

## **Convegno Territori, mobilità, lavori**

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**Sessione Conclusiva**

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### ***La governance multilivello dell'innovazione sociale locale in Europa***

Social innovation has been understood predominantly as a local phenomenon by most of the scholars investigating it. The emphasis on the local as the locus of social innovation and on bottom-up dynamics as the modus of social innovation, however, entails manifold risks for both social research and action. The idea that all social needs are better met at the local level is overstated as is the potential of local agency in addressing structural global processes of social exclusion. The same is true for the assumption that other (higher) spatial, institutional and political levels are hostile to social innovation (Oosterlynck et al., 2013a). In other words, it entails the risk of falling into “the localist trap”, that is the a priori assumption that the local scale is preferable to larger scales (Purcell and Brown, 2005). Escaping the local trap means problematizing social innovation as a solely bottom-up practice, to embrace a more comprehensive and relational approach on how it actually moves between and across scales, depending on the strategies it adopts and on the institutional scalar arrangements framing its development. This does not mean that the local does not play a relevant and special role. Many initiatives are indeed ‘bottom-linked’ and the ‘local’ is the level where all other levels conflate. The same cannot be said about the supra-local dimensions, which might play an irrelevant role in socially innovative initiatives.

Addressing social innovation through the lenses of multi-scalarity is organised as follows. In the first section of the paper the concept of scale will be introduced in relation to social innovation, and a description of the rescaling processes involving social policies in Europe and their implications for social innovation will be provided.

The second section presents the empirical findings emerging from the analysis of the case studies of the ImPRovE project. Here the scales that are mainly involved in social innovation will be identified in particular how opportunities and constraints are distributed among those scales. Then, a typology of social innovation aimed at overcoming the narrow conceptualisation of social innovation as solely a bottom-up practice, by looking at the strategies that socially innovative initiatives adopt in order to establish connections between and across scales. Finally, in the conclusions the potential avenues for further research to better disentangle the multi-scalar puzzle of social innovation will be addressed.