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Abstract: European rural development policy has increasingly promoted place-based, community-led approaches, epitomised by the LEADER programme. Embedded within these approaches is a belief that bottom-up development is best placed to deliver policies building on local strengths and addressing local needs. However, community-led approaches have also faced criticisms for being too technical and constrained by national and international priorities. To overcome such barriers to advancing place-based rural innovation, this paper explores two distinctive approaches to strengthening participation, representation and accountability with these processes: Northern Ireland's Community-led Local Development and the Social Value Engine. The first approach seeks to promote local engagement and participation through a bottom-up process while the second is a tool that encourages community consultation. Through the research, we examine how each approach fosters community inclusion, accountability and representation.

Key Words: Social Value; Social Innovation, Rural Development; Sustainable communities; Community-led Local Development (CLLD)

Highlights

- Rural community organisations fulfil both representation and accountability roles
 - The representational role requires strong local engagement and communication
 - The accountability role demands effective delivery and measurement of outcomes
 - Tools like the Social Value Engine support both roles, evaluating outcomes according to local needs.
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1. Introduction

As rural development theory has increasingly emphasised the need for bottom-up and neo-endogenous approaches (Ray, 2006; Bock, 2016; Olmedo and O'Shaughnessy, 2023), the focus has also turned to more nuanced forms of value beyond traditional economic measures. This has seen social innovation coming more to the fore within rural studies (Dargan and Shucksmith, 2008; Neumeier, 2017; Vercher et al., 2021) along with the need to evaluate social value creation (Kroeger and Weber, 2014; Grieco et al., 2015; Chatzichristos and Perimenis, 2022). Its origins of being mobilized as a response to privatization discourses (Moulaert and Nussbaumer, 2005) reflect how social innovation carries politico-ideological significance, implying social justice (Moulaert et al., 2014). Broadly it is about actions that contribute to human progress and development, whether at local or global scales, but the measurement of social value arising from social innovation remains a challenge to researchers and policymakers alike.

Part of the appeal of social innovation is that it is so all-encompassing and difficult to argue against. Equally, though, its ambiguity can result in slippiness as it can mean everything and nothing, with continuing debate about precise definitions (Pel et al., 2020). Much of the rural development research in this area has focused on the EU LEADER programme and related approaches within rural development measures (Moreno et al., 2024; Dax et al., 2016; Dargan and Shucksmith, 2008). Outside the EU, those policies are no longer applicable to the UK so our research assesses other means of evaluating social value, representativeness and accountability within the community-led rural development arena, which hopefully can inform wider international approaches too. In this article, we focus on two rural policy innovations. The first is the community-led local development (CLLD) approach of LEADER and its translation into a post-Brexit Northern Ireland context. The second is the Social Value Engine (SVE), a tool developed in partnership between East Riding of Yorkshire Council and Rose Regeneration, a private consultancy, to assist policymakers, funders and social innovators with the measurement of social value. Through these two examples, the research objective is to assess the extent to which different approaches to community engagement and social value measurement in policy design can increase inclusivity,

accountability and representation. As a consequence, we reflect on their significance for the rural development process as a whole.

The article contributes to ongoing debates about the distinctive development needs of rural areas and the importance of emphasising the wider benefits that can arise from activities that might register only small or insignificant impacts when using mainstream economic measures. We bring together literatures on social value, social innovation and CLLD to explore these issues further. Examining the usefulness of measurement beyond planned outputs and the value of greater participation in policy design can help to better understand impacts within a territory, and capture both the social gains and the economic savings that social innovations can deliver (Dainienė and Dagilienė, 2016). This will be particularly attractive to policymakers in all regions where austerity continues to constrain activities. The paper proceeds with a critical review of key literature before presenting the methodology, findings and an extended discussion.

2. Generating Social Innovation through CLLD

Community-led models of development rely on local communities participating and engaging in development processes to unlock funds and drive local action (Castro-Arce & Vanclay, 2020; Kibler et al., 2015). The transformation of state-actor relations since the early 1990s means that communities have been given an increased role in taking control of the development of their areas. This is well demonstrated through LEADER and other CLLD approaches implemented through a multilevel governance framework (Müller et al., 2020). New forms of governance mean that responsibilities are extended beyond traditional government bodies to bring other interests such as third sector organisations into the governance space (Swyngedouw, 2005). Territorial development of this kind seeks to break down sectoral silos and create the circumstances for synergistic working. Neo-endogenous development models clearly recognise that even the most bottom-up approaches require external networks to succeed (Ray, 2006; Bock, 2016; Cejudo & Navarro, 2020).

In rural areas, relatively small changes in economic terms can have significant impacts in local communities (Bosworth et al., 2016). We understand CLLD to encompass community-based activities where the community plays a central role, albeit recognising that some CLLD actions are undertaken within a wider framework determined by state institutions such as local or central government. Many authors have noted that the impact of CLLD is limited by the degree to which higher authorities are willing to transfer power to local communities (Hämäläinen & Németh, 2021; Konečný et al., 2020; Bosworth et al., 2016), but the concept of engaging local actors to drive development that is suited to local contexts remains a core vision for European rural policy.

CLLD has fostered social innovation, often driven by social enterprises with a strong local focus (Olmedo and O'Shaughnessy, 2023). These embedded forms of social innovation can reconfigure power relationships through a governance approach based on working *with* communities rather than acting *on* them (Skerratt and Steiner, 2013). Participation in social innovation and CLLD is not necessarily a smooth process, but it requires lay actors from within rural communities to take on key tasks and engage in concrete governance practices and 'ritualised performances' (Müller et al., 2020, p. 224). Understood in this way participation and the associated roles are shaped and constructed by the process itself (Turnhout et al., 2010), it is relational and it draws on norms, values and culture. The process itself identifies clear and demonstrable outputs which are sometimes connected to job creation. For example, the LEADER+ programme in Northern Ireland (2000–2006) that was implemented by 12 Local Action Groups (LAGs), was focused on economic development, job creation and competitiveness (McAreavey, 2022). Participation in community-based activities can also render intangible benefits, such as trust and legitimacy of partners. Participatory budgeting, originally developed in Porto Alegre, Brazil in the late 1980s, enhanced the legitimacy of government and the transparency of processes including decisions relating to budget (Sintomer et al. 2008). Where successfully implemented, it can harness community enthusiasm and energy while transforming relations between public institutions and the communities they serve, creating a sense of shared ownership (O'Hagan et al. 2020).

Excessive bureaucracy and control have been found to be problematic in CLLD (Atterton et al. 2020), sometimes leading to managerial approaches across a programme that standardise evaluation metrics and leave little room for effective self-evaluation and localised learning (Furmankiewicz and Janc, 2011). Policy interventions to promote social innovation seek to create conditions where the community is empowered to take the lead and to help reconfigure social relations to foster greater inclusion. However, this action is often limited by predefined parameters where community participation is seen to occur in an elite and technical space reliant on expert knowledge and competences (McAreavey, 2009). Part of the challenge with policies and programmes that seek to nurture community engagement is that structures maintaining the power of the ruling elite are often reproduced and parameters for participation established from outside the community. As well as limiting the scope of participation, these bureaucratic challenges can allow narrow interests to exert undue power over local processes or simply result in greater top-down influence to deliver local action (Perez, 2000; Atterton et al., 2020).

We follow Müller et al. by investigating participation as ‘social practice’ (2020, p. 225). This involves examining activities below the level of policy instruments to better understand participation beyond codified processes. We are interested in exploring why, given the challenges that have been well rehearsed in the literature, local people continue to participate and engage with rural participatory approaches. This typically involves significant volunteer engagement (Pollermann et al., 2014) which we argue is not properly understood or indeed valued by policymakers, especially within the technical and bureaucratic confines of a funded programme. We also seek to understand the extent to which rural development is truly participatory and inclusive (Castro-Arce and Vanclay, 2020), particularly in delivering social value through different forms of social innovation that take place under the wider umbrella of CLLD.

3. A conceptual framework for enacting social value

Like social innovation, social value is a tricky concept to define accurately (Dainienė and Dagilienė, 2016), being complex, multi-scalar and socially embedded (Bund et al., 2015). It is tempting to include any positive societal changes within the remit of such a term but that risks overlooking the different types and degrees of values (or loss of value) experienced as a result of a new policy or intervention by different people within rural communities (Mulloth and Rumi, 2022). This subjectivity means that the measurement of social value will always be complex and often contested, with the degree of inclusivity always mediated by the epistemic beliefs of actors and the operating conditions of their organisations (Hall et al., 2015). The mix of tangible and intangible factors that constitute social value can create a further challenge for measurement too.

Social value has tended to focus on the spillover effects from private or public sector activities that generate social welfare gains but also includes more direct outcomes of policy or social entrepreneurship (Hietschold et al., 2023). Lashitew et al. (2022) define social value creation as a process of improving socio-economic well-being in communities and argue that this should be done in a self-sustaining and economically viable manner. Social value has been measured in many domains of society including food, education, energy, housing, and social organisation (Gonçalves et al., 2022; Miroso et al., 2016). Growing demands to measure social value arise from both funders seeking to optimise investment choices, and from policy-makers and beneficiaries who want to target their actions to delivering the greatest impacts and returns on their investments (Mulgan, 2010).

Evaluating social value places the focus firmly on local communities, and goes a step further than earlier ‘cost-benefit’ or ‘return on investment’ approaches in economics that continue to set the parameters of equity at a national scale. When considering the needs of smaller rural communities, we must accept that the return on investment will be lower if measured in terms of the number of jobs created or the economic growth impacts. However, if we also consider the added cost of providing essential services to more remote and sparsely populated communities, the equation needs to change to reflect the value of each job provided or safeguarded, and the value of each doctor’s appointment or affordable home that is made accessible. Here, we argue that more locally designed and participatory approaches can better tackle those distinctive needs and thus create social value that is most relevant to those places.

Based on an implicit assumption that social value is created through deliberate action, we see it as a more dynamic concept than quality of life indicators, which can suffer from static or compartmentalised forms of measurement (Scott et al., 2018). When looking at the rural community organisations that are tasked with delivering positive changes, social value provides an appealing, but hard to quantify, mechanism for evaluating their impact (Hietschold et al., 2023). The complexity extends beyond the traditional limitations of non-financial metrics where comparisons of return on investment or cost-benefit analysis often demand substantial approximations of monetary values (Hwang, 2016). For rural organisations pursuing community-led development initiatives, social value may arise through the consultation, inclusion and social learning processes as well as through direct delivery of policy objectives (Neumeier, 2017). This paper explores policy mechanisms that go beyond simple “engagement” with communities, to assess the degree to which they are empowered and represented. The conceptual framework in Figure 1 highlights these two key domains of CLLD activity where social value can arise and these form the basis for analysis.

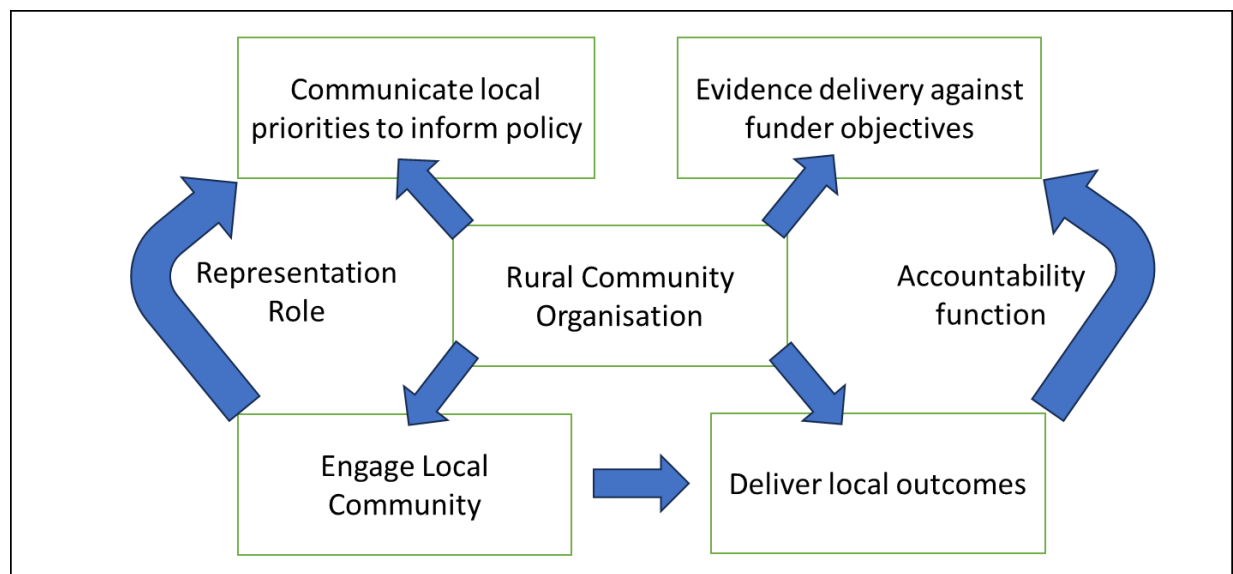


Fig 1. The communication and engagement functions of rural community organisations. Source: authors

Whether it is community enterprises, local policy groups and LAGs, or local charities, they each claim to represent their local community when pursuing social value goals. Therefore, they must engage with people on the ground in an inclusive manner to inform policy and action. We represent this on the left of the Figure 1 as a “representational role” where the scope for adding social value comes through the effective communication and equitable representation of different groups, particularly those with the most pressing needs. Once action is facilitated, usually through some form of external funding, the rural organisations must then be accountable to both their local communities and to the funders or higher tiers of policymaking. This accountability function requires further local engagement and transparency to garner trust among local communities (Esparcia and Abbasi, 2020) and to ensure inclusivity (Husu and Kumpulainen, 2019) but it also requires technical capabilities to present deliverables and impact in a format that is familiar and acceptable beyond the local scale.

The above framework indicates that rural community organisations must communicate effectively at both the local and extra-local scales but maintaining a balance can be challenging. For example, the pan-European scale of LEADER has favoured the selection of more diverse goals that can be delivered across multiple regions (Konečný, 2019) even though locally grown initiatives that have greater autonomy are sometimes better able to prioritise local needs (Bosworth et al., 2016). The two scales also require different languages; at the local level “value” might be interpreted quite differently and result as much from the unexpected consequences of action and the social learning that take place (Pappalardo et al., 2018) as it is from the successful delivery of higher-order objectives. We therefore adopt both the representational and accountability functions of rural community organisations as key themes for

the analysis of the design, implementation and evaluation of initiatives that seek to generate social value. With more effective tools for communicating local priorities, it is hoped that local organisations will become more empowered and have more room for manoeuvre in local decision making (Finta, 2023).

4. Methodology

This article is based on two studies; Study A was conducted by Author A and took place between November 2021 and February 2022. Study B was undertaken by all authors and occurred between March and September 2022, with a follow-up interview with one of the SVE founders in June 2024. Due to public health advice, all data was collected virtually using video conferencing tools. For both studies, a purposive sampling strategy was adopted to recruit participants who could provide in-depth and detailed information about social innovation and community led local development (Study A) and the Social Value Engine (Study B). We recognise that our studies are not directly comparable, and we do not seek to do that. Rather we want to use both to illuminate our understanding of the how social value can be achieved in different ways that go beyond project outputs. We use two quite distinct approaches to community engagement, one is fairly technocratic (the SVE) and the other more organic and bottom-up. However SVE evolved due to the central role of CLLD in rural policy and the desire to capture the 'value' generated by its activities.

Study A comprised twenty semi-structured interviews with social partners involved in community-led local development activities that encompass social innovation. That study aimed to review and evaluate grass-roots rural development activities that had occurred in part of the UK in light of the loss of EU funding. Interview topics included what worked well; what approaches did not work well; accessibility of funds; degree of community involvement and representation; and the role of local government and third sector organisations in delivery of programme. Probing along these sub-themes allowed us to explore the overall approach and degree of community engagement, representation and inclusivity.

Respondents included LAG officers and board members; local government councillors; and volunteers. Some respondents had multiple roles, for instance as a LAG Board member they could also be a local government councillor. Access to respondents was gained through key rural development organisations and this led to a process of snowball sampling. Overall, respondents included nine women and eleven men. In addition, four focus groups were held with the following groups:

- Councils and LAGs
- Community Enterprise/Wealth Building
- Government staff
- Women involved in rural development in Northern Ireland

With consent, interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were read, re-read and coded according to emerging themes. The data was analysed and interpreted by reading and re-reading scripts, followed by a process of coding according to emerging themes. These themes were discussed with the advisory groups and emerging issues and early ideas were elaborated or modified accordingly (Boeije 2010).

Study B examines the development and use of the Social Value Engine. We interviewed the two founders in 2021 and one of the founders along with two employees in 2024 who provided access to the web-platform and details of how they supported users to co-develop the SVE. In between these interviews, we developed five case studies of projects that used the SVE based on secondary materials and manager/advisor interviews. A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit participants who could provide in-depth and detailed information about social innovation and community led local development and their experiences of using the SVE from different organisational perspectives. These included locally-based organisations delivering local initiatives as well as policy makers operating at regional and local authority levels, essentially overseeing and/or funding the activities of local organisations. Transcripts and secondary data were analysed according to the key themes of community engagement, inclusivity, accountability and representation within the context of generating social value. Data was coded according

to themes and sub-themes. Summaries of the cases are presented in Table 1, with pseudonyms used to protect organisational and personal anonymity.

Tab 1. Interviewees and Projects using the Social Value Engine. Source: authors

Upland Villages Association (UVA) - Community-focused charity - Supports local initiatives and services through direct provision and fundraising - Based in an upland area of Northern England. - Uses the Social Value Engine to support funding applications and to assess the impact of initiatives. Interviewed: funding and development officer	Northern England Sub-Regional Authority (NESCA) - Amalgamation of urban and rural local authorities working together to deliver regional social and economic policy - Uses Social Value Engine to guide policy-making in areas of child poverty prevention, increasing access to adult education, employment support and tackling problems of ill health and economic inactivity. Interviewed: specialist on education, inclusion and skills
Community allotment scheme - Primarily surrounds social impact and cohesion - Includes managing an old mill building - The building or area include health factors – exercises, open space, food (agriculture) - Community hub – collaboration – by including practical exercises - Outcomes – health particularly mental, training – good for employment prospects Interviewed: Rural community network advisor	Scheme to promote better mental health - Social interaction gains a key factor - Social housing estates - Food theme in important, developed through cooking classes and activities to reduce mental health illness Interviewed: Rural community network advisor
Rural Arts Trust - Promoting rural arts - Exercise and health, mental health - Business element – creates a space for business engagement Interviewed: Lead volunteer in the project	Community Transport - Contributes towards disability exclusion through transport - Help health needs through access - Outputs revolve around social benefits hence value - Output calculation contains and adjustment – leakage, deadweight, attraction, drop off, displacement -how calculated? Interviewed: Rural community network advisor

5. The Social Value Engine (SVE)

The SVE (www.socialvalueengine.com) was developed as part of a collaborative project between the public and private sector in a rural part of England and has been used extensively by community groups and rural development organisations across the UK. Linked closely with the concept of social innovation, its purpose is to enable policymakers, funders, and project leaders to estimate a monetary figure for the social value generated within a defined project. The SVE is designed around the headline determinants of a sustainable community as set out in the Bristol Accord (ODPM, 2005). These are: Well run, well connected, well served, environmentally sensitive, thriving (economically), well designed and built, fair for everyone, and active, inclusive and safe. From these, a growing range of proxy variables are continually updated and made available to subscribers, allowing them to predict or evaluate the level of social value anticipated or delivered against each category as a result of particular interventions and investments. More recently, the indicators have also been aligned to the UN sustainable development goals.

In practical terms, the designer, funder or leader of an initiative that seeks to generate social value through its action can use the SVE to calculate a value based on the full range of impacts from the implementation of a project. For example, when evaluating the impact of a small community festival, the Tyne & Esk partnership explained how it went beyond just the economic value. From a social value perspective, they were able to add in values for volunteering, reducing social isolation and recycling using proxy indicators provided by the SVE (Social Value Engine, n.d). Rather than just stating a number of volunteers, as with LEADER evaluations, the SVE provides estimates of value based on the wages that would be earned, the service delivered and the skills developed. As more initiatives use the SVE, they can work with the expert team to continue updating and generating new indicators, strengthening the robustness of the measurement process.

The quantitative indicator is useful for funders to compare the potential impacts of proposed projects, for project deliverers to focus on priority social goals, and for evaluators to assess the effectiveness of action. In the words of one of the founders in our first interview, “Its objective is to empower people to measure all types of value that matter to their stakeholders and beneficiaries, not just those within a given policy remit” (SVE founder). The SVE website further describes how putting ‘place’ at the heart of assessing social value distinguishes it from other approaches that evaluate the effectiveness of policies in terms of the returns on investment or the achievement of policy goals. The SVE and other metrics for assessing social value are part of increasing demands from European public institutions to demonstrate policy impact in the broadest sense (European Commission, 2012; 2021).

In the second interview, conducted in June 2024, the team provided us with an update explaining how a recent phase of growth in the SVE business with the recruitment of a growth director to drive marketing has seen them reach over 400 licence holders across 100+ organisations. One of the founders attributed this partly to the international accreditation that the method had secured and partly to their efforts to be simple to use, affordable and ethical in their approach, particularly in enabling and supporting smaller community organisations to use the tool.

In this discussion, the growth director explained that one of their main goals was “bringing people together with different perspectives, but having a common vocabulary”. He elaborated:

“...in our view, more significant impact is getting everyone using the same language, using the same processes, using similar or the same proxies...counting apples and apples rather than counting bananas, apples, oranges and pears within the local community. And it's not so much as what's right or what's best or what's perfect, but it's getting everyone working the same way”.

The quotation highlights the SVE as a tool for enhanced communication and engagement, not simply measurement. This supports our view that alternative models for engagement and participation can boost accountability at the local level, as well as providing a stronger case for funding applications and reporting outcomes to higher levels of policymakers, as illustrated earlier in Figure 1. Where users of the SVE engage multiple stakeholders from the outset of projects, they can ensure that they are measuring what matters to the people that they are trying to support and to the people whose aims they are delivering. Explaining the importance of such an inclusive approach, the marketing director said, “I think it's important to say that we are not dictating how people should run their projects. We are there to support the measuring and evidencing of social value.”

And perhaps a key indication of how the SVE is designed to be more than just a measurement tool, one of the co-founders clarified:

“What we've learned is that just working out what the tyre pressure of each tyre on your car is only tells you whether the tyres are inflated or not ... it doesn't give you any capacity to drive it and so that ‘be responsive’ thing is really important because what we've learnt on our own journey is that is that the engine is a tool for understanding your organisation as well as just being able to measure it.”

The SVE team are clearly aware of the potential to use the tool for measurement, to support funding applications and to carry out evaluations of projects, and engagement, to help inform users of their strategic priorities. The additional quotation above identifies the scope for continuing re-assessment of

social value outcomes to guide new strategies and activities within organisations that seek to deliver a social mission. In the next section, we examine the extent to which users recognise the same benefits from the SVE.

6. SVE User Perspectives: Representational Role

In this section, we draw on the direct experiences of users to understand how the SVE has helped them to represent and communicate local needs to funders and to better understand the complex and locally-nuanced nature of those needs. In the words of one user: *“the engine that basically gives you a financial value of a community or of an intervention...it could be the financial cost of loneliness, the financial cost of volunteers”* (community transport). He continued to explain that the SVE is not just about measuring impact but it also identifies gaps in the services provided by their organisation to initiate new conversations and strategies to better address local needs. Once these gaps are identified, it becomes easier to engage with communities and fulfil the representational function through new funding bids or local initiatives. Another SVE user based in rural arts rationalised how: *“being part of this process has helped us in terms of recognising how we need to capture information going forward”* (rural arts).

Both of the users above also described the technical complexity of the SVE as a challenge. With so many variables in the social value equation, the community transport representative explained that it is difficult to find proxies that provide an exact match, especially when we consider the heterogeneity of rural communities and their needs. Although recognising it is a lot of work, the individual affiliated with rural arts outlined the process of going back to communities and engaging more with them:

“When you're dealing with a community organisation who's hosting an event in your space, regularly, about 17 different groups, and therefore you have to have 17 different conversations and that information might not get translated every single time to the right people. So it's that ongoing piece of work ... But then you know we are lucky we do have our part time staff who can help in terms of capturing that information.” (rural arts)

The Director at UVA echoed this approach, explaining their typical response to requests for more detailed information about local needs: *“So we then looked to set up a bit of a discussion group to think about ... the services that we've provided and gather that information in a more qualitative way to complement the quantitative stuff that we're gathering”* (UVA). This community-orientation is a key value of the SVE. For it to be effective, it has to capture the voices and needs of the wider constituency and not simply reflect the priorities of the organisation itself. As the Inclusive Economy specialist at NESCA told us:

“...actually we need to check to find out what the community want is really social value; it isn't for us to feel better about ourselves because we know that for every pound we've spent, we've got £5 back. If that isn't felt by communities, it just becomes a very academic exercise.”

The innovation of the SVE is to support organisations to be more inclusive and representative of the needs of the communities that they seek to support. It may still be quite a technical process that requires quite a lot of staff resources, but it is valued by users as a tool that can be used to highlight local need and influence organisational strategies. Having a tool that pushes the user to capture the most accurate and complete picture of social value is an effective mechanism to make community engagement more purposeful and to convey to communities that their input is being translated into genuine evidence to support and/or evaluate a rural development initiative.

7. SVE User Perspectives: Accountability Role

Turning to the accountability dimension, the tool is most frequently used to support funding bids. The Director at UVA explained: *“as the funding gets more and more competitive... it makes my life easier when I'm writing bids that I can say ‘for every pound invested in UVA in this year, we deliver £11.50 of social benefits’ ... to have that in a really concise stat that has the academic research to back it up is something that's really valuable to us.”* This was echoed by the rural arts representative: *“we absolutely have put it in every single funding application that we have done... we haven't necessarily got feedback*

from the funders to say that they have put an extra value on us having it in there. But what I would say is that from a confidence perspective in relation to us, we feel it absolutely adds value to our application."

These examples illustrate the importance of having quantifiable data for funders and higher tiers of policy. It may not be the best language for communicating accountability to local communities themselves, but if they are part of the process it should be more transparent. The SVE was also seen as a process that strengthens users' reputations with funders: *"Being able to kind of measure that social value is just a really good way of reporting in a robust fashion to funders... I think it just helps build a kind of that relationship of trust, or integrity, as a small organisation"* (UVA). Furthermore, the tool helps to capture values that might otherwise be overlooked, providing better accountability to communities too: *"I guess it shows us that if we're just laser-focused on one particular outcome of a project and we forget that there's a whole load of other stuff it could do, then we're missing the opportunity to max out the community benefit of the money we have"* (NESCA).

It is easy to see how the SVE can also be translated into a set of evaluation indicators to assess the effectiveness of a policy but, to date, this has largely been an internal process to guide organisational strategies and not something adopted by higher level policymakers. This may be because not enough organisations are using the SVE yet, but it might also be because it requires more resource to be adopted as a formal evaluation tool. From a strategic perspective, however, the Inclusive Economy Advisor of a North East Local Authority noted that it was really valuable as a tool to assess the potential value of multiple versions of a project: *"I think for us it's a really useful design tool, so if we're going to design an investment, how do we weigh up our options to ensure that the way we're investing is going to push as many social value buttons as possible? So if it's an investment in transport, how do we make sure it's not just about the speed at which we can get passengers from A to B, but actually, how is it about reducing social isolation ... air pollution, noise pollution...?"* (NESCA). As the use of SVE advances, its potential as a strategic tool to guide action and engagement with communities is something that the team should work on. This also highlights the need for other rural development actors to use social value indicators in more strategic and pro-active ways, not just for accounting processes.

The tool can also build knowledge about an organisation over time. As the Director at UVA explained, although *"it can get very overwhelming ... I love the fact that then within the engine obviously we can group [projects] together ... get a report for the whole of the SVE tasks. ... because we're often measuring things year on year, we can go into the engine and see an analysis that was done on a project two years ago... It makes it so much easier because we're not starting from scratch every time."* Fundamentally, any tool that provides added knowledge and learning to guide an organisation's strategy is welcome:

"It's always really good to understand what your organisation is currently doing, and the value that you're currently doing." (Rural arts)

"it's definitely given us a new view and a new language" (NESCA)

The danger is that the attractiveness to policymakers is that the tool continues to provide a technical, monetary approach to valuing social outcomes. If this dominates the future use of the SVE, to the detriment of efforts to pursue broader engagement and representation, it will be less effective for rural communities. Already, the technical requirements of using the SVE are quite onerous for very small organisations so having intermediaries to support smaller groups provides a promising opportunity. If the tool allows social value measurement and the stories of real people to be combined, then it can have real impact in communicating rural issues to different audiences:

"I think sometimes when I've had conversations with staff here and there is a lack of understanding about what social value is ... I think very easily it could just become a number on a page that people don't really appreciate or understand. ... They're [volunteers] much more enthused and invigorated by a case study that's a really personal story ... rather than a figure or a monetary value." (UVA)

This quote re-affirms the value of communicating social value in different ways to different audiences. When social value and social innovation can be so ephemeral and intangible, a tool that strengthens both representation and accountability offers great potential to organisations involved in the CLLD arena, but

it only works if multiple actors and stakeholders embrace the approach. Just as volunteers needed personal stories to convince them of the reality of social value, the Inclusive Economy Advisor at NESCA explained the need for making a strong case within the organisation:

“if you're going to pilot this way of working, what you need to do is get the senior management team to agree what success would look like, what would it have to do in order for them to say, yeah, we should do this for every project. So some of it is for me is internally making a case for investing in community activity”. (NESCA)

This section has shown the importance of a clear and accessible language that captures the meaning of social value for different stakeholders. This generates greater legitimacy because more actors can participate and a greater variety of needs and values can be addressed in policy design and evaluation. As a result, both the representational and accountability roles of rural policy can be better fulfilled and communicated through the language of social value. However, it remains a complex approach that requires experts to assist with the translation of local needs into policy objectives and evaluation metrics. To contrast this, we now turn to CLLD in Northern Ireland where participation is more embodied through the direct engagement of community members.

8. Community-Led Local Development: Representation role

The generation of social value beyond project outputs was notable in the desire to genuinely represent local needs across different CLLD activities. Within one participatory budgeting project there was evidence of a grass-roots engagement process as community consultation was initiated:

I remember an initial information evening in [the local town] where they were really trying to take an inclusive approach ...[I] was thinking there's something interesting here about really getting community involvement and energy around the programme as it's shaped. (volunteer, local community & voluntary sector organisation)

As well as the energy flowing from the process, the inherent value of participating and being represented was important. Also important is the empowerment of participants, something that a CLLD participant also reflected on:

...the process is ... a really important part. It gets people more involved with community development ... lets them maybe understand a little bit more about the big picture that works around them and if it's done properly, it does give them some powers, I think we've got to allow communities to decide their own priorities. (elected councillor, local government)

However, funded programmes are not always structured in a way to encapsulate the usefulness of wider social value beyond expected and traditional project outputs, suggesting that a funded programme can be restrictive as these respondents describe:

Whenever you brought local people around a table you should allow them to use their local knowledge ...[but]... because of the prescriptive way it was set out that wasn't always possible...(employee, local government with rural development remit)

Local knowledge was not valued – technical and programming knowledge was considered more important” (volunteer, local community & voluntary sector organisation)

While the SVE provides a template for local actors to feed in their understanding of local needs and values, this approach demands local actors to trust policymakers to listen to their ideas, value their knowledge and act upon their suggestions. Local knowledge is not always valued within formalised programmes with priority given to other forms of knowledge, often dictated by funders and higher-level policymakers. Setting aside how knowledge is valued, securing relevant representation is also challenging. More than 'simply' getting people round the table to represent their community, it also requires an understanding

of pertinent and specific skills and competences so that people could participate in a meaningful way and therefore represent specific interests. As one person explains:

I think it's important that the individual [has a] certain level of competency or ... experience to sit and question decisions that's been put to the board ... and challenge decisions and how they've been made ... [S]ome of the people who came from the community and voluntary sector sat on the board, but they weren't very vocal at the meetings ... there's a sort of a perception that the elected members have more knowledge and kudos. (employee, local government with rural development remit)

Having the power to represent and the confidence to speak up are clearly critical issues for achieving meaningful representation. In the SVE model, community input is needed, so their voices are arguably more empowered – they can provide the data that can help to develop or fund a new social initiative so why wouldn't they speak up? However, of the CLLD examples that we saw, the technical aspects of the programme come sideline these voices who were less able to see how they could contribute. Both an employee and a volunteer from one of the community organisations explained this challenge:

"Identifying and representing community priorities were at times sidelined due to the technocratic nature of funding, especially around business plans and business cases. Those were typically delivered by consultants and so the question of whose interests were actually represented within the programme was less than straightforward." (employee, local voluntary and community sector organisation)

"...it's not the nature of the programme and its structure and how it was set up you know, that's not what is valued, it the values of delivery and meeting the targets and so that whole kind of community engagement and sense of a community owned programme, not sure". (volunteer, local community & voluntary sector organisation)

Participation and representation were nuanced and valued differently among the organisations and individuals within this study. It was noted that *"targets don't include any element of equality within them"* (employee, local government with rural development remit) which made it difficult for some of the smaller community groups to compete for funding:

Every time a community group or that thought they had got their ducks in a row, there was always another hurdle, and they just seemed to keep coming up with new hurdles for community groups. (local government employee, rural development)

...you almost need to have you know a definite support mechanism to especially the weaker community organisations to give them a fair and level playing field against council projects and other professional, more professional projects. (employee, local voluntary and community sector organisation)

The empirical data points to the importance of having local voices represented so that they could influence subsequent activities, something that was not always achieved, not least because participation in the programme required technical nous. Despite this, the formal programme seemed to be limited by its own parameters and was thus only able to measure recognised programme targets which did not always align with perceived community interests. The SVE, by comparison, allows all types of organisations to present the value of their projects on a level playing field, but the technocratic nature of the tool still creates a cost and a level of professional skill that will not be equally available to all groups. Making the SVE available to small groups engaged in CLLD projects, however, offers a potential route to increase representativeness and reduce inequality between rural areas and local origins.

9. Community-Led Local Development: Accountability role

The question of legitimacy and accountability within rural development initiatives has long been of interest. Some Study A respondents talked about how their LAG had operated successfully in terms of the 'bureaucracy and the administration' and for those overseeing the whole programme, reflecting

accountability to the funder rather than to the local area and relevant communities therein. Another individual put it this way:

There hasn't been a collective kind of gathering what have we learned and what has been a collective impact in terms of outcome, so I can throw numbers at you and statistics but in terms of real value there hasn't been that kind of exercise for LAG members. (volunteer, local community & voluntary sector organisation)

This insightful quote speaks to the nature of value beyond project outputs and it is interesting that the informant describes that as 'real value', reflecting also on the participatory dimensions i.e., collective gathering.

You are trying to build a relationship with a community and you are trying to bring forward an application for funding but then you are assessing that application and there is a conflict there. (employee, local government with rural development remit)

Accountability in the programme was somewhat obscured with implications for nurturing trust among local communities, an issue that we identify earlier as being important. Evident here are the technical capabilities that were necessary to present deliverables *beyond* the local scale to connect to wider economic development priorities as demanded through business plans:

...the ones that are gonna be successful are the ones that can afford to bring on somebody who, who can talk the language and, and do business cases and do business plans and put forward an application which works well so that leaves out those that don't have that they don't have access to that, they don't have the funds to be able to do that. (employee, regional voluntary and community sector organisation)

That there was such emphasis on the technical aspects of the programme, bring to the fore the question of where ultimate accountability lies and the degree to which this really was a community-based scheme. We found evidence of pressure to achieve physical outputs which resonated beyond the locality but not necessarily within the local area:

Again, that comes down to that pressure of programme spend, councils could get the money out and get it spent and have something shiny enough at the end of it with all the pictures and everything else you might want to go with it. (employee, regional voluntary and community sector organisation)

But if it was a council backed capital build, everything was sorted so quick, so fast, everything was in order and they scored the best scores. It just really frustrated me because who was this money for? ...it was for the small communities, it was for groups who were managed by volunteers. (local government employee, rural development)

The longer quotes here are used to convey the frustration of individuals who aspire to deliver more rural development outcomes within communities, but find themselves reporting back to funders against a range of other criteria. The literature on LEADER has revealed that innovation and risk taking can be challenging when following traditional approaches to project delivery because those investing funds are expected to deliver tangible outcomes and ensure that the funds are all spent. This can lead to funders pursuing proven routes where they know that projects are within the remit, will complete on time and ensure the money is spent. Identifying new projects which have the capacity to co-fund, or to complete the bureaucratic process as well as deliver the required outcomes risks the money not being invested at all. Respondents in Study A understood the need to be accountable to funders, but they also emphasised the need for governance to be proportionate to the size of the activity. There was evidence of little appetite for even minimal risk in an attempt to minimise funder liability, even though this compromised accountability back to the wider community and territory:

...as a manager I found, particularly near the end, that we were funding projects that didn't need funding because they were the only projects we could fund because there was no risk. If there wasn't any risk, why were we funding the goddamn projects in the first place? (local government employee, rural development)

Ultimately in programmatic CLLD funders' demands weigh heavily within considerations of accountability.

So they were able to change how they monitored and evidenced and... it needs to be accountable and transparent ... let's identify what those things were that worked and try and embed them rather than just going back to the way we do things. (employee, voluntary and community sector)

Within the CLLD activities accountability seemed to be equated with getting the money spent on time, within budget and according to the pre-agreed outputs. Thus it was directly related to funders with a lot of scrutiny, paperwork and less consideration of the impact beyond project outputs or relating to intangible issues. Accountability to the wider community within CLLD activities was much less apparent, particularly when compared to the degree of engagement in the earlier stages of policy development. The representation role allowed communities to participate in the policy and thus offered the promise of greater empowerment, but arguably this needs to be followed through more effectively in the subsequent accountability of the policy initiatives and outcomes.

10. Concluding discussion

The two studies reveal very different models of CLLD. Arguably, both examples highlight the continuing predominance of accountability to funders as demanded by programme rules set by national governments. Both approaches engage local communities and enable local leadership in different ways, but in each case, the local actors cannot operate alone. This epitomises the neo-endogenous rural development model, but our findings go further by highlighting the challenge of enabling local participation. This local emphasis enables greater accountability to local communities as well as providing stronger evidence to higher-level stakeholders of the robust methods of delivery. The ability to evidence effective community engagement and accountability also builds trust for local organisations within their wider policy and funder networks. The means of achieving community engagement differs in the two approaches.

The SVE demands that its users capture as much information as possible from local communities and provides a very clear framework and motivation for local input. The CLLD approach is built on the ethos of LEADER and supports initiatives that provide an open forum for local groups to communicate their priorities. However, the effective translation of those priorities into action still requires organisations to balance the demands of reporting to funders as well as delivering local outcomes.

Differences exist in the emphasis on reporting and the two approaches demonstrate different routes for capturing social value and different emphasis on what represents 'value'. In CLLD "spend" rather than "outcomes" are often assessed. CLLD activities can be masked by the fact that they are not always led by the community but are entirely driven through programmatic and technical issues. Consequently, projects that are low risk tend to receive funding rather than riskier projects. Many individuals participating in CLLD activities are fully committed to developing their community and locality. Our research shows how they also value being in a room with others and benefiting from the energy that flows as ideas are exchanged in a genuine community forum. The promise of community empowerment, representation and accountability was evidently alluring for some of our respondents, but where it did not materialise it became a point of immense frustration. Calls for more "meaningful participation" among interviewees mirror more general critiques of social value and social innovation discussed earlier, where it is perhaps too easy to make positive assumptions about a process that claims to be locally engaging, empowering and representative.

In contrast the SVE embraces the fact that reporting will always be a condition of local funding and uses this as a rationale to shift the emphasis towards reporting all forms of social value created at the local level, not just those within the original policy remit. Indeed Study A reveals how the SVE drives policy-makers and those delivering initiatives to continue to think about the pathways to maximise local social value. This enables innovative organisations to use the SVE as a tool for enhancing both their representational and accountability functions at the local level. Rather than just a calculation to present local needs in monetary terms, deferring to the expectations of government approaches, it can also be

deployed to improve organisational strategies and ongoing evaluation. The SVE suffers from being a more technical tool, but if users of the tools are supported to represent communities and report back to them more effectively it can deliver more instrumental forms of local empowerment. The SVE tool could benefit from clearer indicators of inclusivity to firmly embed the principle of social justice. Even so, enabling local projects to be evaluated in terms of the breadth of social value that they generate, beyond the constraints of narrowly defined policy aims, can empower social innovation in rural communities. That empowerment takes two forms – the accountability with funders and local communities as well as the ability to attract additional investment to support socially innovative activities.

An over-emphasis on paperwork and bureaucracy within a defined CLLD programme can stifle innovation and lead to a narrow view of project outcomes that fail to capture concrete data on the wider social value generated from impacts *beyond* project outputs. Although some of the experiences of LEADER will continue to influence rural development in the UK, as community-led approaches evolve and new tools are developed to strengthen the representational and accountability functions of policy initiatives, it is hoped that this can also provide opportunities for other European countries to reflect on the need for greater flexibility, more ambitious approaches to social innovation and a more empowering approach to addressing the needs of rural communities. Fundamentally, social innovation seeks to enhance human progress and development. Trying out new ideas within a locality can seem risky to budget holders but arguably offering the promise of participation without properly delivering the opportunity to make a difference or to feel heard could be equally damaging. The SVE can help by setting clear parameters around which to balance community aspirations and funders' expectations.

For any rural development policymaker or delivery organisation, our research highlights the need to balance local representation and both local and higher-level accountability. Guided by the framework in Figure 1, the findings confirm that socially innovative approaches to increase community engagement and representation combined with accountability to the local community can deliver outcomes with social value, as determined by local needs. It is easy to talk about local engagement and consultation, but this research reveals that tools like the SVE provide mechanisms to drive more inclusive and meaningful engagement, where the community input drives the overall assessment of social value creation. The SVE is one of many techniques for measuring social value so we recommend that organisations in the rural development domain consider how they could adopt this, or similar approaches, in ways that can increase community engagement, improve communication of outputs and potentially also drive organisational strategies and initiatives. To nurture inclusive spaces of participation and representation within a rural context, a degree of accountability has to be understood as remaining within the territory too. It is not simply about getting money spent and upholding financial probity, which are of course important. Going beyond these conventional issues will help to encourage social innovation as well as realising the wider social value for a rural community.

11. Limitations and next steps

Although this paper only draws on a handful of case studies from the UK, the depth of research has revealed important learning points that can be adopted by rural development organisations across Europe, where CLLD remains a driving force. As the SVE and other tools are more frequently adopted, there is scope for researchers to continue to investigate the impact that these have on the accountability and representative functions of policymakers and social innovation initiatives. There may also be learning for us as researchers: we may be able to learn more about the importance of “meaningful” participation and engagement in our research, about our own accountability to research participants and about the ways in which we measure social value. Tools like the SVE could help evaluation methods to attribute values in different ways, reflecting the values as they are understood within a local area and not simply as they are calculated based on traditional costing methods.

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