



**COLLECTION OF
EXAMPLES OF SOCIAL INNOVATION**

in the Balkans



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CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Bosnia and Herzegovina - Beekeeping For All With Apiform.....	6
Croatia - Dagnja Co-op for Young Croatian Defenders.....	8
Serbia - Special Needs Children Riding High at Horse Club Arandjelovac.....	10
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia - Farmers Collaborate to Clean Up Lake Prespa.....	12
Albania - A Cooperative Driving Tourism Development In Përmet.....	14
Bosnia and Herzegovina - Mozaik Foundation, an Incubating Social Enterprise	16
Serbia - Rural Hub, A Place Where Rural Ideas Bloom	18
Kosovo - Kids Unite for Friendship and Peace.....	20
Montenegro - Social farming to provide opportunities to people with disabilities	22
Bulgaria - Attracting young people in depopulated villages with Baba Residence.....	24
Do you have an example of social innovation to share with us?	26



INTRODUCTION



SIMRA (Social Innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas) is a four-year project (2016-2020) funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 programme. It aims to advance understanding of social innovation and innovative governance in agriculture, forestry and rural development, and how it can be boosted, in marginalised rural areas across Europe and around the Mediterranean, including non-EU countries.

WHAT IS SOCIAL INNOVATION?

For the SIMRA consortium, social innovation refers to “the reconfiguring of social practices, in response to societal challenges, which seeks to enhance outcomes on societal well-being and necessarily includes the engagement of civil society actors”. Social innovation aims to increase and introduce new solutions to challenges faced by rural areas, especially those considered as marginalised.

WHAT IS A MARGINALISED RURAL AREA?



Within SIMRA, rural areas are considered marginalised because:

- of their physical constraints (e.g. mountainous, arid)
- of their limited access to infrastructure (limited access to road transport networks, electricity and/or to telecommunications, including the Internet).
- or they have marginalised populations (i.e. societal marginality) being:
 - o people with (very) low incomes
 - o high proportion of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion
 - o high levels of infant mortality
 - o high proportion of early leavers from education and training



WHY A BROCHURE OF GOOD EXAMPLES?

This brochure aims at showcasing the diversity of social innovations in marginalised rural areas of the Balkan Peninsula. These examples are extracted from the SIMRA database, available on SIMRA's website.

The examples selected meet the following criteria:

- i) Evidence of reconfiguration of social practices in response to societal challenges;
- ii) Active involvement of civil society or grassroots organisations;
- iii) Novelty or reconfiguration taking place in new geographical settings or in relation to previously disengaged social groups;
- iv) Improves societal wellbeing through social, environmental or economic aims.

WHY FOCUS ON SOCIAL INNOVATION IN THE BALKAN PENINSULA?

The focus of the SIMRA project is on the European Union and the Mediterranean area, including the Balkan Peninsula in South-East Europe which includes both countries which are Member States of the EU along with some of those identified in the EU Western Balkans Strategy.

In the context of the 2018 Enlargement package, this third collection of good examples* pays particular attention to the societal challenges faced in the Western Balkans countries and the social innovations emerging in their rural areas. Eight out of the ten initiatives in this brochure are located in marginalised rural areas outside the European Union, showcasing examples ranging from healthcare services to rural networking and including tourism development.

*Find the first two collections of examples on SIMRA's website:
<http://www.simra-h2020.eu>

BEEKEEPING FOR ALL WITH APIFORM (BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA)



Photo credits: APIFORM Beekeeping

WHY BEEKEEPING?

Bees are crucial to the environment and food production as pollinators, but they are in decline. It is very important to protect bees for the benefit of the planet and our ways of life. **Beekeeping can both boost the bee population and help reduce its decline.**

Initiated in Bosnia & Herzegovina, the Apiform project teaches communities that working with bees can be a hobby, but also **a very profitable home business that is accessible for people with disabilities.** It is relatively inexpensive to start, the return on investment of which is by the end of the first year of honey production and can double within two years by swarming and dividing bee colonies.

WHAT HAS APIFORM ACHIEVED?

Apiform Sit-in Beekeeping advocates beekeeping for all. Launched in 2011, Apiform won the 2015 EU Social Innovation Challenge. They have **redesigned the beehive for use by people in wheelchairs**. Bringing inclusivity and accessibility to the world of beekeeping, Apiform promotes their wheelchair accessible beehive design globally and delivers **educational programmes focused on the development and training of citizens in beekeeping and protecting native plants and animals**.

The Apiform beehive is designed specifically for disabled people, people with back pain and children, all of whom previously could not practice beekeeping without assistance. Once inaccessible to wheelchair users, beekeeping is now open to all. Apiform is actively encouraging beekeeping alongside an organic lifestyle which protects the environment for bees.

WHAT IS THE FUTURE FOR APIFORM BEEKEEPING?

Apiform is expanding worldwide. They plan to develop an **eLearning platform with video courses on the theory and technology of sit-in beekeeping**, and **guidance on how people can build their own**. They are creating a seminar room to deliver face-to-face courses which involve live bees. Apiform's goal is **to create a community of beekeepers with a strong focus on self-employment and sustainability**. Apiform is expanding into urban beekeeping, starting a pollinating movement, and aiming to make beekeeping accessible to all by making starter beehives and providing other tools that will help future beekeepers.

▀ Find more information on <https://twitter.com/apiformbee>

DAGNJA CO-OP FOR YOUNG CROATIAN DEFENDERS (CROATIA)



WHO ARE THE BRANITELJ VETERANS?

Soldiers who fought in the Homeland War in Croatia (1990-1995) are known as ‘branitelj’ (meaning ‘defenders’). Often, veterans returning from the war faced unemployment, a lack of support, and social issues. While veterans of the Croatian Homeland War have a number of legal rights to financial support, employment, housing and healthcare, access; the legal recognition of their status as a veteran is required. Some groups, including those who were underage when fighting as soldiers, experience difficulty obtaining such recognition. Regardless of access to material benefits, veterans of the conflict face **increasing social marginalisation and difficulty reintegrating to society.**

WHAT DOES DAGNJA VETERAN FISHERY COOPERATIVE DO?

The Dagnja Veteran Fishery Cooperative (Braniteljsko Ribarska Zadruga) is a **cooperative of former underage soldiers** who have difficulty establishing their veteran status that would entitle them to the rights of veterans. The cooperative started in 2010 with state support granted by the Ministry of Veterans. It has a license from the Ministry of Agriculture to **cultivate mussels** and a concession contract with Zadar Region for the **economic use of marine areas for the cultivation of bivalves**. It is also a partner in research projects with the University of Zadar's Department of Ecology, Agronomy and Aquaculture.

IN WHAT WAYS DOES THIS HELP YOUNG VETERANS?

The Dagnja Veteran Fishery Cooperative helps smooth the transition of Homeland War veterans from fighting for their home to living in it. It provides economic benefits through the opportunity for its members to earn a livelihood and develop skills. In addition, **the young veterans experience the social benefits of community, ownership, shared values and participation**. Involvement with the co-operative also helps tackle the social exclusion faced by many Homeland



War veterans. Beyond addressing the need to integrate war veterans, the added value and success of Dagnja lies in networking with the Zadar Region Development Agency, local stakeholders and local actors.

- ▮ Find more information on SIMRA's database www.simra-h2020.eu

SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN RIDING HIGH AT THE ARANDJELOVAC EQUESTRIAN CLUB (SERBIA)



Photo credits Konjicki Klub Arandjelovac

WHO ARE THE ARANDJELOVAC EQUESTRIAN CLUB?

The Arandjelovac Equestrian Club, in the village of Vukosavci, near Arandjelovac (Central Serbia), was founded by a small number of horse owners, horse lovers and horse riders in 2008. Today, the club is self-sustaining and has about 270 members. The Arandjelovac Equestrian Club is one of only 6 accredited hippotherapy centres in Serbia, and the only centre to offer its services for free. They support **30 children with free hippotherapy for conditions such as cerebral palsy, autism and various psycho-physical problems or paralysis**. To pay for this, the Arandjelovac Equestrian Club initiated **an ecological campaign, collecting secondary raw materials**. They have also bought the land that is used for the Equestrian Club and are growing organic produce on it.

WHAT IS HEALING ABOUT HORSES?

The Arandjelovac Equestrian Club uses **hippotherapy**, teaming a child with a horse and a physiotherapist, occupational therapist or speech therapist, as fits their requirements. Hippotherapy means “treatment with the help of a horse”. It can be used to assist the treatment of a range of conditions of human physical and mental health. **Physical hippotherapy uses the movement of the horse to develop motor skills.** The horses’ unique repetitive and rhythmic movement continually challenges the rider to make small adjustments to maintain their balance and posture in a way that cannot be replicated by any other apparatus or equipment. **Horses are ideal companions for psychotherapy because they mirror and respond to human behaviour.** Additionally, they help clients develop confidence as well as improve their mood.

MAKING STRIDES IN THEIR DEVELOPMENT

Vuk, aged 12, has cerebral palsy and, as a result of therapy at the Arandjelovac Equestrian Club, has improved his motor systems such that his movements are now free from spasms and pain. Sara, aged 10, also with cerebral palsy, has experienced similar improvements from hippotherapy. Nata, aged 15, and Bogdan, aged 3, both have autism. Nata has started playing with other children, and Bogdan’s first word was the name of his therapy horse “Lisa.” Another child, Bane, aged 15, has psycho-physical developmental problems and, prior to horse therapy, was afraid to leave the house. All these children and many more have been helped by the horses and therapists at the Arandjelovac Equestrian Club.

▀ Find more information on www.konjickiklubarandjelovac.rs/sr-yu/

FARMERS COLLABORATE TO CLEAN UP LAKE PRESPA (FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA)



Photo credits: Macedonian Ecological Society

WHY WAS LAKE PRESPA UNDER THREAT?

Prespa Lake is **one of the oldest freshwater lakes in the world**. It is home to a diverse range of more than 2,000 species plants and animals, including many endangered species and some that are unique. The lake was under threat from a series of **unsustainable farming practices**. Most significantly, the overuse of pesticides amongst orchard farmers was causing pollution and eutrophication of the lake. Illegally dumping of farm waste in the lake and wasteful irrigation practices were also contributing to its degradation.

WHAT COULD BE DONE TO SAVE THE LAKE?

The Restoration of the Prespa Lake Project was established to reduce pollution and restore the water quality of Lake Prespa. Funded by the Swiss Development Cooperation and the Global Environment Facility, and instigated by the UNDP, the Prespa Project

sought to **raise awareness, change attitudes and be open to inspiration by farmers in the area.**

The project's participatory approach supported the **creation of a Farmers' Association** which connects farmers with each other and the relevant authorities through a network. The Innovative solutions developed were enabled by the direct participation of the farmers who put them to use.

Working with farmers to adopt environmentally-friendly practices has led to **major successes in environmental improvements**, including the use of organic compost and a reduction in excessive fertilizer use and wasteful irrigation. As a result, the water quality of the lake has improved. This is of benefit to the environment as well ensuring better water quality for the citizens in the municipality.

DIGITAL INNOVATION KEEPS POLLUTION LOW

Farmers, concerned about threats to their livelihood, were spraying pesticides at inappropriate times and in excessive quantities. In 2005, a system was set up to monitor pests and diseases, but the information was not communicated to farmers sufficiently quickly to be of use to them.

An **alert system** informs farmers when spraying is needed, which was developed by the Faculty of Computer Science at the University of Cyril & Methodius in Skopje as part of the Prespa Project. **SMS messages are sent to every farmer in the area who is registered with the Association of Farmers, and an update is posted on Facebook** to spread the information as widely as possible. Because of this innovation, the farmers know when to spray their fruit to its destruction by pests, knowledge of when there are no pests detected has led to **a reduction of 30% in the amount of pesticide used**. The low cost and simplicity of implementing the system makes it simple to replicate in other locations.

A COOPERATIVE DRIVING TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN PËRMET (ALBANIA)



Photo credits: Visit Permet

UNDISCOVERED TREASURES OF PËRMET

Situated in the heart of a valley and surrounded by mountains, Përmet boasts **natural attractions** such as the Bredhi i Hotovës-Dangëlli National Park and the hot springs of the Langarica Valley. In addition, there are **numerous cultural assets** including Përmet, the ‘City of Roses’, churches and monasteries of the Byzantine period, and archaeological remains of the Ottoman Empire. The area has attractions of interest to Christians, Muslims and, in particular, to Bektashi who have pilgrimage sites in the villages of Ali Postivan and Frashëri. The valley is famous for its **high-quality agricultural and traditional products**, including grapes, cherries, herbs and medicines, wine, cheeses, meats, honey and gliko (compote). Despite these many treasures, in the early part of the 21st century the Përmet district was one of the **least developed areas in Albania, with a notable lack of skills and knowledge in the promotion of tourism.**



WHAT IS THE PRO PËRMET CONSORTIUM?

The Pro Përmet Consortium is a **voluntary association for people involved in the sectors of regional products, or hospitality and services**. It is dedicated to the goal of **sustainably developing tourism** in the Përmet district. Members are collaborating to promote the territory and its products, develop tourism and tourism infrastructure, and preserve the environment. The Consortium provides its members with the tools to develop and increase their own capacity and promote their products as a united group instead of relying upon outside help or working alone. It also encourages them to share their best practices and improve the quality of their services and marketing of products. Through the Pro Përmet website and its Facebook page, the area is promoted as a **destination for good food and outdoor experiences**.

HOW SUCCESSFUL HAS THE PRO PËRMET MODEL BEEN?

Pro Përmet products have increased in popularity as has their market demand. All Consortium members have increased their profits and their number of employees. In 2009, before the project was implemented, the total net profits from all 15 Consortium members was 13,302,080 Lek (approximately €95,000). By 2012, **profits had increased by 15%** to 15,302,680 Lek (approximately €109,000). **Employment over the same period increased by 44%**. In the past few years, income has increased for members of Pro Përmet and for the entire economy of the district as more tourists visit the area and stay for longer.

▀ Find more information on www.visitpermet.org/

THE MOZAIK FOUNDATION, AN INCUBATING SOCIAL ENTERPRISE (BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA)



WHO IS THE MOZAIK FOUNDATION?

Mozaik is a national-level foundation, established in 2002, with the aim of **encouraging the development of rural communities**. They are dedicated to creating a movement of young, enterprising people who create jobs, stimulate the economy and act as role models for others. The majority of young people in Bosnia & Herzegovina express a wish to leave the country to improve their prospects. The Moziak Foundation aims to provide them with **opportunities to improve their prospects in their own country, and to develop local communities in the process**.



HOW ARE YOUNG PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES SUPPORTED?

The Mozaik Foundation's mission is to encourage people to organise and advance their own communities. They help young people to achieve for themselves and contribute to

the common good. Mozaik Foundation's Social Business Incubator provides **intensive mentoring for prospective social entrepreneurs**, creating an ecosystem of support around them. Mozaik also provides the necessary financial support. The **Youth Bank** is their small grant programme, run by young people for young people, enabling them to translate project or business ideas into reality. Together with Mozaik, **young people in Bosnia & Herzegovina** create new social enterprises, employ young people and generate profits that focus on **sustainably addressing social issues**.

A FAR-REACHING STRATEGY FOR BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA'S FUTURE

The Mozaik Foundation is expanding its operations. Between 2016 and 2025 they will provide opportunities for 50,000 young people **to learn about social innovation and social entrepreneurship**, support 1,000 youth work actions and invest in 1,000 young social entrepreneurs, 500 of whom will launch their own social businesses. Social entrepreneurs who establish their business and are successful will be invited to join M-club, the alumni network of the Mozaik Foundation as part of its strategy to encourage them to inspire the next generation of young social entrepreneurs. Mozaik Foundation's vision is of **Bosnia & Herzegovina as a competitive regional economy with an advanced social welfare system**.

▀ Find more information on <http://mozaik.ba/moz/>

RURAL HUB, A PLACE WHERE RURAL IDEAS BLOOM (SERBIA)



Photo credits: Rural Hub

WHAT IS RURAL HUB?

Rural HUB is a **co-working space** developed by the Centre for Socially Responsible Entrepreneurship in the village of Vrmdza, Serbia. It is a **place where innovative, socially responsible individuals and organisations can work, meet, learn and connect**. Rural HUB offers working space for individuals and teams, mentoring to support and develop knowledge and expertise, a space for meetings, and support for socially responsible events and project activities of interest to the community. Rural HUB also invests in **developing the wider local community** by connecting local people, using their products and services, establishing unique tourist products and specific local products, developing sustainable farms and encouraging small family businesses.



WHY IS RURAL HUB NEEDED?

Rural HUB represents a multidisciplinary effort to provide innovative, effective and sustainable solutions to the pressing changes faced by villages and communities. The initiative seeks to contribute to **increase prosperity of the community** and to **halt the emigration from villages and rural areas, especially the exodus of young**. One of the biggest challenges facing villages is how to offer young people a better life and incentives to remain. Rural HUB specifically targets the 15 to 35 age group to **encourage and support them in social entrepreneurship** and utilizing their contemporary knowledge and networks with an aim of propagating information about real achievements and the differences made. They also encourage and support individuals of all ages living in rural areas who wish to start responsible businesses that increase the prosperity of the community.

A MODEL OF SMART TRANSFORMATION

Rural HUB believes that they are at the beginning of a significant movement that will develop and **empower villages**. They are actively building and connecting rural and urban knowledge in a sustainable way – to be ‘rurban.’ This involves **preserving, enhancing and retrofitting the existing village**, maintaining its **values and lifestyle** whilst also **introducing selected modernization**. Their development strategy is based on their model of a **sustainable eco-village** and is achieved through **collaboration between people from an urban background and traditional farmers**. Their next step is to build a network of rural initiatives and individuals who want to develop and apply the rurban concept in their context and environment.

▀ Find more information on <http://ruralhub.rs/>

KIDS UNITE FOR FRIENDSHIP AND PEACE (KOSOVO)



WHY DID KOSOVO NEED KIDS FOR PEACE?

Kosovo emerged from the 1998 to 1999 conflict ethnically divided. Continuing social tensions inhibited children of different ethnic groups from communicating with each other, especially in rural areas. There was a persistent culture of mistrust that was being passed down to the next generation. Without a means for bridging the ethnic divides, Kosovans would continue to live segregated lives, putting future peace at risk. Kids for Peace was established to promote peace amongst young people and address the worldview of these divided communities.

FROM A GRASSROOTS BEGINNING TO A KOSOVO-WIDE ORGANISATION

In 2002, Fatmire Feka, who lost family members through ethnic cleansing, approached World Vision International with the concept of Kids for Peace. World Vision used a bottom-up approach centred on child participation and leadership to develop the Kids for Peace Club. Branches were established across Kosovo, including in some of the most ethnically-divided areas in the country. The Youth for Peace network then emerged as an extension of Kids for Peace, sharing its mission for promoting peace and integration amongst children and communities. The success of Kids for Peace has been achieved through financial support from donations, and the desire of children and communities to live in a peaceful Kosovo. Since 2002, approximately 10,000 children and young people have benefited directly from this project. Annually, this project supported approximately 300 children as members of 'Kids for Peace' clubs and 300 youths in the 'Youth for Peace' networks.

HOW IS PEACE PROMOTED?

Kids for Peace focuses on promoting peace. Art, song, dance, games and other fun activities are designed to foster friendship amongst children from all backgrounds. Kids for Peace mobilises children and young people to continuously find ways of addressing the tension, trauma and ethnic divisions that have plagued their communities. In these ways, Kids for Peace provides unique opportunities for multi-ethnic interactions amongst children in order to overcome deep-rooted ethnic tensions and create a culture of peace through building relationships. The children are unified, happy and passionate about peace.



▀ Find more information on SIMRA's database on www.simra-h2020.eu

SOCIAL FARMING TO PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES TO PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES (MONTENEGRO)



HOW DID ARTOS START?

In 2017, the Diocese of Budimlje and Nikšić of the Serbian Orthodox Church (Montenegro) started a project of social farming to **promote the employment of people with disabilities while protecting the environment**. Traditionally, the actions of associations of people with disabilities in Montenegro revolved around issues of physical accessibility, without paying attention to possibilities of employment or social inclusion. The activities in ‘**Artos – Opportunities for Everyone**’ (a project which has been developed with EU funds) are based around **an aquaponic greenhouse**. This has created and promoted job opportunities for people with disabilities and serves as an excellent educational tool for the local young population. The idea behind the project is that aquaponic farming within a context of socially responsible entrepreneurship will have positive impacts on the environment and tackling the vulnerabilities of disadvantaged groups.

WHY AQUAPONIC FARMING?

Aquaponic farming is a self-sustainable production system that represents a combination of **aquaculture techniques** (intensive fish farming) with **hydroponic techniques** (soilless plant cultivation). It is very suitable for people with physical disabilities because the labour required can be undertaken from a wheelchair. In addition, aquaponics attracting the interest of the wider public due to the increasing interest in healthy, sustainable, local food production.

The project has chosen aquaponics because **it does not have a prerequisite of an extensive formal education and training**, and the employment will be advantageous for the target group since they will be **the first to gain the relevant knowledge and skills**.

WHAT ARE THE FIRST RESULTS?

Over the first eight months of the project, 20 participants have been trained in the development and operation of aquaponics, alongside which they have been given **psychological support and motivation for undertaking their own enterprise** in this sector. Three participants have been employed directly by ARTOS to work in the aquaponics greenhouse.

Looking forward, the project aims **to scale up to market size systems** and expand possibilities for the employment of people with disabilities. The strategy behind the project is to create an economically viable, visible, engaging occupation adapted to the needs and skills of people with disabilities and responding to market demands.

▀ Find more information on SIMRA's database on www.simra-h2020.eu

ATTRACTING YOUNG PEOPLE IN DEPOPULATED VILLAGES WITH BABA RESIDENCE (BULGARIA)



WHAT IS BABA?

Baba Residence (*baba* - grandmother in Bulgarian) is an initiative **bringing together urban youth and elderly people in low-density and remote villages in Bulgaria**. It gives the opportunity to have a truthful exchange of knowledge and care between youth and elderly through design thinking and ethnological approaches. The result is an improved quality of human relations between generations, documentation and creative utilisation of local folklore, and social entrepreneurial projects that help the villages flourish again.

HOW TO CONNECT YOUNG URBAN PEOPLE WITH ADULTS LIVING IN DESERTED VILLAGES IN BULGARIA?

All participants undergo training with Ideas Factory (a Bulgarian networking platform for entrepreneurs) before spending between 4 and 6 weeks in one of the remote and sparsely populated villages in the initiative, in order to develop an innovative idea for a product, service or event that will attract stronger interest to the village. Along with developing

their concept and skills in local crafts, the young people are supported by the household in which they live.

The participants are groups of 20 young people (up to 35 years old) who are students or recently graduated (within the past two years) and still unemployed. The objective is to **connect the potential of unemployed young people with the knowledge of the elderly from almost deserted villages**, in an **innovative social business model**. People who are involved in this initiative have to be motivated to work for a positive social and economic change in society.

HOW DOES IT IMPROVE THE LIFE OF YOUNG UNEMPLOYED AND REVITALISE DEPOPULATED AREAS?

The result of their interaction are specific products, services and initiatives based on local knowledge and responding to the specific needs of the people in the villages. Each participant in "Baba Residence" has an opportunity to achieve his specific idea, together with the people from the village where they live. This idea is thought to have **long-term effects in rural areas** and the potential to **attract interest in the respective village and/or to contribute to its economic and social development**.

Residences will enable participants to start learning some of the crafts practiced in the village. **Interaction with old people gives invaluable knowledge of Bulgarian history and traditions, which may soon be lost irrevocably**. Participants also receive a different experience, as a "slower" village lifestyle that is impossible in large cities. The touch with traditions and nature enriches young people and encourages them to think about new ways to provide social empathy. At the same time, the elderly lonely people receive attention and feel useful and necessary. They also receive real help with their everyday work in the house from their young friends.

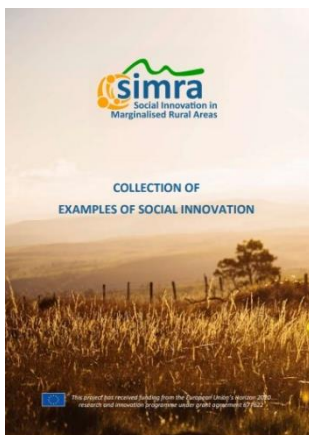
▀ Find more information on www.ideasfactorybg.org/baba-residence

DO YOU HAVE AN EXAMPLE OF SOCIAL INNOVATION TO SHARE WITH US?

Do you have examples of social innovation in a marginalised rural area in Europe or Mediterranean countries?

Click [here](https://uhi.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/simra_en) to submit your example!
(also available in French)
https://uhi.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/simra_en

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