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Dynamics of Social Innovation in rural areas: A Case Study of VàZapp' in Apulia region

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Abstract

Introduction and objective - Murray et al. (2010) defined the social innovation as "...new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs (more effectively than alternatives) and create new social relationships or collaborations. ...they are innovations that are both good for society and enhance society's capacity to act. The interest is in innovations that are social both in their ends and in their means."

In the province of Foggia, the most convincing example of SI in rural areas is represented by VàZapp'. VàZapp' is a rural hub aiming at creating career opportunities for young people in a rural area. It descends from a deliberative and participatory movement, which attempts to tackle this issue by developing a path of open and diversified community creation that revives agriculture from young entrepreneurs and young human capital existing in these territories to mitigate the process of marginalization and brain drain, and finally to lead these areas to a new paradigm of agriculture. The aim of this work is to propose a temporal and spatial scale model to frame the dynamics of social innovation and to test this model by means of case studies in a rural context.

Methodology - Our methodological approach is based on the concept of proximity and distance, which are used in many different ways in literature dealing with, for example, innovation studies, organizational science and regional science (Knoben & Oerlemans, 2006).

Cognitive proximity refers to the shared knowledge base between actors. Organizational proximity refers to a similar organizational background of actors.

Social proximity refers to levels of trust, friendship, kinship and experiences between actors. Social proximity may facilitate the exchange of tacit knowledge, in particular, because of trust-based relations. Finally, institutional proximity refers to the extent at which actors have similar broader cultural backgrounds such as societal norms and values. Boschma (2005) argues that these forms of relative proximity weaken geographical (absolute) proximity as a necessary precondition for learning and innovation.

The qualitative data have been collected through a focus group with some main actors directly involved in the VàZapp' Social Innovation. In addition to the qualitative data of the

focus group conducted by an expert, there is further information obtained from semi structured interviewees.

Following the use of the social innovation spiral (Murry and co, 2010) and its various phases as well as the concept of proximity in a context of territorial development defined by Raven et al. (2011) it has been possible to put together the following graph. In the table different 'proximities' are considered in each line which influence the dynamics of scaling of social innovation.

Preliminary Results - To well understand and to compare with scientific literature a semi-structured interview to principal actors of the case study was conducted. Since all interviewees hold a high position in their respective organization, it is believed that they have a comprehensive overview concerning the attitude and activities of the two cases.

Due to the availability of the actors to answer the questions posed in the interview, it was possible to identify the phases of social innovation in which both case studies are located.

It is important to consider that V&Zapp' is still in the phase of growing and scaling up.

Keywords : Social Innovation, Marginalized rural area, temporal and spatial scale model