Report of the Short Term Scientific Mission (STSM)

COST Action: FP1201 - Forest Land Ownership Change in Europe: Significance for Management and Policy (FACESMAP)

Title: Forest Owners' associations and cooperatives: Social Innovations around NWFPs in Spain

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1. Introduction

Non-Wood Forest Products (NWFPs), such as mushrooms and truffles (e.g. de Román and Boa 2006; de Frutos Madrazo et al. 2012), cork (e.g. Campos et al. 2008), pine nuts (Ovando et al. 2010), chestnuts (Pettenella 2001), and wild herbs (Reyes-García et al. 2015) are a relevant resource for rural economies in Mediterranean countries such as Spain, where forests are less timber-oriented (Palahí et al. 2008). In Spain, the forest owners are the legal owners of both the forests and their derived NWFPs. However, given the generalised open access to forests, the owners often feel powerless in controlling the picking practices on their lands, leaving NWFPs usually treated as externalities. Some of the land owners even experience the feel of a potential threat (Górriz-Mifsud et al. 2015).

Besides this diffuse use of forests, the small average forest size (<1 ha) precludes individual owners from effectively managing and trading NWFPs. Some institutional arrangements or Social Innovations have been developed in certain Spanish regions in order to internalise the benefits derived from locally growing NWFPs. These social innovations allow forest managers to better harvest, control and eventually receive revenues from markets or harvesters. The NWFPs under study are collected from and managed in either natural forests or plantations. Whether these activities are carried out separately by each landowner or collectively (through a social innovation) can have significant impacts on the derived benefits (Górriz-Mifsud et al. 2016).

Social innovations could be defined as "*new ideas that simultaneously meet social needs and create new social relationships and collaborations*" (BEPA 2011). The added value of the social innovation perspective relies on the analysis of the social processes that permit the social capital to thrive and to produce welfare gains to (in our case rural) community members. The involvement of stakeholders is a key characteristic of social innovations and can in some settings be described as civic initiatives with the aim of empowering and promoting cooperative activity (Bock 2016).

Social innovations are currently getting further attention due to their decentralised nature. Based on a preliminary literature review on social innovations, the concept seems to be a widely used "buzz-word" (Pol & Ville 2009). One objective of the M.Sc. thesis related to the STSM is to give the concept of social innovations more precision and plausibility.

The concept of social innovations has been scarcely analysed in the field of forestry, with preliminary studies focusing on forestry networks (Maso et al. 2011; Rickenbach 2009; Borg et al. 2015), or value chain structure (Secco et al.

2009). Social innovations are generally bottom-up initiatives allowing them to take many different forms. In my work, I focus on social innovations contributing to the development of rural economies through NWFPs (e.g. consumer-producer relations, producers' cooperatives or associations).

During the STSM I have investigated this largely unexplored field, trying to answer the following questions:

- Which social innovations involving forest owners do exist in Spain related to NWFPs?
- How were they created and how do they function?
- Which are the social, ecological and economic benefits and possible disadvantages of social innovations?

2. Objective of the STSM

The two main objectives of the STSM were data collection through face to face or phone interviews, and analysis of the collected data on social innovations around NWFP in Spain.

The aim was to find common elements such as: emergence, challenges, crucial events, facilitating factors, social capital, and economic indicators, of organisations of landowners around the topic through in depth qualitative analysis of the interviews.

3. Methodology

Qualitative data was collected and analysed using the following procedures.

3.1. Data collection

A mapping of existing social innovations in Spain has been done, with 13 associations or collaborations around NWFPs were found in Spain. 9 associations were contacted through e-mails, and 7 were willing to participate in the study. Four interviews have been conducted, one as a face-to-face and three by phone interview. All four interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewee and explained that possible quotations will refer to the association. Three associations were not able to commit to an interview, but filled out a questionnaire. All interview guidelines and questionnaires were prepared separately and targeted individually to each association. In order to do this, a background research was done for all collaborations. All interviews and questionnaires were conducted in Spanish. The interviews were transcribed and the transcriptions checked by the host.

Interviewed landowners' cooperation's are listed in Table 1, covering different stages of the value chain and different typical Mediterranean NWFPs (cork, chestnuts, pinenuts and black truffle).

Table 1 - Interviewed landowners cooperating in the field of NWFP in Spain.

	NWFP	Land property	Production	Harvest	First processing	Trade
ADEHECO	Cork	Private	X			
Gavarres association	Cork	Private	X			
QUALITY SUBER	Cork	Private		X	X	X
Catalan association of truffle and funghi producers	Black truffle	Private	X			
Biopenyagolosa	Black truffle	Private	X	X		X
Valle del Genal	Chestnut	Private & public	X	X	X	X
COFOREST	Pinenuts	Private & public	x	x	x	x

3.2. Data analysis

Grounded Theory approach (Glaser & Strauss 1967) was used to organise the qualitative data through inductive reasoning. The grounded theory was chosen as a guiding tool as it provides a flexible analytic systematic analytical strategy. The constant comparative method gives the approach flexibility, and the strategy is systematic in the sense that sections of the interviews are meticulously coded one at the time against a constant set of codes. We used a deductive-inductive approach, given that we started from coding the categories and concepts derived from the literature review, while also allowing new codes to emerge. By structuring the analysis through the "coding paradigm", the codes were linked as per their reference either to the phenomenon under study, its context, its drivers and outcomes (Kelle, 2005). This procedure was recurrently executed for each interview, writing memos with the main relations found, until the point of saturation is reached. MAXQDA software program for qualitative data analysis has been used for the coding.

Figure 1 - Coding categories using the MAXQDA software program

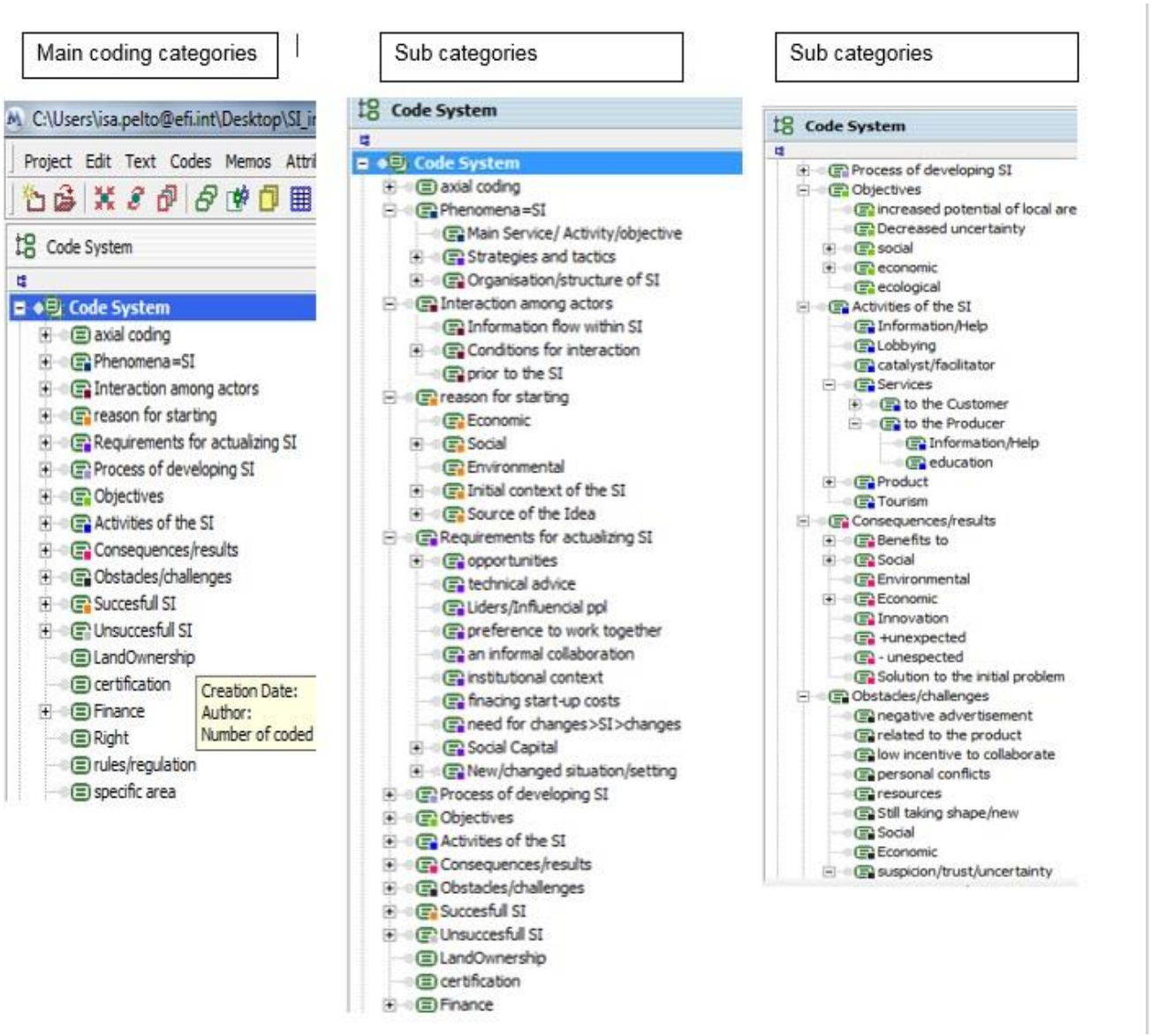

Figure 1 illustrates the coding categories used and developed during the qualitative data analysis using the MAXQDA software program. The left side of the picture show all of the main categories, which were in general made based on the literature review. The centre and the right hand side of Figure 1 show the sub-categories or sub-codes of some of the main categories. Most of the sub-categories emerged during the analysis and some of the sub-codes were further divided if the distinctions were found to be meaningful for the in-depth analysis.

Figure 2: data analysis using the MAXQDA software program

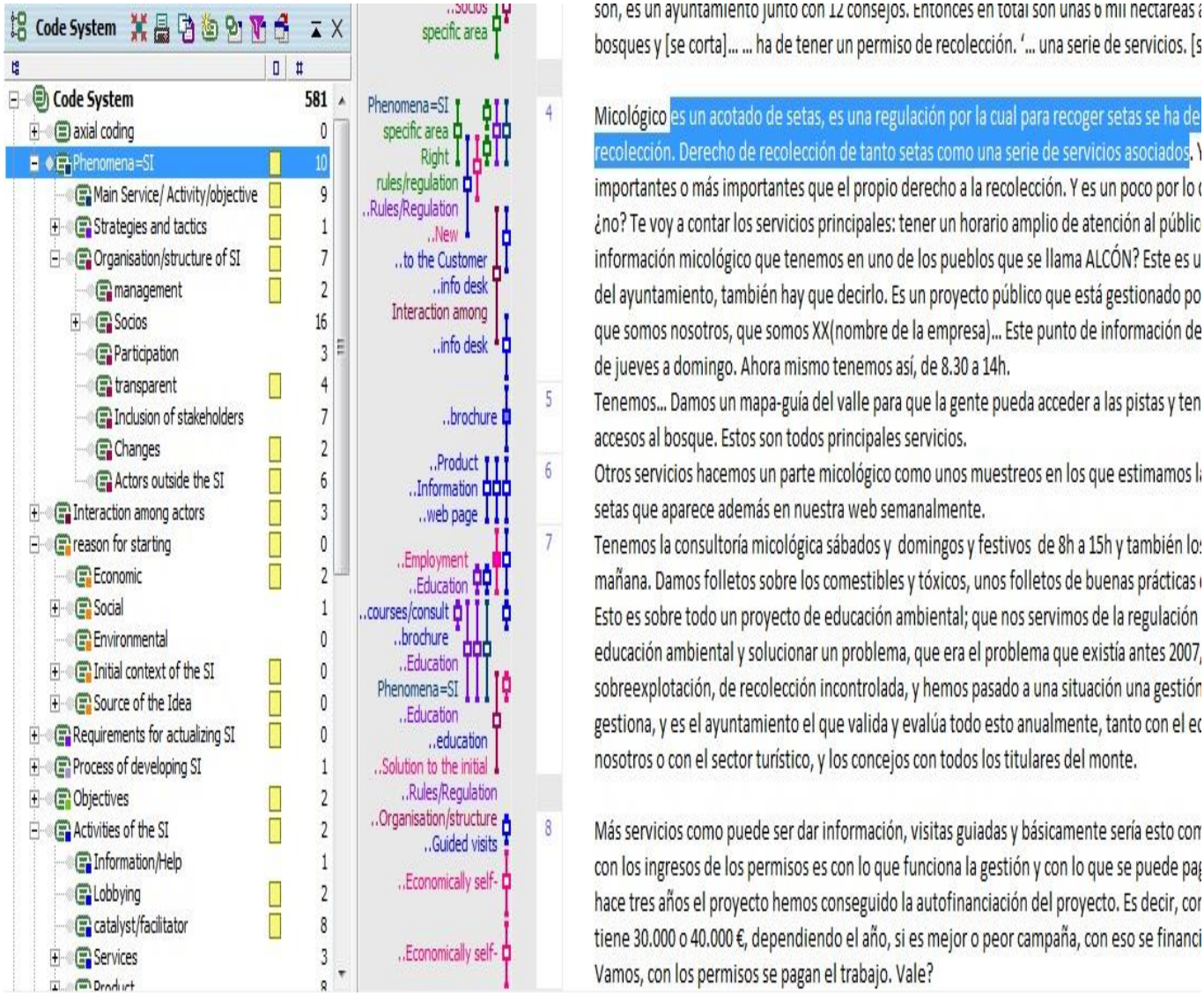

Figure 2 gives some insight to the coding process enabled by the MAXQDA. The highlighted part of the section visible in Picture 2 is coded under the highlighted code *Phenomena= SI*. The small yellow box indicates that memos, are an important part of future analysis, are written about the code. The number 10 indicates that there are 10 other sections within the 6 analysed texts coded under the same category. The colourful bars in the middle show that different parts of the displayed section are coded under many different main- and/or sub-categories, suggesting that the interviewee was touching many different important aspects for the purpose of the study.

4. Work related to the STSM

In order to be able to use the full potential of the STSM, work was conducted both prior to and during the mission.

4.1. Description of the work carried out prior to the STSM

Preparatory fork for the STSM included literature reviews on social innovations, social capital and grounded theory. Two preliminary interviews carried out in September 2015 were also transcribed and potential interviewees were contacted through e-mail.

4.2. Description of the work carried out during the STSM

The activities during the STSM were manifold and resulted in a development of the beneficiary's understanding and abilities to successfully prepare and carry out both interviews and in depth qualitative analysis. The software program for qualitative and mixed methods data analysis MAXQDA, was provided by the host in order for the beneficiary to carry out qualitative analysis. The two preliminary interviews were analysed and new interview guidelines and questionnaires were prepared jointly with the host. The new data was then analysed and coded by the beneficiary and later discussed with the host.

The beneficiary also participated in a stakeholder meeting of a project related to NWFPs as an observant, learning there about two other social innovations in public lands. The conference was a good experience and opportunity for the beneficiary to talk with many influential and active individuals in the field of NWFPs in Spain.

5. Preliminary results

The interviews revealed that landowners' collaborations around NWFPs in Spain take the forms of:

- Non-profit associations; or
- For-profit collaborations: e.g. cooperatives, vertical integration, and public-private alliances.

We observed that the collaborations target the increase of added value (e.g. processed products, or joint certification of Sustainable Forest Management) or joint trade, the control of harvesters, or production aspects (e.g. peer information or formal training on the techniques, joint acquisition of inputs). Those implementing a joint trading effectively report an improvement in their

market power derived from that sector alliance with respect to their previous situation and with respect to competitors.

The studied social innovations among landowners have experienced many of the theoretical benefits of social innovations based on the literature review, namely: reduction of transaction costs, reduced uncertainty, increased supply, and scale economies. Still, we have identified some concerns related to grey markets hindering their proper development in terms of unfair competence, very much spread among the NWFP sector.

Another shared characteristic is the endogenous initiative of the cooperation: the members of the collaboration identified a common problem, share the social innovation as the most suitable alternative, and design it from inside (sometimes with external inputs derived from knowledge transfer processes). There is also a common pattern that behind each social innovation there was a limited group of people that led and pushed the process.

We also find that most initiatives share the availability of public financing used as seed money to launch the ideas, being project funding or bank guarantees. Interestingly, not all used projects aim at bolstering entrepreneurship; instead it seems that the novel association used the project possibilities at their reach (e.g. LEADER, EAFRD, LIFE) in an opportunistic manner to build their business model upon them.

Interviews and questionnaires have also shed light on the organisation manners, which we still need to further categorise. The data also confirms that those new inter-relations have improved the social capital of the involved members.

Uncertainty is in many cases part of the challenges, objectives and results of the collaborations. The main challenge experienced by the interviewed collaborations has been uncertainty at different levels as all interviewees reported uncertainty as an obstacle during the establishment of the association. In line with theories on social capital, the associations have at least partly overcome the obstacle through increased cohesiveness and harmonisation of objectives and practices of stakeholders. Even if uncertainty was never identified as the social problem driving the establishment of the social innovation, decreased uncertainty was mentioned by 6 out of the 7 interviewees as a primary objective of the social innovation. All interviewees report increased trust among the members as a result of the social innovation. In many cases, the increased relational social capital in the form of trust, is followed by economic benefits. However, further analysis is needed before making any final conclusions.

6. Future collaboration with hosting institution

Future collaboration has been planned with the host, as follows:

- The beneficiary will continue analysing the interviews in the coming months.
- An abstract has been sent to the Wild forest products' conference, 13th-14th of October in Barcelona (StarTree final conference). An abstract has been sent to a conference on social economy, with a session no Social Innovation held in Valencia, Spain 19th- 21st of October.

In addition to these conferences, the beneficiary is currently searching for further options to continue the collaboration in the near future.

7. Foreseen publications/articles resulting or to result from the STSM

At the end of my stay we have draught a scientific paper outline. At least one scientific paper is expected to be published in the future. More data collection and deeper analysis will be carried out in continuation of this STSM in order to eventually publish the findings. In addition to the M.Sc. thesis under work and planned scientific paper, a small article to disseminate through EFI platforms will be written.

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