Social innovations in/with/for the welfare state in rural areas

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Contribution to ESSI webinar June 3, 2025

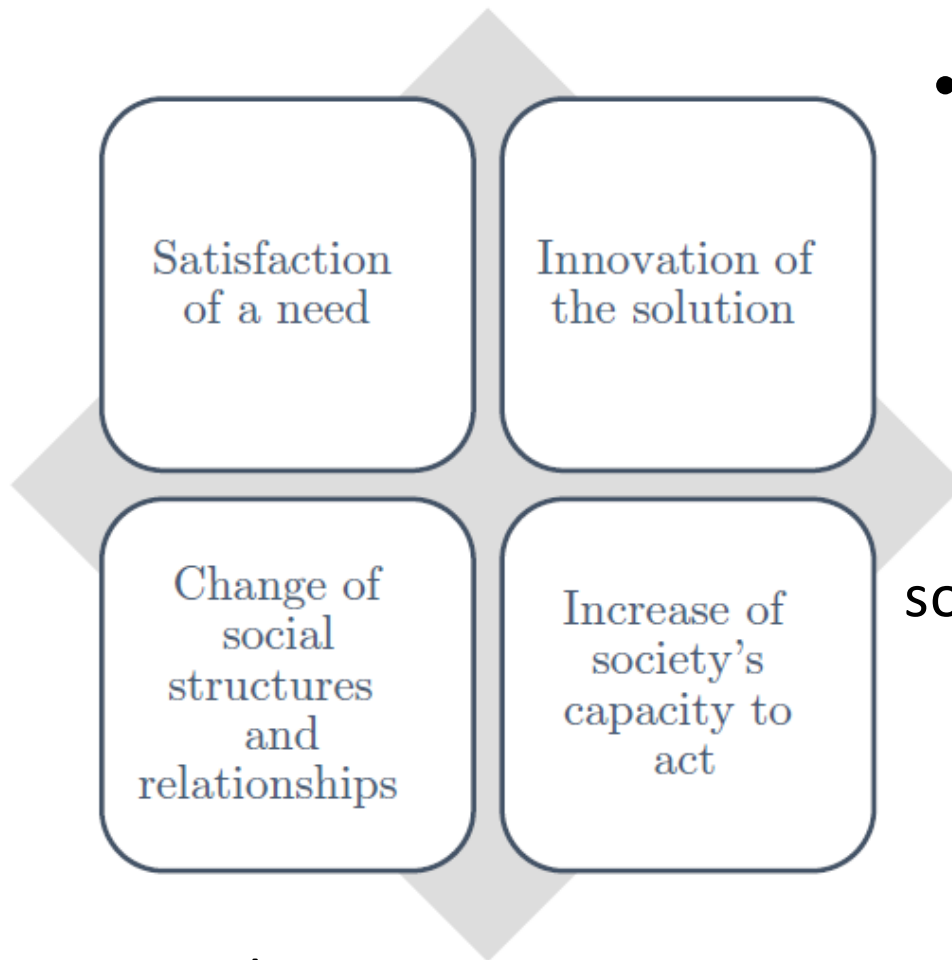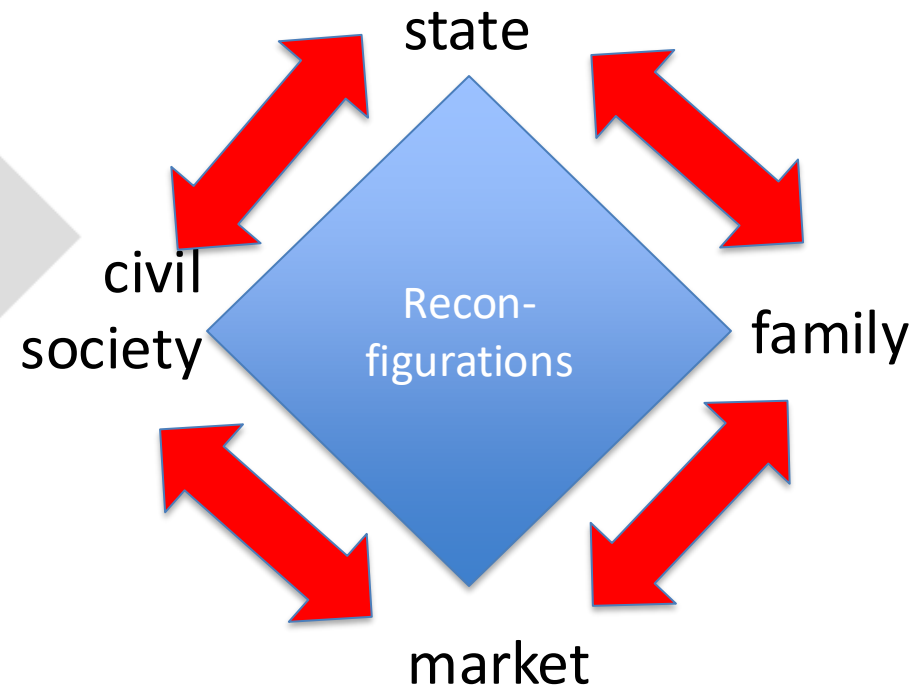# The question

- Which part do social innovations play in solving problems in the welfare state and the labour market …

- … and also mitigating the impacts of disadvantageous social policies?

- How does this play out in rural areas?

- Some empirically grounded comparative conclusions from 3 out of 6 case studies

- Incidentally, an interdisciplinary experiment with economists and sociologists!

Social innovation ↔ welfare state

Satisfaction of a need	Innovation of the solution
Change of social structures and relationships	Increase of society's capacity to act

Portales 2019

- „redesigning the welfare diamond"

state

civil society — Recon-figurations — family

market

(Jenson 2015)

The rural dimension

- an attempt to connect the work of the WeLaR project with new Horizon projects [DICES](#), [SERIGO](#)

- Basically developed in the context of rural development:

> "SIs as "a tool to create vibrancy in rural areas by filling public service gaps, experimenting with new business models, and creating a stronger sense of community" (Bulakowskiy & Marshalian, 2024)"

- **Rural challenges:** inadequate services, gaps in infrastructures, lacking public meeting spaces, low productivity or limited job prospects, outmigration of younger, more skilled people; accelerated ageing of local populations (Christmann et al., 2024).

- **Rural SIs**: smaller number of actors, a stronger role of civil society, fewer and older people involved, less access to funding, and less developed "ecosystems", land use may play a part, (Bulakowskiy & Marshalian, 2024), Impact sought on regional level

Methodology

- Case selection pragmatic, to fit in matrix with some variation among welfare state regimes (South European, Continental, CEE/SEE)

- Document analyses, interviews with experts, innovators, users of the service (4-8) following a common reporting guideline

- Individual case study reports and comparative analysis: Holtgrewe, Ursula, Wolter, Stella & Bruckmayer, Michaela. (Eds.). (2024). *Social innovations in and with the welfare state.* HIVA

Case studies distribution

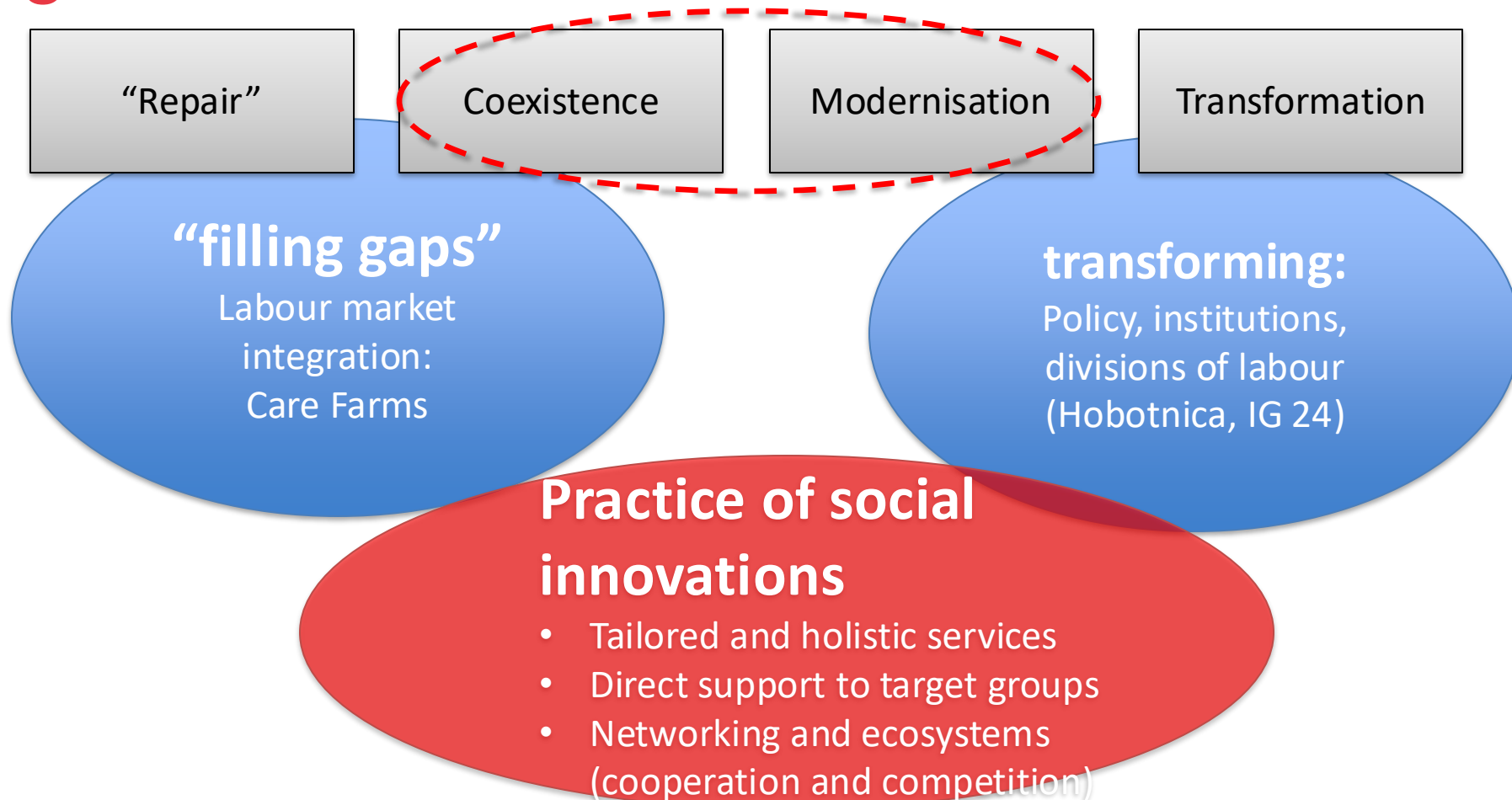|	CEE/SEE	South	Continental	
LM (re)-integration and Social Entrepreneurship	PL:**Aktywizacja** Job crafting for people w/disabilities	• IT: Restaurant **Numero Zero** staffed by psychiatric patients	• BE: **Care farms** project for people w/ mental health conditions	
Social security for precarious forms of work			• AT: **IG 24** interest representation of precariously self-employed live-in carers	
Interest representation / participation of marginalised groups	RS: **Hobotnica (Octopus)** modular services for women in a rural area		• DE: initiatives to oppose asylum seekers' **payment cards** • AT: **IG 24** (prerequisite for social security)	

Types of social innovation

- **„linear inclusive" labour market inclusion** or (re)-integration
  - Individualised support interfacing with health and care services
  - Recombination of domains
  - wellbeing and self-efficacy of clients, some knowledge transfer to public/labour market or healthcare services

- Resistance to **welfare-state-plus-globalisation-induced exclusion or marginalisation** of particular groups:
  - Regularising employment of precarious self-employed migrant care workers
  - Octopus RS „closing gender gap in unpaid work"

No „pure" types: contrasting ambitions and pragmatic middle ground

WeLaR

| "Repair" | Coexistence | Modernisation | Transformation |

"filling gaps"
Labour market integration:
Care Farms

transforming:
Policy, institutions, divisions of labour (Hobotnica, IG 24)

Practice of social innovations
- Tailored and holistic services
- Direct support to target groups
- Networking and ecosystems (cooperation and competition)

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Typologie: Howaldt 2017

Opportunities and constraints

Opportunities

- Labour shortages
- Policy concerns over mental health, wellbeing
- Reasoning of inclusion, prevention, social investment
- Absorptive capacities of public administrations (also local, bottom-up)
- Social media for organising

Constraints

- Path dependencies of welfare state regimes
- Current politics (ageing electorate, austerity)
- Resource dependency, "projectification": institutional expectations vs limited capacities
- Frustration with higher aspirations

Pathways – some pragmatic convergence?

- Degrees of initiatives' **aspiration**:
  - filling gaps in welfare state provisions → *developing and integrating new, more tailored services*
  - *Upscaling*
  - transforming policies towards more inclusion and equality → *supporting people affected by current policies*
- **Embeddedness** in networks, trajectories, communities of practice, parts of (not always harmonious) "ecosystems"
- **Some indirect impacts**

Conclusions

- Variation in aspirations and strategy, but convergence of shared practices

- In our cases: more focus on target groups and thematic networks than regional development

- To achieve impacts, SIs in the welfare state context require institutional counterparts with "absorptive capacities" for resources, institutionalisation, uptake

- How do transformative initiatives sustain their aspirations? Varied time horizons, divisions of labour, pilots, localisation (but frustrations are likely)

References

- Bulakowskiy, M., & Marshalian, M. (2024). *Assessing the framework conditions for social innovation in rural areas*. OECD. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/05/assessing-the-framework-conditions-for-social-innovation-in-rural-areas_6d2469b7/74367d76-en.pdf

- Christmann, G., Sept, A., & Richter, R. (2024). Socially Innovative Initiatives in Deprived Rural Areas of Germany, Ireland and Portugal: Exploring Empowerment and Impact on Community Development. *Societies*, *14*(5), 58. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc14050058

- Jenson, J. (2015). Social innovation: Redesigning the welfare diamond. In A. Nicholls, J. Simon, & M. Gabriel (Eds.), *New Frontiers in Social Innovation Research* (pp. 89–106). Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137506801

- Portales, L. (2019). Social Innovation: Origins, Definitions, and Main Elements. In L. Portales, Social Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship (pp. 1–14). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-13456-3_1

WeLaR is Horizon Europe research project examining the impact of digitalisation, globalisation, climate change and demographic shifts on labour markets and welfare states in Europe. It aims to improve the understanding of the individual and combined effects of these trends and to develop policy proposals fostering economic growth that is distributed fairly across society and generates opportunities for all.

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