in the first place. They all established themselves there coming from outside but formed a strong bond and collaboration. This bond is given to the fact that they grow the same cultivation and that before settling down they worked in the others' farms. The project began after Francesco Penazzi had taken some refugees as seasonal workers, and the commitment lasted for the whole duration by all the actors. Evidence is given in Table 39.

Table 39. Motivation variables (Chapter 2) related to A Nursery for Social Farmers project. The evaluation assessment is deducted from the interview's quotes, other sources and personal observations. The variables were evaluated according to a personal assessment as follows: very present, present, rather present, rather absent, absent

Variables	Evaluation	Source
Perceived advantage, benefit and impact	Present	"The first reasoning is that they are paid for their work […] they do the whole season, then maybe they find a job and they stay in town […]. The maximum ideal is that I gain a farmer neighbour" (Int 12).
Compatibility	Very present	The process of people coming as seasonal workers and settling after began before; "Of those who stop by, there is always someone who remains, who decides to stay" (int 12); "Either friends of friends, or woofers that have always allowed people to come here and to stop by, and then there is always somebody who needs a job, who needs a worker for the summer" (Int 12); "That is the reason why I am here, why my neighbours are here, why all the others are here […]. To continue in this direction, a direction that tends to work" (Int 12).
Simplicity	Very present	The idea behind is simple. In addition to woofers or other people, they hire refugees and teach them the farmer job.
Foreseeability	Present	"The project was born from our idea to contribute to the repopulation of the area, so to stop or decrease the phenomenon of people that leave and nobody takes their place" (Int 12).
Trialability	Present	In the beginning, Penazzi took the refugees to work for one or two months; "The first year we had a couple of traineeships of simply one month, two months, with other people from the reception centre that came here, worked one, two months with us and stop" (Int 12); "Bama and Abdoulayne came to work as seasonals" (Bolognacares, 2020).
Socio-emotional bonding	Present	Penazzi comes from outside, but he built a social connection with his neighbours that also moved in from outside to start farming; "It's a bit of a shame that I was not born here" (Int 12).
Commitment	Very present	The three main actors, Penazzi, Lai Momo and Grameen were present from the beginning to the end of the project.
Disbelief in innovation	Absent	No disbelief in innovation was expressed.

There is no information about the education of all the actors, but the farmers are graduated and are highly skilled in their job. The division of labour was clear and effective, with Penazzi dealing with the practical farm part, and Grameen with the business-related part. In this way, they had all the knowledge to give a solid and complete education to the trainees. All the actors were prepared in carrying out the project, also thanks to their previous experience in trainees' assistance. Evidence is given in Table 40.

Table 40. Knowledge variables (Chapter 2) related to A Nursery for Social Farmers project. The evaluation assessment is deducted from the interview's quotes, other sources and personal observations.

Variables	Evaluation	Source
Level of education	High	Francesco Penazzi, master in Agricultural Science at the University of Bologna […] Filippo Missiroli, Master in Agricultural Science at the University of Bologna (Penazzi, 2017).
Actor's abilities	Very present	Penazzi and his neighbours are experiences farmers, with previous experience in explaining the job to other workers; Francesco Penazzi arrives in Rocca Corneta in 2012 working at a friend's farm. In 2016 starts working on his own (Penazzi, 2017).
Different competencies	Present	"[…] with the help of Grameen for all the part of education at the economic level, of management, of facilitation and the part of obtainment of micro-credit that is their speciality" (Int 12); Francesco Penazzi took care of the part in the farm, Grameen Italia took care of the education about micro-entrepreneurship; "Once the summer and autumn period of the internships in the farm was done with the visits, the theoretical lectures […] the period in the farm was terminated. At this point, courses on micro-entrepreneurship with Grameen had already started" (Int 12).
Lack of experience	Absent	Grameen had already promoted innovative initiatives; The farmers' community is an innovative environment; "Mamadou, a 30-years-old Senegalese […] was hired as a seasonal by one of the farmers" (Bolognacares, 2020).
Lack of expertise	Absent	All the actors were well prepared, also Penazzi's employee; "Filippo […] did all the theoretic part, he did all the lectures" (Int 12).
Lack of access to information	Absent	There was no lack of access to information.

The project was well organized, with a clear division of labour between the actors, even if the main actors participated and collaborated in each other's activities, such as arranging and attending visits to other farms based on micro.credit. The target and the measures were defined even though each actor had his motivation to be involved in the project. For Penazzi was the repopulation, for Lai Momo was to find some engagement for the refugees, for Grameen to promote the micro-credit. All these intentions lead to join forces in a successful shared project. A Nursery for Social Farmers was funded, but Francesco Penazzi has also some internal revenue. Evidence is given in Table 41.

Table 41. Organisation variables (Chapter 2) related to A Nursery for Social Farmers project. The evaluation assessment is deducted from the interview's quotes, other sources and personal observations.

Variables	Evaluation	Source
Solid organization	Very present	"We began cleaning together a field from the weeds, and then, step by step, the trainees saw and participated in all what happens in a farm […]. They worked 30 hours per week, in every phase, and they got the tools to understand how a farm in Europe works" (Bolognacares, 2020).
Precise objective	Very present	"It's very important to have experience first-hand of the time it takes, of the energies, it takes to do a particular thing" (Int 12); "The problem is that many agricultural projects […] are a disaster because many farms start with this shot of life from the European Community's funds and they get full of debts if you don't have a little of experience" (Int 12); "Grameen was obviously enthusiastic […] this was a way to get in contact and educate some potential beneficiaries [for the micro-credit]" (Int 12); "In these situations, we always try to do long internships, experiences in a farm, placement in a network of contacts" (In 12); "My neighbours that like me, arrived here […] that first-hand saw how it works, what are the difficulties and the satisfactions to take roots in a place" (Int 12).
Cooperation	Very present	"From the encounter between SPRAR project, us, me as farm and placed in a small group of farms, and Grameen Foundation, this project was born" (Int 12); "Obviously, the Grameen Foundation took also part in every guided visit because some of the projects we visited were developed thanks to micro-credit funds" (Int 12).
Inter-sectoral composition	Very present	Different type of actors took part in the project: a private business, a cooperative and a foundation.
Availability of financial resources and revenue streams	Very present	"My idea was that of a self-sustaining project […] I don't take in a trainee that I don't need, I actually need help during the whole season, but I pay him and in the meanwhile, I carry him along" (Int 12); "Actually one [trainee] per year. Last year two because there was the European funding behind this project, of the social challenge, so we could take in one more" (Int 12); "€30.000 that covered the two internships for six months" (Int 12).
Poor organization and leadership	Absent	The project was simple and well organized with no lack of leadership capabilities.

The relationship between the actors worked well and it was very collaborative. Penazzi has also a very good connection with his neighbours that are a source of support. The innovator mentioned that the people resident in the town were somewhat suspicious. Nevertheless, this did not constitute a major obstacle, because the locals were not directly involved in the project. The external communication was primarily constituted by making the refugees know about the project, to identify who could benefit the most from it. The most important aspect is that the communication within the active actors worked well. Evidence are given in Table 42.

Table 42. Interaction variables (Chapter 2) related to A Nursery for Social Farmers project. The evaluation assessment is deducted from the interview's quotes, other sources and personal observations.

Variables	Evaluation	Source
Quality of relationships	Very present	The relationships between the actors involved in the innovation were very good, and of cooperation; "The third important actor in all the matter is the neighbours. Absolutely important […]. I can do this because my neighbours are kind in the same direction and have kind the same awareness" (Int 12).
Acceptance	Present	"The locals slowly got used to seeing new people. So that gradually you can bring more and more strange, darker people. At first, it was not so easy" (Int 12).
External communication	Rather present	"With the fact to make these guys [the refugees] understand what it is about because it is not immediate setting up an explanation about what micro-credit is, what Grameen does etc" (Int 12); The innovation was not systematically advertised to the public, but some articles were written on informational websites.
Outside support and commitment	Very present	The cooperative and Grameen Foundation were committed partners outside the local farmers' community.
Unsolid connections	Absent	The connections were good; The choice of the beneficiaries was not very easy, but with trust and communication they were identified; "Some of the refugees don't have employment, so the reception centre tries to propose to you them, them, them […] but slowly and especially trusting them, we selected" (Int 12).
Passivity	Absent	The cooperative had many potential beneficiaries "For them [the trainees] it was an important opportunity because for the asylum-seekers it is difficult to find a job, especially in mountainous territory" (Aledda, 2019).

To implement this challenge one European fund was used, which provided enough economic support. Nevertheless, the project could also stand alone, in the sense that Penazzi pays the workers he needs while teaching them. This constitutes the private, sustainable type of support. Evidence is given in Table 43.

Table 43. Economic support variables (Chapter 2) related to A Nursery for Social Farmers project. The evaluation assessment is deducted from the interview's quotes and personal observations.

Variables	Evaluation	Source
Support in early phases	Present	The project was based on one funding source that lasted for the whole duration.
Type of support	Public - European	"Last year two trainees because there was the European funding behind this project, the social challenge, so we could take in one more" (Int 12); Francesco Penazzi has actual need for a worker, so he pays the salary.
Deficient funding	Absent	"The fund was enough" (Int 12); "At a European level, there was this social challenge […] and Grameen Foundation got access to the social challenge" (Int 12).

The main problematic aspects were constituted by the bureaucracy and the regulations regarding the refugees which were bond to the reception centre in Lizzano. Another hindering aspect is the legal framework, creating uncertainties around the obtaining of the resident permit by the refugees. The policy and the judicial conditions became unfavourable soon after the completion of the project affecting the following plans. Evidence is given in Table 44.

Table 44. Policy variables (Chapter 2) related to A Nursery for Social Farmers project. The evaluation assessment is deducted from the interview's quotes, other sources and personal observations.

Variables	Evaluation	Source
Readiness of involvement	Present	The reception centre is sponsored by the public administration. In this sense the involvement of the reception centre was easy.
Approach	Bottom-up	The project was initiated by Francesco Penazzi who lives in the area.
Hindering regulations	Very present	"The choice of giving them a house here was because they [the receptive centre] told us no, don't worry, after we will ask for a derogation so that they will have to come back once every two weeks… then instead it was once every two days" (Int 12); "We maybe need to work with the migrants from the CAS of Bologna and it becomes impossible" (Int 12); "The actual Italian political situation. Consequently, the closure of the SPRAR centres […] The refugees have even fewer certainties on the obtainment of the refugee status, of a residence permit" (Int 12).
Unwillingness of risk taking	Absent	The project was supported by EU funds for innovative projects.
Bureaucracy	Very difficult	"We had rented a house here for them [the refugees], but twice a week they had to go back to Lizzano because they had to sign the presence with the fingerprint. I can't tell the discomfort" (Int 12).
Absence of a legal framework	Present	"Both of them [the trainees] was waiting for the documents, o a resident permit for humanitarian reason, […] and being waiting there is little to plan long-term" (Int 12).
Unfavourable policy	Very present	"Once the SPRAR project got closed, it was a moment of panic, so the thing was put a bit in standby" (Int 12); "Salvini excluded from the Sprar reception all the people who have a humanitarian residence permit and the asylum-seeker […]. The small reception is disappearing, substituted by big centres" (Aledda, 2019).

4.3. Comparative analysis

In this section, the variables previously assessed in the single case analysis will be compared theme by theme across the five cases.

About the motivation theme (Table 45), in all the cases the innovators perceive an advantage for a beneficiary group of people, and they could foresee good results. They expanded or developed already existing realities, a reason for which the ideas resulted also quite simple in most cases. The idea was subject to a testing period in all cases except for Terraviva. The socio-emotional bond to the territory was present in all cases since the initiators were born (as for Butéga Valtellina) or moved subsequently (as for CapraUnica's Island and A Nursery for Social Farmers) to the area of the project. Only for Rural Making Lab, the territory of the activity and residence did not coincide, but the innovators felt a bond to the region itself. The initiators were very committed and believed in the innovation they were creating.

Table 45. Comparison of the motivation-related variables across the five cases. The variables are evaluated according to the list: very present, present, rather present, rather absent, absent.

Variables	Butéga Valtellina	CapraUnica's Island	A Nursery for Social Farmers	Rural Making Lab	Terraviva
Perceived advantage, benefit and impact	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present
Consistency	Very present	Very present	Very present	Very present	Very present
Simplicity	Present	Very present	Very present	Present	Rather present
Foreseeability	Very present	Very present	Present	Very present	Very present
Trialability	Rather present	Present	Present	Very present	Absent
Socio-emotional bonding	Very present	Present	Present	Rather present	Present
Commitment	Very present	Very present	Very present	Very present	Very present
Disbelief in innovation	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent	Rather absent

Moving on to the knowledge theme (Table 46), it can be observed that the level of education of the initiators of all cases is high and they also have abilities and skills. In most cases, the initiators have different competencies from one another. In CapraUnica's Island more than the others, the initiators share more or less the same competencies. Most of the innovators were also skilled and experienced in the innovation topic. Butéga Valtellina's innovators had never worked to an innovation before, but they had no problem in gaining the expertise needed due to their

resourcefulness, and their knowledge from their education fitted very well. At times, also some other innovators had to gain some expertise related to the particular project they were dealing with. Having access to the information needed was an issue only for Butéga Valtellina that had to deal with outdated data or reluctant people in realising information.

Table 46. Comparison of the knowledge-related variables across the five cases.

Variables	Butéga Valtellina	CapraUnica's Island	A Nursery for Social Farmers	Rural Making Lab	Terraviva
Level of education	High	High	High	High	High
Actor's abilities	Very present	Present	Very present	Present	Very present
Different competencies	Very present	Rather present	Present	Very present	Very present
Lack of experience	Rather present	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent
Lack of expertise	Rather absent	Rather absent	Absent	Rather absent	Rather absent
Lack of access to information	Rather present	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent

Concerning the organization theme (Table 47), in general, the projects were based on a solid organization at the beginning and a good functional concept. The only one that lacks in an organizational structure is CapraUnica's Island, which is rather an ongoing-developing project, left very open to possibilities and changes. The mission and core values were shared by the innovation group in every case with a clear identification of the problem and the solutions to alleviate it. The cooperation within the innovation group was a strength in every project because it was based on personal, previously established relationships. In other words, the innovators already knew each other, which was the base of a good quality relationship. The inter-sectoral composition of the group was more present in some cases, less in others. Two projects were based on one specific financial source, the amount of which was very clear. Rural Making Lab relied on its internal circular economy which constituted a solid income stream. Also, CapraUnica's Island relied on the internal solid income stream from the innovators' jobs. For Butéga Valtellina planning the finances was more difficult, because it is a long-term project, and especially in the beginning, they did not have any private internal revenue to invest.

Table 47. Comparison of the organization-related variables across the five cases.

Variables	Butéga Valtellina	CapraUnica's Island	A Nursery for Social Farmers	Rural Making Lab	Terraviva
Solid organization	Present	Rather present	Very present	Very present	Very present
Precise objective	Very present	Very present	Very present	Very present	Very present
Cooperation	Very present	Very present	Very present	Very present	Very present
Inter-sectoral composition	Present	Rather present	Very present	Rather present	Very present
Availability of financial resources and revenue streams	Rather present	Present	Very present	Present	Present
Poor organization and leadership	Absent	Rather present	Absent	Absent	Absent

Concerning the interaction theme (Table 48), the quality of the relationships between the innovators and the stakeholders were in general good. Only Butéga Valtellina and CapraUnica's Island had encountered some difficulties, especially CapraUnica's Island. All five projects were eventually accepted by the local community. The aim and the development of the projects were also communicated by the innovators themselves except for A Nursery for Social Farmers. Only CapraUnica's Island had difficulties in having support from outside the local community and to get accepted by the locals, which also determined rather unsolid connections with the local community, especially with the public administration.

Table 48. Comparison of the interaction-related variables across the five cases.

Variables	Butéga Valtellina	CapraUnica's Island	A Nursery for Social Farmers	Rural Making Lab	Terraviva
Quality of relationships	Present	Rather present	Very present	Very present	Very present
Acceptance	Very present	Present	Present	Very present	Present
External communication	Very present	Very present	Rather present	Very present	Very present
Outside support	Very present	Rather present	Very present	Very present	Present
Unsolid connections	Absent	Rather present	Absent	Absent	Absent
Passivity	Absent	Rather present	Absent	Absent	Rather absent

To continue with the economic support theme (Table 49), all the innovations did not find difficulties in getting financial support in the early stage, except for CapraUnica's Island, that did not look for public support at all. Regarding the public support, it came from local authorities and municipalities in the case of Rural Makin Lab and from the European Union in the case of A Nursery for Social Farmers, while the private ranged from local associations to foundations. In general, the funding was enough, with more struggle in covering all the expenses in the two cases that are long-term projects, namely CapraUnica's Island and Butéga Valtellina. Especially for the latter, the difficulty was to find external economic sources to finance the later stages of the innovation.

Table 49. Comparison of the economic support-related variables across the five cases.

Variables	Butéga Valtellina	CapraUnica's Island	A Nursery for Social Farmers	Rural Making Lab	Terraviva
Support in the early phases	Very present	Rather present	Present	Present	Present
Type of support	Private – national, local	Private	Public – European	Private and public – regional, local	Private – inter regional, local
Deficient funding	Rather present	Rather present	Absent	Absent	Rather absent

Concluding with the policy theme (Table 50), the readiness of involvement of the public administration varied between the projects. For two projects it was especially positive, while for one, in particular, it was rather negative. Only A Nursery for Social Farmers found some hindering judicial conditions, and it was the one that also dealt the most with hindering regulations, absence of a legal framework and unfavourable policy. For all the rest, the policy was favourable with some sparse difficulties. CapraUnica's Island encountered the unwillingness of risk-taking from the public administration contrary to the others. All the cases but one reported complicated and difficult bureaucracy. Finally, all the projects had a bottom-up approach.

Table 50. Comparison of the policy-related variables across the five cases

Variables	Butéga Valtellina	CapraUnica's Island	A Nursery for Social Farmers	Rural Making Lab	Terraviva
Readiness of involvement	Rather present	Rather absent	Present	Very present	Very present
Approach	Bottom-up	Bottom-up	Bottom-up	Bottom-up	Bottom-up
Hindering regulations	Present	Absent	Very present	Absent	Absent
Unwillingness of risk taking	Absent	Very present	Absent	Absent	Absent
Bureaucracy	Very difficult	Rather difficult	Very difficult	Not difficult	Rather difficult
Absence of a legal framework	Absent	Rather absent	Present	Absent	Absent
Unfavourable policy	Rather absent	Absent	Very present	Absent	Absent

In conclusion, the supportive factors that the case studies share to a greater extent are the following:

❖ the perceived advantage, benefit and impact on the target group;

❖ consistency to previous experiences, skills and context;

❖ foreseeability of the results;

❖ commitment of the initiators;

❖ high level of education;

❖ initiators' abilities and skills;

❖ precise objective;

❖ cooperation within the innovation group;

❖ climate of acceptance of the project by stakeholders and community;

❖ having private types of support;

❖ having a bottom-up approach.

5. Discussion

5.1. Method

In this section limitations regarding the method will be discussed.

5.1.1. Sampling

The first aspect to consider concerns the choice of case studies. A random approach, often used in quantitative researches removes the risk of bias (Shenton, 2004). Despite this, purposive sampling is used more frequently in qualitative approaches (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). In this study, the cases were first divided into five groups, and then one project per group was selected according to the perceived degree of representativity of the group. The number of cases analysed is limited to five. Even though they are few, they were chosen for their different way of addressing the depopulation problem, providing a wide spectrum of potential variables to be analysed. This allowed a deep insight in understanding the social innovation processes in the field of fighting depopulation through different approaches and to learn similarities between them. Nevertheless, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the Italian framework, since the distribution of the case studies analysed is uneven across the country being the north represented more than the south. Thus, more data were collected about projects and their context in one part of Italy. This fact is not to be underestimated being the history, culture, and traditions very different. Other studies would be necessary to gain more understanding on the topic. Comparing projects with the same approach of tackling the problem in the north and in the south could provide an insight into the presence of differences in the contexts and in what is lacking. Grouping the projects differently could also provide a different perspective on supportive and hindering factors. For example, gathering projects that work with agriculture, or with tourism, or with entrepreneurship etc. could have highlighted the presence of policies in these sectors, and if they are useful for the emergence of social innovations.

5.1.2. Data collection

The same purposive approach has been used in sampling the informants. For each case study, a couple of informants were selected, at least one of which belonged to the innovators' group. No other than the innovators themselves could have provided deep insight and understanding of the projects, which was the aim of the interviews. For the sake of research quality, interviewing a large

number of informants ensures triangulation (Shenton, 2004). Problems in contacting potential interviewees, though, were encountered, because of which it was necessary to leave out some informants. Therefore, triangulation was ensured by comparing the material found on the internet.

Bias could have also occurred in conducting the semi-structured interviews since some of the innovator's interviews were carried out in person, while others by phone. In the interviews conducted in person, there has been space to build a connection with the informants visiting the project's site and small talk before the interview creating an informal and confidential environment. The interviews conducted by phone were shorter, probably because a sense of confidential chat could not be built. Visiting the project place has been useful to understand the activity and get a visual idea of the context, but in terms of learning the factors, it was not essential.

5.1.3. Data analysis

The analysis applied a double strategy of combining inductive and deductive ways of analysing the case studies. First, a comprehensive case description was prepared with including a description of the activities, a chronology and influential factors. Here, the inductive analysis logic dominated the aim to understand each single project. Then, a more structured analysis followed with coding the interview data according to the relevant variables.

This made it possible to answer the research question, namely if the literature variables are present in the case studies about depopulation. The reports were helpful at this stage to check it the deductive analysis left out any relevant aspects and to make the most decisive factors emerge. A possible alternative way of coding could have been to first elaborate variable names independent from the literature, and to match them with the ones from the literature subsequently. However, it soon emerged that many literature variables could be observed also in the case studies, thus those names were used from the beginning. If major differences would have appeared, it would have been more appropriate to code independently from the literature.

5.2. Results

In this section similarities across the cases will be highlighted with the aim to identify common patterns valid for social innovations addressing depopulation. Some variables that were considered particularly interesting to bring to attention, are discussed more extensively. References to literature are made where relevant.

5.2.1. Motivation and knowledge

Socio-emotional bonding with the region was very relevant in all the projects. Neumeier (2017) argues that socio-emotional bonding depends on the size of the region. The smaller the region, the higher the bond of potential innovators on the territory, resulting in a stronger commitment (Neumeier, 2017). The socio-emotional bonds are composed of two elements: social bonds and emotional bonds. Neumeier refers both of them to the region. People feel attach to the people living on a certain territory (social bond) and to the physical place, maybe because they have emotions connected to a certain territory (emotional bonds). An evidence to support the thesis of the existence of the two dimensions of the bonding is given by the case of Butéga Valtellina. The innovators felt connected to the people living in Valtellina, since they started the project firstly to help their friends producers, and they felt connected to the region itself since they didn't accept to see it being destroyed by intensive agriculture. It seems logic to become attached to a place (and the community living in that place) and to want to improve it if it is well known, which gets easier if the place is small rather than big. There are more variables to consider though, such as the scope of the projects and the availability of resources and support. According to Barbera and Parisi (2018) the bonding of the social innovators to the local area translates in an increased sense of responsibility towards the context in which they operate. In this view, the connection to the territory brings to the realization of issues that go beyond the local area, such as the migration of young people from a whole region. The youth unemployment problem is at the core of the activities of the association Pensando Meridiano in which socio-emotional bonding is felt at a regional level, namely Calabria region (a rather big area of 15.221,90 km^2). Neumeier et al. (2011) also discuss the pros and cons in operating in small or larger regions, highlighting the benefit to find more interested and suitable actors the larger the region is. Since marginalized areas are often peripheric and far from the opportunities that bigger cities offer, even if the bond is developed at a local level, finding actors with the necessary competencies might results in the expansion of the innovation to a bigger level. There is no doubt that the innovators of the case studies analysed felt socio-emotionally connected to the region in which they operated, but how their connection changed in relation to the spatial level could be a personal perception that should be investigated with a specific interview question. The size of the region might contribute to trigger fondness and engagement in social innovators, but the size that the project takes depends by sets of variables difficult to generalize.

The results have brought to light the difference in the duration for the creation of the bond. In the projects where the innovators grew up in the area, such as in Butéga Valtellina, the bonding

developed in childhood. In the ones where the innovators moved in the area, such as in A Nursery for Social Farmers and CapraUnica's Island, it developed in adulthood. From the data, the number of years since the bond was established seems irrelevant. A previous study about approaches and values of social innovators conducted between 2015 and 2017, reported the inclination to move across the country as a characteristic of Italian social innovators (Barbera & Parisi, 2018). The majority of the study subjects felt very connected to the territory where the activity was being carried out, that was not necessarily their hometown. About half of them considered moving as a future possibility (Barbera & Parisi, 2018). This supports the hypothesis that moving to another place is an option and it is not seen as restrictive for the creation of social innovations.

There is another aspect to consider, which is the impact of seeing a place with new eyes. This aspect was particularly true for Butéga Valtellina, where the innovators came back to their hometown after the study period outside the community. Coming back made them realize the affection they had for their territory and it awakened the will of engagement. To some extent, this aspect can also be seen in CapraUnica's Island, where the innovator, after many travels abroad, decided to engage in his home country, realizing the inner value of an abandoned place. In addition to the fact that taking distance made the initiators see new opportunities, there is also the fact that moving away opens possibilities to learn and acquire practical skills and abilities that the innovators engaged in the projects, similar to what happens in open innovations. Open innovation, a process that allows knowledge to inflow and outflow the organization (West et al., 2014) parallels the combination of knowledge that the innovators brought in the local area from outside with the traditional knowledge of the area. And last, moving away and travelling boost self-confidence, accelerate self-growing and probably even decrease the fear of taking risks, since travelling already requires the courage of stepping out the comfort zone.

The acquisition of knowledge and know-how seems of highest relevance as well as the importance of the presence of those institutions or actors that support innovations knowledge-wise and share their experiences, besides funding institutions. Also Barbera and Parisi (2018) put the ideation of models for the development of knowledge and the entrepreneurial practices as one method to help internal areas identify their unexpressed potential. Institutions providing the required knowledge can result fundamental for the success of an innovation as in the case of Butéga Valtellina. On the other hand, where this knowledge provision is lacking, social innovations can deputise for it. As examples from this thesis, A Nursery for Social Farmers, noticing the lack in the agricultural sector is offering exactly that know-how potential farmers need to settle, while Rural Making Lab supports the association's members to gain proper training and professional skills. Social

innovations supply by nature social deficiencies, but they shouldn't be an alternative to policies or institutions (Ludvig et al., 2018). Social innovations should rather be a tool for policies (Ludvig et al., 2018), but it is often not the case in Italy.

5.2.2. Organization and interactions

One of the aspects that emerged from the projects is the well-consolidated relationships between the innovators before the start of the projects themselves. The very close relationships were long-standing friendships, as in Butéga Valtellina, family-like, as in CapraUnica's Island, friendships from university, as in Rural Making Lab, and community-like, as in A Nursery for Social Farmers. The relationship between the innovators of Terraviva was consolidated before the start of the project, just as in the other innovations, but they seemed more based on a professional connection. Another aspect that made Terraviva stand out, was the age of the innovators, which was higher than the average age of the other project's innovators. There is maybe a correlation between the type of relationship the core innovation group is based on, the age of the innovators and the experience in innovation. From this thesis, it can be noted that in most of the study cases, the innovators were below the age of 40, but also that older age does not prevent people to be innovative or to start such projects. Even if clear age-related data about different entrepreneurial cohorts is lacking, older entrepreneurs' importance for the future economic activity is increasing as a consequence of ageing world population (Weber & Schaper, 2004). One of the aspects that Weber and Schaper's paper (2004) evidences is the advantage derived from the superior personal network. It can make it easier for older people to establish collaborative relationships with people outside the circle of close friends. While for younger people, it may be easier to search the members for the core innovation group in their close circle of acquaintances because they lack superior personal network. Barbera and Parisi (2018) found out that the contacts between social innovators' community in Italy trespass the regional borders in a network that comprises the whole peninsula. This last observation rather applies to experienced social innovators, namely those that have been in the environment long enough to have established contacts, which is more likely to be the case of older entrepreneurs. It raises the question about the pertinence to differentiate between new-to-the-job social entrepreneurs and experienced one rather than under the age of X and over the age of X. Most specific entrepreneurial education is exclusively for young people, but an increasing number of people are approaching the entrepreneurial environment at a later age, which should make policies consider targeting this group.

The role of the community's acceptance emerged as a hindering factor in CapraUnica's Island and Terraviva. It was especially significant in CapraUnica's Island, where creating relationships with

the locals and getting accepted by the community demanded a lot of energy by the innovators and to some extent undermined their motivation. From the example of these two innovations, it emerges the importance of the local administration's support, since Terraviva could count on the municipality's help to build trustworthiness toward the project among the locals, while CapraUnica's Island could not. Ostrom and Walker (as cited by Lukesch et al., 2020) highlight the importance of building trustworthiness reputation both from institutions and from innovators implying a mutual effort and openness between these two actors. Lukesch et al. (2020) introduce the concept of renewal from above, or institutional innovation which leads back to the suggestion of capacity building to improve governance and performances of public administrations (Milio, 2011). Lukesch and Milio are saying that the institutional role concepts of readiness of involvement and willingness of risk-taking by Dro and Therace (2010), Ludvig et al. (2017) and Neumeier (2017) must not only rely on the attitude of the public administration in charge, but that the presence of institutional innovation (Lukesch et al., 2020) and staff educated in supporting innovation (Milio, 2011) has a great potential in fostering social innovation.

5.2.3. Economic and policy support

The results put in evidence the difficulty of long-term projects in finding sufficient funding. Differences in the stability of the finances can be noted between long and short-term projects. Finding economic resources for a defined period, as in Terraviva, A Nursery for Social Farmers and Rural Making Lab, seems easier. Two of them answered a call for finances, while the latter was organized mainly around its internal circular economy. Butéga Valtellina and CapraUnica's Island, the long-term projects, struggled a bit more. Knowing if the project is short or long term can be useful for institutions and policies for supporting innovations better. Kukeczko et al. (2006) and Neumeier (2017) stress on the importance of having funding at disposal also in later stages of the innovations, noting that most finances opportunities are present in the early stages. This is true for Butéga Valtellina, which struggles with burdensome obligations that arose in a later stage of the innovation. They were lucky to find funding sources from a private investor, but it is not enough for their needs. CapraUnica's Island, on the other hand, was set from the beginning on private revenues coming from their jobs' income. This made the progress of the project and the invested energy fluctuate based on the circumstances. Projects like Butéga Valtellina in the longer run will sustain itself, since it is framed to become a business. On the other hand, projects like CapraUnica's Island, that are not institutionalised cannot count on a stable funding stream. However, examples of social non-for-profit activities that have been operational for many years exist. The paper from Ludvig et al. (2018a) outlines two successful cases that make consistent use

of volunteer work, a treat in common with CapraUnica's Island. The success of one of the cases of the paper was partially based on the volunteer working hours of the owner (Ludvig et al., 2018a) which requires a great dedication by the actors and undermines the sustainability of the project. It is also necessary to note that CapraUnica's Island was not thought to be a full-time project for the innovators since they also wanted to give an example of the feasibility of living and working remotely. Maybe because of the spontaneous nature of the project, the innovators did not put much energy in searching for public funding, even though they sought support from the public authorities.

It can be discussed if the continuation of the projects analysed in this thesis should be called sustainability. According to the literature (Buckland & Murillo, 2013; Carvache-Franco et al., 2018) sustainability is the continuation of the project over time, and the economic sustainability is of special importance. All the projects analysed found a way to self-sustain without many public finances needed, even if some, such as Butéga Valtellina, are not there yet. In fact, since even the short-term projects found a way to continue, it could be discussed if these projects were really short-termed or if they should be rather considered slices of longer projects, therefore sustainable. Rural Making Lab has been one of the activities carried out by the association Pensando Meridiano, which is engaged in the involvement of young people in the territory. As a further development, the start-up PM Open Lab was born. Terraviva is continuing the engagement on the terraces with the SociAlp project after winning another call for projects. A Nursery for Social Farmers, as said before, is a project that began prior to the funding, and that is continuing after. Finding sustainable business model is a challenge for non-profit activities (Acquier et al., 2019). Some search partnership with third parties outside the local community (Buckland & Murillo, 2013), some introduce a for-profit activity that support the project or membership fees (Acquier et al., 2019). These strategies are also found in the case studies. Of special significance is the case of Rural Making Lab with the concept of an internal circular economy, which constituted one of the most successful factors for this innovation and an example of the complementarity of private (i.e. membership fees) and public (i.e. public sponsorships) sources to make the innovation self-supporting (Górriz-Mifsud et al., 2019). Moreover, since the revenues are invested in supporting the competencies building of the association's members ("Pensando meridian website", 2020), it is based on the concept of *capacity building*. The capacity building (as cited in Milio, 2011) is the process that individuals, groups or organizations undertake to "improve the ability to enhance their functions and objectives (p. 611). It has been used to modernize public administration in the implementation and support of policies (Milio, 2011). But it can also be understood as part of the process of becoming sustainable, since it allows an innovation that deals with new technologies,

such as Rural Making Lab, to save budget for the employment and consultation of professional figures. Sacco (2018) takes the argument further. He states that for a social innovation to survive beyond the lifetime of the founders, it is necessary to transform it in a collective action. Therefore, capability building in favour of the local communities assumes a crucial role in developing the sensibility and the empowerment of the community, to give it new tools to face problem-solving challenges and to adapt to new times. These are necessary features for a social innovation to survive (Sacco, 2018). The "knowledge sustainability" is important as much as the economic sustainability for Italian internal areas.

Regarding the type of economic support, private sources appear more important in the analysed projects than public ones. All the projects used private sources, from private institutions or from the innovators' own finances. Private institutions and initiatives, in particular, were determinant in supporting the case studies analysed. The projects analysed rely rather on non-state organizations including foundations, such as Cariplo, Garrone and Grameen, local associations, cooperatives and initiatives. The local authorities contributed as sponsors, e.g. the Calabria Regional Council for Rural Making Lab, or as supporters of local associations and initiatives, such as Montagna 4.0 and Sbrighes. The situation of support for innovations tackling the depopulation problem in Italy seems to resemble the case of non-timber innovation, namely that regional and local economic sources support innovation whereas sectoral support is largely lacking (Weiss et al., 2017). In Italy there is a very important policy, the National Strategy for Internal Areas, whose aim is the development of selected marginalized areas so that residents in these peripheric areas equal opportunities compared to residents in urban areas. The Strategy has been designed and carried out with great accuracy, financed by the state and the single regions, covering topics from improving services to supporting innovative activities. But the policy is limited to a few selected areas (Lucatelli & Tantillo, 2018). The prevalence of private funding institutions in the case studies analysed not included in the Strategy could be given by the fact that the public resources were employed elsewhere. Therefore Weiss et al. (2017) statement could be complemented saying that whereas sectoral policy and support is present but not able to supply to all the sector under consideration, support from private institutions help to supplement the public.

Nijnik et al. (2019) and Weiss et al. (2017), stress the importance of connecting top-down stimulating policies with bottom-up endogenous actions in the innovation's creation. In this light, the bottom-up approaches that characterized the case studies could be seen as being favoured by these already mentioned type of support. Some projects such as Rural Making Lab are bottom-up

initiatives that also function as triggers for the activation of the engagement by the community since it started projects that were subsequently taken over by local institutions.

Rural Making Lab is also the only selected case located in the south of Italy. Looking back at the list of cases in Chapter 3, it can be noted that only five out of 17 projects take place in the south of the country. It is a known fact that social innovation practices are more numerous in the north of the peninsula and in few southern regions, even though social innovators as a *population* are present in the whole country (Barbera & Parisi, 2018). Regional and local initiatives seem vital in supporting the creation and development of the case studies analysed. The emergence of social innovations is thus dependent on the location of supportive private and local initiatives, determining the proliferation of projects in certain areas, where these institutions are mostly present.

6. Conclusions

Social innovations have been suggested as an effective and promising tool for contrasting the depopulation of the internal areas of Italy. The factors that favour or hinder the emergence of social innovations according to previous research have been outlined and subdivided into six themes of variables that regard 1) the motivation to start the innovation, 2) the knowledge of the innovators, 3) the organization structure given to the innovation, 4) the interactions within the innovation group and with outside the innovation group, 5) the economic support coming from external public or private actors, 6) the policy support. Five Italian projects that differ in their methods to address the depopulation problem have been selected as case studies and have been investigated through the aid of semi-structured interviews. After having gained a deep understanding of the cases, the presence of the factors from the literature has been investigated. This thesis aims at contributing to our understanding of whether the factors highlighted by previous studies on social innovation apply also in depopulation cases.

The results show that the depopulation cases analysed share the same favourable and hindering factors underlined by previous studies.

As regards the endogenous (internal) factors, the study showed that the innovators felt a socio-emotional bond to the area where the activity is carried out and perceived the benefit that the project could have on the community which contributed to strengthen their commitment. The projects were based on the innovators' abilities and previous experiences. The initiators in the core group were highly educated and in most cases their competencies were differentiated. They were also able to identify precise objectives to solve particular problems, to give the innovation an adequate organization and to build a cooperative group of action.

As for the exogenous (external) factors, this study showed that external funding is important for the development of social innovations, that the projects were in many cases advantaged when the public administration was ready to get involved and willing to take risks, and that they were sometimes hindered by difficult and complex bureaucracy and sometimes by regulations. The projects were based on activities and territorial features already present in the places, making the social innovations dependent from the cultural and historical context of the area. Moreover, the bottom-up approach has been the most popular among the case studies.

Some aspects worthy of deeper consideration emerged.

The discourse about socio-emotional bonding has been extended to include a differentiated view on the required years to establish such a bond. This thesis suggests travelling or depart from a local area and then returning as a factor influencing the socio-emotional bonding and the will to engage on the territory because of the resulting self-confidence and the new knowledge-acquisition, and its property of making the area seen with "new eyes". Institutions are not only important for their political and financial support, but also for the provision of knowledge and know-how. Specific entrepreneurial knowledge programs target young people, but since the young age is not a prerequisite to start innovative projects, such programs should rather target the non-experienced aspiring entrepreneurs as a category regardless the age. The education and capacity building of public administration, or renewal from above, in meeting the need for support of social innovators seem to impact the acceptance of the social innovation and therefore, they seem to be fostering factors. Short-term and long-term projects differ in how easy finding the necessary financial support to cover all the stages of the innovation is. In particular, long-term projects struggle to find external economic support in the late stages. Capacity building in favour of the local communities is a feature able to make a social innovation survive beyond the lifetime of its founder, and it is perceived as knowledge sustainability. Private institutions' support become crucial where a sectoral policy doesn't cover all the whole sector. The entrustment to local and regional initiatives for the support of social innovations determines their proliferation according to the location of these initiatives, and potential inhomogeneity throughout the country.

In conclusion, the factors that are valid for the emergence of social innovations addressing the depopulation problem in Italy parallels the ones from the literature. From this thesis it emerges also the context-dependability of the projects, the benefit of a close collaboration between social innovators and public administration, and between private and public institutions in the support of social innovations.

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Int 3 (2019, July 25). Interview with Luca Andrea Marazzini, project's initiator [In person].

Int 4 (2019, July 26). Informal not recorded interview with D., project's initiator [In person].

Int 5 (2019, July 30). Interview with Daniel Tarozzi, journalist [On the phone].

Int 6 (2019, September 18). Interview with Lucia Pompilio, president of the Natural Science Society [In person].

Int 7 (2019, September 18). Interview with Ivano De Negri, president of the management body of the Ossola's protected areas [In person].

Int 8 (2019, September 18). Interview with Claudio Minacci, president of the land association Terraviva [In person].

Int 9 (2019, June 26). Interview with Giorgio Gobetti, innovation's initiator [In person].

Int 10 (2019, June 26). Informal not recorded interview with the producers [In person].

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8. Annexes

Annex 1. Generic interview guide

1. Can you tell me about how the project started?
   - What were the motivations behind?
   - What was the problem?
2. Can we draw together a timeline of the steps of the social innovation (design, development, put into practice, social change) and which actors were involved or contributed in each step?
   - What was the role of each actor?
   - How relevant was each actor?
   - Are the institutions national or regional?
3. What were the factors you found the most supportive? That helped you the most? (funds, advises, moral support,…)
   - Who and what determined the projects success?
4. Can you tell me about how you got all the info needed?
   - Was it easy to get them?
5. Were there any difficulties in starting and carrying out the SI?
   - Did anyone or anything hinder you?
   - Would you have needed something else?
   - Were there any conflicts between the actors?
6. What are your future plans?
7. Do you want to add any final comment or thought?