

## Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de géographie alpine

107-2 | 2019

Des montagnes en crise : quelles réponses par l'innovation sociale ?

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### Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/rga/6106>

DOI: 10.4000/rga.6106

ISSN: 1760-7426

### Publisher

Association pour la diffusion de la recherche alpine

### Electronic reference

Alessandro Gretter, Cristina Dalla Torre, Federica Maino and Andrea Omizzolo, « New Farming as an Example of Social Innovation Responding to Challenges of Inner Mountain Areas of Italian Alps », *Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de géographie alpine* [Online], 107-2 | 2019, Online since 27 September 2019, connection on 30 September 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/rga/6106> ; DOI : 10.4000/rga.6106

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This text was automatically generated on 30 September 2019.



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## *Acknowledgement*

*Some investigation activities carried out during year 2018 in Tesino (Trentino) are connected to the Project “Anticipate Future Jobs on Alpine Remote Areas” (ALPJOBs) financed by the European Parliament within the initiative ARPAF (more details here <https://eventi.fmach.it/alpjobs>).*

## Introduction

- 1 The speeding up of socio-economic changes in the past fifty years played a key role in the depopulation phenomenon of part of the Alps, in particular, in the southern and eastern Alpine municipalities (Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention, 2015, Elmi *et al.* 2018). Recent studies highlight that the most pressing challenges are a generalised ageing population and spatial polarization between growing and declining areas. Hence, the most populated municipalities often act as centres of service, commerce and employment, attracting flows of population that commute or move from neighbouring areas (Bätzing *et al.* 1996, Fondazione Montagne Italia 2018, Elmi *et al.* 2018, ESPON 2018). Many of the economical and organisational mountain models have been out-marketed by larger and external competitors, leading to abandonment of consolidated practices. With regard to the agro-sylvo-pastoral sector, a recent study promoted by the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention (2018) highlighted that many Alpine farms have disappeared in the last thirty years (from 570,000 Alpine farms altogether in 1980, only 260,000 remained in 2010) and more than half the farm

managers, mostly in Italy, have given up their activities. This decrease mostly concerned small farms with less than 10 hectares – generally family farms that characterise the Alps and mountain areas worldwide (Wymann von Dach *et al.* 2013, Guiomar *et al.* 2018). These trends of land abandonment – also affecting the two case studies identified – contribute to the further marginalisation of mountain territories (Chand, 2016), referring to their political, social and economic powerlessness and disadvantage (Billson 2005). In the long-term, these trends can also negatively affect the maintenance of the cultural landscape, local resources and increase risks (e.g. natural and hydrogeological) also in connection with the effects of climate change. The authors were interested in detecting cases of interest in mountain territories to understand which elements were contributing to coping with the consequences and reversing the general trends. The focus was particularly in the territories of the North Eastern Italian Alps. Here, drivers have been operating on a long-term perspective, causing classified situations of primary marginalisation risk due to territories remaining outside the main communication, exchange channels and a lack of supporting policies for rural mountain development.

## Theory

### Social Innovation as leverage for mountain development/ renaissance

- 2 In the course of the centuries, mountain territories always developed strategies to cope with social, economic and environmental crisis. Mountain communities have been characterized by a long tradition of self-government, cooperation and rural autonomy, whereby local communities were assigned competence for many issues of local interest and were (and still are) responsible for the management of the commons, in particular, woodlands and pasturelands. (Cantiani *et al.* 2016, Gretter *et al.*, 2018). Regarding the economic and technological aspects, as Zanon (2018, pp.4-3) asserts “not only mountain sites are characterized by up-to-date equipment and activities, but there are also cases of innovative initiatives and firms that are competitive in the larger market. Many Alpine regions have been invested by development processes, and some places have become centres of economic growth”. Over time, Alpine territories have developed the capacity to adapt to fragile environments, cope with difficult living conditions, provide sustainable natural resource management solutions and start collective actions for improving the quality of their life (Maino *et al.* 2018). Despite this, mountains are not homogeneous. Some parts of the Alps, in fact, can be considered “fragile areas” due to their morphological features and social weaknesses, and are currently facing socio-economic and demographic challenges such as brain-drain, ageing of the population and loss of social capital (Cerea and Marcantoni, 2016). Such emerging issues require a different type of solution besides the strategies adopted so far. These new types of responses can be referred to as social innovation. Emerging from social needs, social innovation determines a reconfiguration of social practices traditionally embedded in mountain territories, including habits and customs, networks of cooperation and decision-making processes (Howaldt *et al.* 2015). This process of innovation starts from the vision, intuition, capacity and determination of one or a group of leaders (Trigiglia, 2007), but needs the engagement of the local community in order to be embedded in the territory. It determines the emergence of a new product or service and has

outcomes on the community's wellbeing. Social innovation can be the leverage for mountain renaissance particularly for "fragile areas", which are characterized by a dearth of key resources such as financial capital, agglomeration effects and infrastructural nodes, but can count on the presence of networks of actors operating in a climate of trust and reciprocity (Zanon, 2018).

- 3 From a constructivist perspective on social innovation, it remains unclear where new impulses originate (Noak *et al.* 2018). Differently to the concept of territorial innovation by Zanon, according to which mountains can principally rely on endogenous assets, we assert that mountain innovation needs the synergy between the endogenous potential and impulses that most likely emanate from the outside (Neumeier, 2012). "It is likely that the initial impetus for innovation is triggered by external factors, as ideas or the identification of a need to change one's behaviour very seldom arise in a vacuum, without any external influence or stimulation" (Neumeier, 2012, p. 63). Such impulse can be recognized in a leader, in a new idea coming from outside the community, or in a new way of working that is imported. In some parts of the Alps, for example, heavy depopulation allowed "new highlanders" to fill the empty slot and to start entrepreneurial activities both in the economic and cultural fields (Viazzo and Zanini, 2014). While Neumeier (2012) and Butkevičiene (2009) highlight the importance of external factors influencing rural social innovation, Bosworth *et al.* (2016) indicate that knowledge sharing increases the likelihood for social innovation to emerge. In fact, even though the innovative idea can be triggered by an external input, the reconfiguration process of the social innovation starts if there is a relation of synergy between the exogenous factor with the endogenous assets (natural resources, social-cultural practices, traditions and local community).
- 4 Although social innovation tackles societal challenges in order to improve wellbeing, conditions for potential conflicts can emerge when the tradition embedded in the local community is challenged by the impulse brought from outside (Membretti and Viazzo, 2017). Even in places that have largely been emptied by depopulation, it must be expected that conflictual dynamics may arise over the ownership of tangible and intangible resources. In fact, Lindhult (2008) argues that social innovation processes may also create new problems and conflicts, or have ambivalent or even negative effects for certain actors. Conflicts are however also an integral part of the process and, if managed, they can bring new energy to change, encouraging exchanges of views, as well as stimulating creativity and the development of new solutions (Maino, 2016).
- 5 Within this framework of tension between tradition and innovation, new farming is intended here as a mountain-specific reconfiguration of an attitude towards a traditional rural activity such as farming, and reframing it in a more social perspective. In the following section we will analyze new farming as a mountain-specific social innovation.

### **What is considered "farming" and what we mean by "new farming"**

- 6 In this article, farming is defined as the lifestyle and work of people whose jobs are in the primary sector. However, besides the farmers, in recent years a novel category labelled as "new farmers" has emerged (Ploueg, 2015). Both Academia and public authorities are unable to agree on a unique definition. If we consider the point of view of European Union institutions, they refer to "new entrants to farming" (EIP-AGRI,

2016) as those starting a professional activity in this sector. This definition is not connected to any official statistics. In fact, EUROSTAT considers individuals who are “sole holders under 35 years age” in the category of “new farmers”. It excludes all older individuals and those operating in farming while holding and working in other positions. According to Mailfert (2007, p. 21), new farmers are “beginning farmers, back-to-the land migrants looking for a more fulfilling lifestyle and self-decided economic success”. They are an expression of different movements, rooted in the ones generated by the social protest of the late 1960s, that can be gathered under the umbrella definition of “neo ruralism” (Chevalier 1981). This phenomenon, which started in France and Spain, reached the Alps about ten years ago. There, the appearance of new dwellers in mountain territories (Bender and Kanitscheider, 2012, Löffler *et al.*, 2014, Steinecke *et al.*, 2010), favoured a process of “rural renaissance” with individuals interested in an active role in rural activities.

- 7 What leads these individuals to enter the farming sector? A large set of drivers have been detected by various studies. However, EIP-AGRI (2016) has identified “financial opportunities, economic duress, lifestyle aspirations, work ambitions, social aspirations and environmental aspirations” as the main factors.
- 8 With the extension to “new farming”, we encompass other activities besides the core meaning of agricultural activities (indistinctly from integrated, organic or other approaches), including the transformation of products and the promotion of local natural and cultural resources. “New farming” can be linked to activities of service such as care, tourism and land maintenance. This broader definition has been created in order to enhance the inclusion of activities with a polyfunctional role occurring in the mountains.

### From farming to new farming as a social innovation

- 9 The previously-mentioned drivers are leading individuals into the decision to become active agents in new farming, detecting the features of social innovation initiatives. Some authors emphasize the social and/or socio-ecological attitude of individuals moving into a rural dimension. New farmers and new dwellers of rural and mountain communities, “[...] express a change of the territorial concept, that is, a change in the relationships between individuals and their biosocial surroundings” (Nogue i Font, 1988).
- 10 Individuals and groups operating in new farming are an important source of innovation and entrepreneurship, as has been remarked with reference to European agriculture (EIP-AGRI, 2016). As seen above, newcomers are capable of bringing into local systems different skills, resources and opportunities that were not present or not properly exploited locally. Some examples are small scale, less intensive activities and address needs coming both from external users (i.e. didactic farms) or from within the community (children and health care) maintaining a bond with agricultural activities. In the concept of new farming, the actions of cooperation and networking are of particular relevance. *Ex novo* new entrants are typically disconnected from traditional agricultural knowledge systems (e.g. formal agricultural advisory systems, informal family supports, mainstream marketing channels, etc.). However, they often actively seek to become embedded in their new communities and contaminate them.

- 11 As a whole, these actions act to stimulate local economies, creating new jobs and business opportunities. However, new entrants face a number of obstacles in establishing their new businesses. Access to land, knowledge and use of machinery and production techniques are the most evident. In addition, in order to set up a farm, it is essential to have access to and fully understand information on market access and typology. Strong and weak ties are both needed to facilitate successful access to farming resources and this statement applies in some degree to both farm-origin farmers and new farmers (Mailfert 2007).

## Research questions, hypothesis and methods

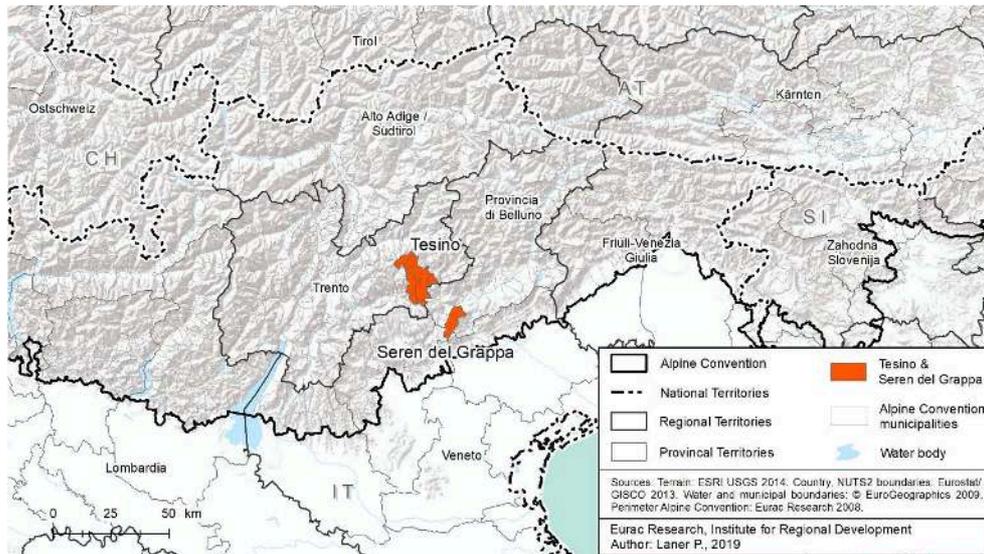
- 12 In approaching social innovation in mountain territories, new farming can be considered as a concept that helps to frame and evaluate the research carried out in remote rural/mountain territories. Leaving aside the benefits of modernisation, which reached mountain territories at different speeds and quantities, we found it relevant to understand how local communities are able to respond to mountain territories' compelling social and economic needs. This not only assumes relevance for current challenges, but also for future challenges. In fact, the resilience of communities should rely upon lasting characteristics that inhabitants and other stakeholders are implementing today.
- 13 New farming is currently redefining rural spaces, by challenging traditional dynamics, reconfiguring social practices, stimulating a revision of traditions and enhancing a set of values, from those embedded in the local culture to the ones emerging in the global citizenship.
- 14 There are some hypotheses we would like to test in this paper. How does new farming impact rural areas, and which model of development is it sustaining? Does it represent a relevant option to hold back population recession, and how far does it act as a driver for the socio-economic renewal of the locality involved? Could new farming reinforce interdependence between local economies and global processes operating at different scales?
- 15 This paper has been written based on information and data collected during research activities carried out between 2013 and 2018. Various methods were adopted in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Socio-economic data was collected through desk research, and some evidence was confirmed by interacting with local authorities. Analysis of grey literature was relevant in order to gather further non-technical information and to monitor ongoing initiatives and feedbacks. Direct activities in the field consisted in interviews carried out with local stakeholders, shadowing and observing participation. Notably, the authors were involved in designing and managing initiatives focused on empowering the local community. All these methods were necessary in order to build an empirical narrative of new farming.

## The cases

- 16 There are several examples in the north-east of Italy that can be referred to as new farming processes. Among them, the example of Seren del Grappa (Maino *et al.*, 2016) shows that starting from a newcomer's presence and ideas, and the opportunity

provided by setting-up an experimental vineyard, the community implemented a process towards the creation of a participatory strategy for the territory's development. In Trentino, the municipalities of Tesino (Castello Tesino, Cinte Tesino and Pieve Tesino) created several initiatives based on a concept of "circular knowledge" to bridge generations and enhance local resources for agroforestry production.

Figure 1 – Location of case studies



Source: Laner, P., 2019.

- 17 Other examples in Carnia (Ariis, 2015) and in Comelico and Cadore (Argenta and Galera, 2017) report the initiatives of new dwellers that led to the novel interpretation of traditional activities such as breeding, agritourism and fruit and vegetable production, even facilitating, in some cases, the integration of refugees and migrants.
- 18 The authors have decided to present the cases of Tesino and Seren del Grappa in detail. Both areas have been considered as "inner areas" since the late 1990s. Each case study is presented according to a common scheme that highlights the description of the context and needs which are the exogenous factors catalysing innovation, the new farming model developed and, then, the local effects and solution of needs that emerged so far.

## Seren del Grappa

- 19 Seren del Grappa is a municipality located in the mid-mountain area in the Veneto region, between the UNESCO Dolomites and the Po valley. Far from the main thoroughfares and tourist flows that have impacted the surrounding mountain territories, the area is characterised by a small-scale economy characterized by a strong rural tradition. From the 1920s onwards (the end of the First World War), Seren del Grappa was hit by strong depopulation, causing the abandonment of entire villages in favour of the closer and more industrialized Belluna Valley. Also, in recent decades, traditional planning tools have not been able to counter these dynamics due to politicians' disregard for the mountain, together with the ageing of the population and

the scarcity of economic resources. Consequently, in the span of a century, the population halved from 5,025 inhabitants in the 1921 to 2,448 inhabitants in 2017 (Istat, 2018), despite a positive net migration during the last two years, with a minimum role from foreigners. These long-lasting dynamics have caused the near abandonment of local economic practices primarily based on mountain farming, livestock and forestry. As a consequence, forest expansion due to land abandonment has compromised the architectural and cultural heritage.

Figure 2 – The building hosting the “Val di Seren Foundation”



Source: Val di Seren Foundation, 2014.

- 20 However, its abandonment and marginal position helped preserve an almost uncontaminated area that still retains age-old knowledge and traditions, together with high environmental value. The area's potential and the local community's dynamism and industriousness were recognised by a "new mountain dweller", as defined by Corrado *et al.* (2014). In 2012, the newcomer purchased a historical building in a characteristic hamlet of the municipality. Subsequently, to cope with the area's state of abandonment and counter land degradation, he created the "Val di Seren Onlus" Foundation with the aim of revitalising the territory and creating synergy with the local community. Thanks to his personal network in his region of origin, the Alto Adige, he was able to put Seren del Grappa in the spotlight and it became better known. He was the exogenous influencing factor who created a great flurry and a radical change in the local community's perception of the area itself: from problem to resource. At the same time, this also generated misunderstanding and initial difficulties in accepting external inputs, in giving "outsiders" access to properties, local know-how, well-established social relationships and a pre-existing social and economic network.
- 21 The Val di Seren Foundation turned to the Institute for Regional Development at Eurac Research to obtain support in setting up and coordinating the entire process. In 2013, after a preliminary analysis phase, Eurac Research launched a bottom-up process and enabled the population, the economic operators and the local administrators to reach a shared vision and strategic guidelines for the territory's future in the mid- and long-term. Eurac was tasked with technical and scientific support but also acted as a

mediator to boost synergies among exogenous and endogenous factors. Indeed, a key factor during the early stages of the process was the effort required to overcome the initial mistrust and create a climate of collaboration. Reconfiguring the decision-making process also meant dealing with different points of view and conflicting interests that had to be managed properly.

- 22 As a result of the strong cooperation among stakeholders, the first concrete projects and initiatives have been implemented. These included: the establishment of an experimental vineyard of resistant hybrids; the renovation of the historical building close to the vineyard; a web marketing course to develop innovative communication tools and promote the territory, and the organization of a successful festival entitled "The Mountain of the Future". They are all characterized by elements of local tradition and innovation. For example, with regard to the vineyard, past wine-growing and wine-producing activities were strongly anchored in local tradition, but these were completely abandoned. The establishment of the experimental vineyard highlighted the strategic relevance of the agricultural sector for the area. It also revealed the will expressed by the local community to start over from farming as a leverage to recover traditional local practices and knowledge, and consequently the cultural landscape and architectural heritage. At the same time, the project was carried out with the purpose of testing innovative techniques, which could provide important long-term results for the return to mountain farming in a sustainable and innovative way.

Figure 3 – Local inhabitants involved in the preparation of the experimental vineyard



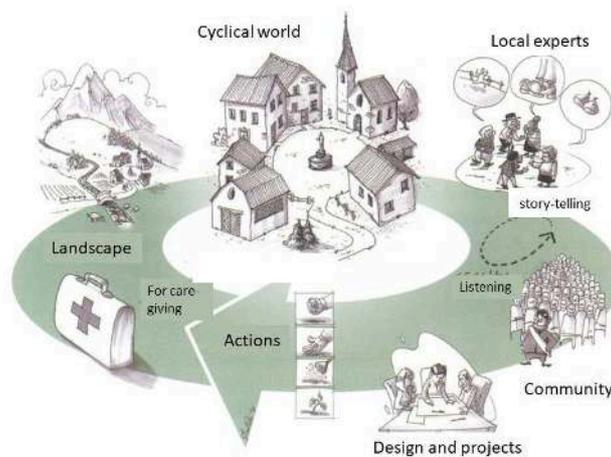
Source: Val di Seren Foundation, 2012

- 23 The support given to the launch of the first concrete projects bred a sense of confidence and gave new impetus to the area. The projects act as drivers for other projects and help revitalise the territory in terms of agricultural activities, as well as other sectors. Most of them have been characterised by multi-functionality and are the result of interregional cooperation between Veneto and the Alto Adige region.

## Tesino

- 24 Tesino is one district located in the most eastern part of the Autonomous Province of Trento, bordering the Veneto Region. Since the late 1990s it has been classified as an area with production difficulties, being listed within the “inner areas” by the Italian Government. The main drivers of emigration in the area are lack of services and qualified working opportunities, due in particular to the reduction of jobs in local manufacturing companies.
- 25 In recent years, the study area, inhabited by 5,199 people in 1921 and with a population of 2,189 (ISTAT, 2018), has recorded a positive net migration with a minimal role from foreigners, counterbalancing the negative natural balance. Internal migrants from Italy are primarily returnees, as well as amenity migrants and business-oriented migrants. Agriculture and tourism are the main economic opportunities, but these sectors cannot be accessed easily by new dwellers due to traditional property rights. The highly fragmented nature of land and property ownership is a serious barrier to development for both long-time residents and newcomers, whether the latter have local kinship ties (as in the case of returnees) or must first build trust relationships with local landowners before they can rent land from them.

Figure 4 – The “Circular vision” of Tesino as elaborated by local innovators



*Adapted from Sordo & Vitti, 2016*

**SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM SORDO, N. & VITTI, A. 2016.**

- 26 In Tesino, young locals are creating, and leading, tight linkages within the community and are capable of enhancing local culture through new social and economic activities. Since 2014, projects have been launched to engage members of multiple generations in efforts to preserve traditional ecological knowledge. These projects are setting the basis for revitalizing local agriculture, trying out new modes of transforming products from natural resources (organic production, old varieties or valuable species, etc.) and offering a novel form of hospitality (agro-environmental education, pet therapy, etc.). Recent changes in local governance, with younger administrators and the implementation of new development strategies, are now combined with individuals'

ideas on how to pave the way for greater local economic opportunities (Gretter *et al.*, 2017).

- 27 Behind the key actor who supported the dissemination of a different vision related to farming, there is a second generation of returnees who combined both exogenous and endogenous elements. The aim of one of the key actor's projects was the recovery and adaptation of traditional local knowledge connected to agriculture and food transformation to actual needs. An attempt was made to map all the elements composing the rural system operating in Tesino to provide an opportunity to bridge different generations, such as older people and school pupils. Activities include the creation of an event dedicated to the use of spontaneous herbs for food preparation, each year attracting persons from various regions. Seeds of a bean species that almost disappeared were found and then replicated in various vegetable gardens or farms in order to obtain a production to be sold at similar prices to famous varieties. These activities were accompanied by actions taken by local communities in order to improve the working opportunities and conditions of farmers, in particular with relation to wood clearance, availability of plots and the amelioration of roads and infrastructures. However, limiting factors remain in the water pipeline, digital connectivity and basic services.

Figure 5 – Education activities with locals on MAPs



Source: Sordo, N. 2016.

- 28 In Tesino, the number of individuals involved in the primary sector is somewhat limited, but the involvement of young persons has revived it. Statistics of women and farmers under 35 years of age are higher than the provincial average (22% and 27%, respectively). Some of the interviewed farmers have been supported by regional funds aimed at young individuals creating new farm enterprises. These young farmers decided to invest on different farming models, approaching organic production and permaculture, valorising Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (MAPs) and testing locally innovative varieties of grapes using the abandoned terraced landscapes. Most of them are locals, others are returnees with solid links to Tesino. A few are individuals external to the community. They are aged between 25 and 55, are mainly not related to farming

families and chose to switch from other sectors. They are following a personal ambition and inspiration, detecting a series of opportunities in “new farming” rather than being forced to operate there due to the economic crisis.

- 29 Tesino’s primary sector (forestry should also be taken into consideration) can represent leverage for change instead of relying on consolidated tourism models and disappearing manufacturing. Those involved in new farming can contaminate other sectors too. They are capable of reinvigorating the socio-economic offer by valorising local resources and presenting genuine examples of the rural community.

## Discussion

- 30 Selected case studies deal with new farming initiatives in Italy’s inner mountain areas. Common traits can be identified by comparing the cases: the strategic role of the agricultural sector for mountainous areas as a model of sustainable development; the role of innovation to give renewed impetus to marginal areas and the importance of the synergy between exogenous factors and local resources; the launch of concrete initiatives as a driver for creating a fertile environment and setting the ground for other projects. Most of the projects implemented in the case studies analysed are characterised by multi-functionality. This does not mean combining different activities within the same realm, but coupling activities with other aspects such as services of public interest and the promotion or marketing of the area.
- 31 All these could contribute to the wellbeing of local communities and could have positive indirect effects on curbing population recession. Social effects are even greater than simple economic revenues and should be able to spread generative welfare in the involved communities with benefits for the medium and long-term.
- 32 At the same time, case studies highlighted common difficulties: access to land due to the high fragmentation of land property that can be found almost everywhere, with a few exceptions, in European mountain areas (Omizzolo, 2017); access to rural communities’ traditional knowledge and these communities’ well-established social and economic relationships (Maino, 2017); resistance to change and innovation.
- 33 These can be overcome by locally embedding initiatives in a process of positive contamination, where trust and cooperation are relevant aspects, and by stimulating the local economy.
- 34 In the case of Seren del Grappa, some barriers were overcome thanks to the entire local community’s involvement in the participatory process and by dealing with conflicts as an integral part of the process. Evidence of the distinctive strength of opening up the decision-making process can be seen in several perspectives: the synergy that has been generated between the local community and newcomers, tradition and innovation, local knowledge and the expertise provided by experts and researchers.
- 35 Many new entrants find it important to keep or develop local services and in that way stimulate a region’s liveability. Usually, they involve categories of unemployed individuals such as females, persons with disabilities and refugees. In Tesino, new training activities were implemented for women in the field of social and responsible tourism. The development of new business models based on end-users is relevant for the value citizens attach to some aspects of the countryside and agricultural products (quality, tradition, health benefits, nature etc.). The “desired future” of young locals, as

recently expressed within participatory mapping activities of the AlpJobs project, is, in fact, a lively social texture and working opportunities.

## Conclusion

- 36 Current socio-economic challenges in mountain areas relate to ageing population trends, spatial polarization between thriving and declining areas, and changing production-related economic paradigms. Although traditionally populations have developed the capacity to adapt to the fragile and hostile environment characterizing mountain areas, new types of responses are needed to face emerging complex and cross-scale challenges. Authors support the argument that social innovation can be the framing concepts for initiatives aimed at improving community wellbeing by reconfiguring social practices embedded in mountain territories. Such initiatives start from the vision and values of a leading group, but become embedded in a context through the local community's engagement. Within this framework, new farming can be one concrete example that frames those initiatives which employ a new set of values related to agricultural production and an economic model of reference. New farming expresses a change in the relationship between actors and their context.
- 37 Two cases were explored in order to respond to the research questions concerning the impacts of new farming on rural areas, an economic model of reference, neo-endogenous factors supporting social innovations and global processes acting at the local scale.
- 38 It emerged that, in the case of Seren del Grappa, the initiative of a private person external to the community was able to attract the interest of other citizens and, with the involvement of the local administration and the support of experts created a participatory development action. In Tesino, the impact from internal innovators was, at first, more on the socio-cultural side. This then gathered, or supported, the interest of new entrants in farming adding an economic relevance which was later also recognised by the municipalities. Moreover, the combination of new dwellers and a renewed interest in the primary sector enabled "new farming" to become a potential powerful engine to boost small-scale and locally-based activities of economic and social relevance. Their scale of operation is usually greater than the single municipality or community and evokes the need to reach minimal dimensions in order to obtain a better testimony of the innovation brought into the mountains, emphasizing the role of the network of networks.
- 39 This exploratory study acknowledges the importance of bottom-up initiatives in the primary sector designed to improve community wellbeing in mountain rural areas lacking policy support. In Europe, funding opportunities can be derived from Common Agricultural Policy measures and their application at national and regional level. National strategies, such as the one in Italy aimed at circulating unused land ("Banca della Terra") for farming initiatives, are also to be considered relevant. Furthermore, institutions such as the FAO (2014) are starting to invoke a novel approach to agriculture such as agro-ecology and agro-forestry. However, future research is needed to identify specific policies addressing the dissemination of social innovation initiatives in mountain territories, specifically targeting the primary sector.

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## ABSTRACTS

Changes in the socio-economic framework that have taken place since the late 1960s have disrupted the multi-centennial balanced models of organisation in mountain communities, leading to a series of challenges in the socio-economical, cultural and environmental spheres. Mountain communities, independently or with the support of local and regional authorities, tried to halt or reverse these processes. In some cases, the effort is not only collective, but the sum of different individuals belonging or related to the community. Processes of social innovation arose sparsely in various alpine territories, and many of them are connected to a novel interest in the primary sector by locals and new residents. The combination of both, but not exclusively, could be considered as generating "new farming". Authors present two cases identified in the north eastern part of the Italian Alps, which can be associated to this phenomenon. One has been analysed as an external initiative, in which the other authors were involved in supporting ongoing processes. Emerging common elements identified include multi-functionality, new job opportunities and profiles, more substantial social effects and the presence of a series of barriers. At present, actions and projects of social innovation, which are able to anticipate the changes and challenges of the future, seem to be inadequately addressed and deserve attention.

Les changements intervenus dans le cadre socio-économique depuis la fin des années 60 ont perturbé des modèles d'organisation des communautés de montagne pluricentennaires et équilibrés, générant une série de défis au niveau socio-économique, culturel et environnemental. Les communautés de montagne, seules ou avec le soutien des autorités locales et régionales, ont tenté d'arrêter ou d'inverser ces processus. Dans certains cas, l'effort n'est pas uniquement collectif, mais est la somme du travail de différentes personnes appartenant à la communauté ou en rapport avec elle. Les processus d'innovation sociale se sont peu développés dans les différents territoires alpins et beaucoup d'entre eux sont liés à un intérêt nouveau pour le secteur primaire de la part des habitants et des nouveaux résidents. La combinaison des deux, mais pas exclusivement, pourrait être considérée comme générant une "nouvelle agriculture". Les auteurs présentent deux cas du nord-est des Alpes italiennes qui peuvent être associés à ce phénomène. L'un a été analysé comme une initiative externe, tandis que dans le deuxième cas, les auteurs ont participé au soutien des processus en cours. La multifonctionnalité, les nouvelles possibilités et profils d'emploi, des effets sociaux plus substantiels et la présence d'une série de

barrières font partie des éléments communs émergents. À l'heure actuelle, les actions et les projets d'innovation sociale capables d'anticiper les changements et les défis futurs ne semblent pas suffisamment pris en compte et méritent une attention particulière.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** neo-rurals, social innovation, community development, new farming, Alps

**Mots-clés:** néo-ruraux, innovation sociale, développement communautaire, nouvelle agriculture, Alpes

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