

Smart Villages: a Scottish perspective on an emergent European initiative

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What I want to talk about

- A bit of background and my entry point
- The smart villages concept - a chaotic conception?
- ...but some villages do outperform expectations
- What are the possible theoretical explanations?
- What is the policy context EU & Scotland
- How do Smart Villages manifest themselves on the ground?
- Key challenges to research and evaluation communities
- Where does this communitarian turn that enables community-based action sit in relation to other grand narratives of development?

My background



- A social scientist (geography and rural development)
- 30 years living in the same village
- But now a real local resident not just someone who sleeps in the village
- Involved and active in several third sector bodies Men's Shed, a Community Woodland and area partnership
- Active on H2020 SIMRA

My entry point to smart villages

- Research and practical involvement in social innovation which the ENRD Contact Point sees as one of the two key elements of Smart Villages
- SIMRA is about Social Innovation in Marginal Rural Areas
- It has brought me into contact with many excellent examples of what I think of as smart villages and made me think about trying to explain differences in socio-economic performance

What is social innovation?

“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”

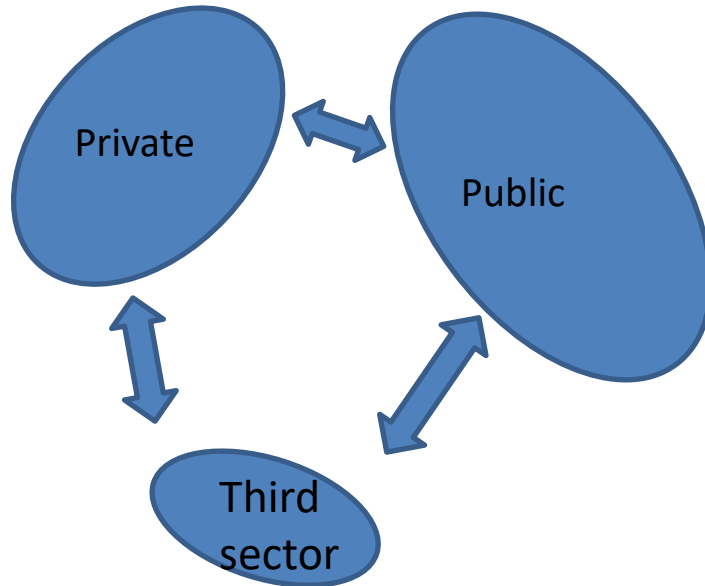
- **Reconfiguring:** doing something differently
- Addressing **societal challenges**
- Seeking enhanced **societal wellbeing**
- Involving **active engagement of civil society**

The scope of social innovation is almost limitless

- The old dualism of market and state is a misrepresentation of how the world is today
- The third sector is becoming an ever more important player in delivering products and services
- Civil society often ends up picking up the pieces after the failure of market or states
- Retail
- Energy production
- Farm and forest management
- Financial services
- Food
- Social care for young, elderly, disabled etc.
- Tourism services
- Environmental protection
- Recycling
- Refugees
- Transport
- Housing
- Business support services

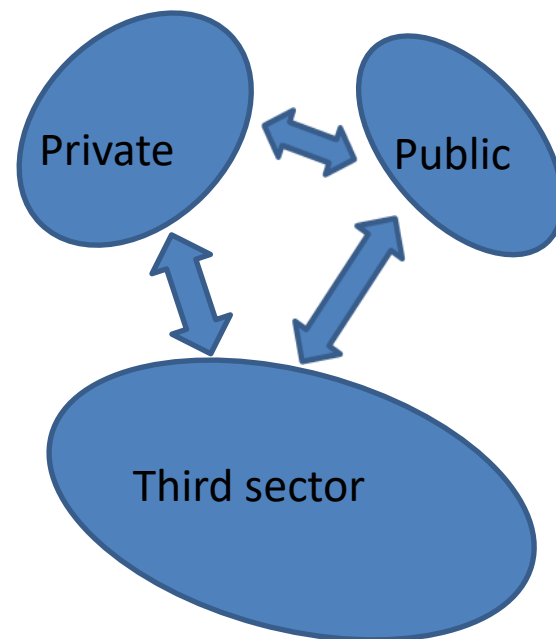
A crisis-driven reorganisation of economic activity is taking place

c. 1960-1980



And there is increasing hybridity of institutions, so there is overlap and some sectors are provided by all three elements

NOW



e.g. Western Isles Council Scotland

NOW TO SMART VILLAGES

Smart Villages – the Commission perspective

- Began as a rural soundbite to match the Smart Cities initiative one village or a cluster
- Seized on and supported by some rural MEPs
- Adopted as an ENRD working group because of strong Commission(er) interest
- A smart city is a place where traditional networks and services are made more efficient with the use of digital and telecommunication technologies for the benefit of its inhabitants and business
- But is a smart village defined by its digital connectivity?
- What is the intervention logic?
- Last week at European Parliament Smart Villages event a representative from Fintry Development Trust made a compelling case that they were a smart village but had poor connectivity
- Smaller municipalities, are driving dynamic adaptive management in Spain and Italy but Scottish councils are large and severely cash strapped
- So is a smart village just a small version of a smart city or not?

Definitions for the EP study

European Commission EU Action for Smart Villages 2017

“rural areas and communities which build on their existing strengths and assets as well as on developing new opportunities”, where “traditional and new networks and services are enhanced by means of digital, telecommunication technologies, innovations and the better use of knowledge”.

ECORYS study 2019

“communities in rural areas that use innovative solutions to improve their resilience, building on local strengths & opportunities.”

Smart villages: A chaotic conception?

- After Sayer

A chaotic conception occurs where the objects and relations we are studying are arbitrarily divided up, leaving the resulting concepts devoid of any significant cohesion or structure

- IT-savvy places with strong IT infrastructures (Hogan's view) and Kenny Higgins view for Smart Villages Scotland

Or

- places with strong social capital (especially linking and bridging) and "available" human capital which gives them a capacity to outperform expectations

Or

- The confluence of these two highly divergent streams one based on neoliberal innovation theory and the other on communitarianism/the collaborative economy

Theoretical roots

- Classical location theory-some places have competitive advantage
 - Services- central places
 - Manufacturing industry
- Core-periphery: we expect peripheries to experience challenges
- Social capital (bonding, linking, bridging; trust)
- Human capital (brain drain vs endogenous knowledge, ITK (links with endogenous development theory)
- Innovation systems -a cascade of multi-scalar interlocking systems (regional and/or sectoral) in an ideal world- comprising state, business and civil society actors (including smart specialisation options)..... but can you really have a village-level innovation system?

Smart Villages- the EU policy context

- An optional part of future RDPs (which are becoming less integrated with other ESI funds)
- Weakly linked to social innovation (which is much more present in ESF+)
- Often conflated with development of IT infrastructure and IT up-skilling
- Often conceptualised in farming not rural terms
- Seeking nationally tailored implementation

Smart Villages-the Scottish policy context- a communitarian turn?

- Land Reform Scotland Acts 2003, 2016
- National Forest Land Scheme
- Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013
- Community Empowerment Act 2016 esp. parts 3 4 and 5 Participation requests; Community Right to buy; Community Asset Transfer
- CARES
- Arm's length support agencies (LES, CES, CCF, CLS)
- Probably the most communitarian set of policy instruments of any EU country/region

Some Scottish examples

- Portsoy pop 1700 - a coastal community
- Braemar pop 400 – a national park village
- Huntly pop 4000 - a small town



- The trigger: a celebration of 300 years a harbour 25 years ago
- The consequence: a vibrant community-owned development hub driving local development with new projects emerging to revitalise the place



This is what it looks like in practice



Braemar – a mountain community driven by a strong community development trust

- Took over a castle as tourist attraction
- Restored traditional rural buildings
- Developed a community hydro scheme
- Developed social care project
- Developed community gardens
- Now thinking about social needs housing project



Huntly: a small town with significant socio-economic challenges seeking positive change

- Driven by municipal initiative that resulted in third sector development trust
- Activities include recreation, tourism, green transport, farmers market, local food, microbusiness support
- Getting a turbine as income stream was vital



Common features of these smart villages



They are the setting for (several) successful community-led projects including digital hubs



They have drawn down diverse sources of competitive funding



They are underpinned by good leadership, strong social capital and strong human capital



They have usually developed (maybe not initially) local development strategies/community level plans

The key challenges from a research and policy perspective

- Outcomes of current policy likely to be at odds with core aims of SG
 - To him that hath shall be given
 - Complexities of navigating the map of support
 - Affirmative action (animation?) or not?
- The troubled and uncertain relationship between Smart Villages/community empowerment and globalisation
 - Bulwark against globalisation
 - Harbinger of globalisation at village scale, or
 - Exemplar of the collaborative economy

To him that hath, shall be given

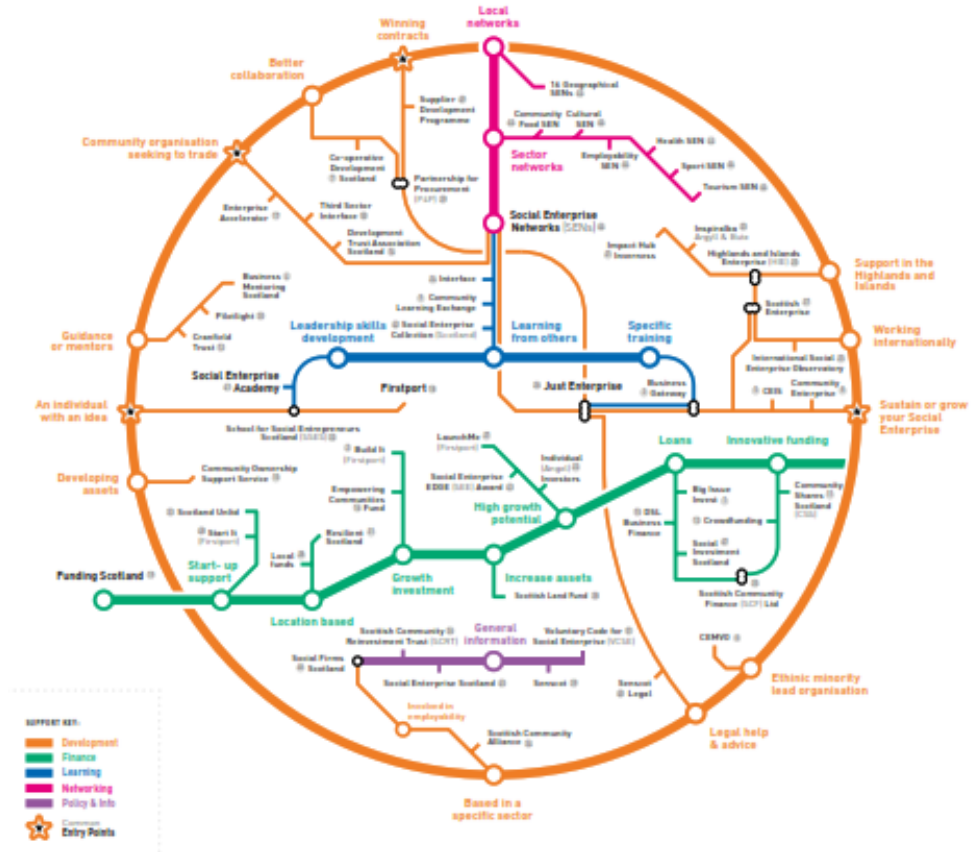


The pros and cons
of the
projectisation of
development

Smart villages tend
to become
smarter. But SG
aims are to reduce
disadvantage and
improve equity
outcomes

Navigating the
“Social enterprise
ecosystem” is not
easy

- Source Senscot 2019



Is affirmative action needed?

- It may be the unsmart (dumb?) that need the policy support
- Almost certainly yes, if distributive justice is to be achieved
- Almost certainly yes, because core human and social capital needs may not be present in less advantaged communities – animation and capacity building may be needed

Uncertain times

- Is bottom-up community action manifested in such forms as smart villages no more than an act of defiance and/or necessity against the forces of neo-liberalism and public sector austerity
- Or is it a harbinger of a new way of doing things in a more collaborative economy where the power of the formal market recedes and a new ecology of markets, state and third sector delivers wellbeing in different ways in different places

The Scottish Government sits uncomfortably on the fence

- Enabling the market, committed to growth, seeking FDI etc
- Enhancing community capacity to do things differently

Assessing outcomes

Option 1

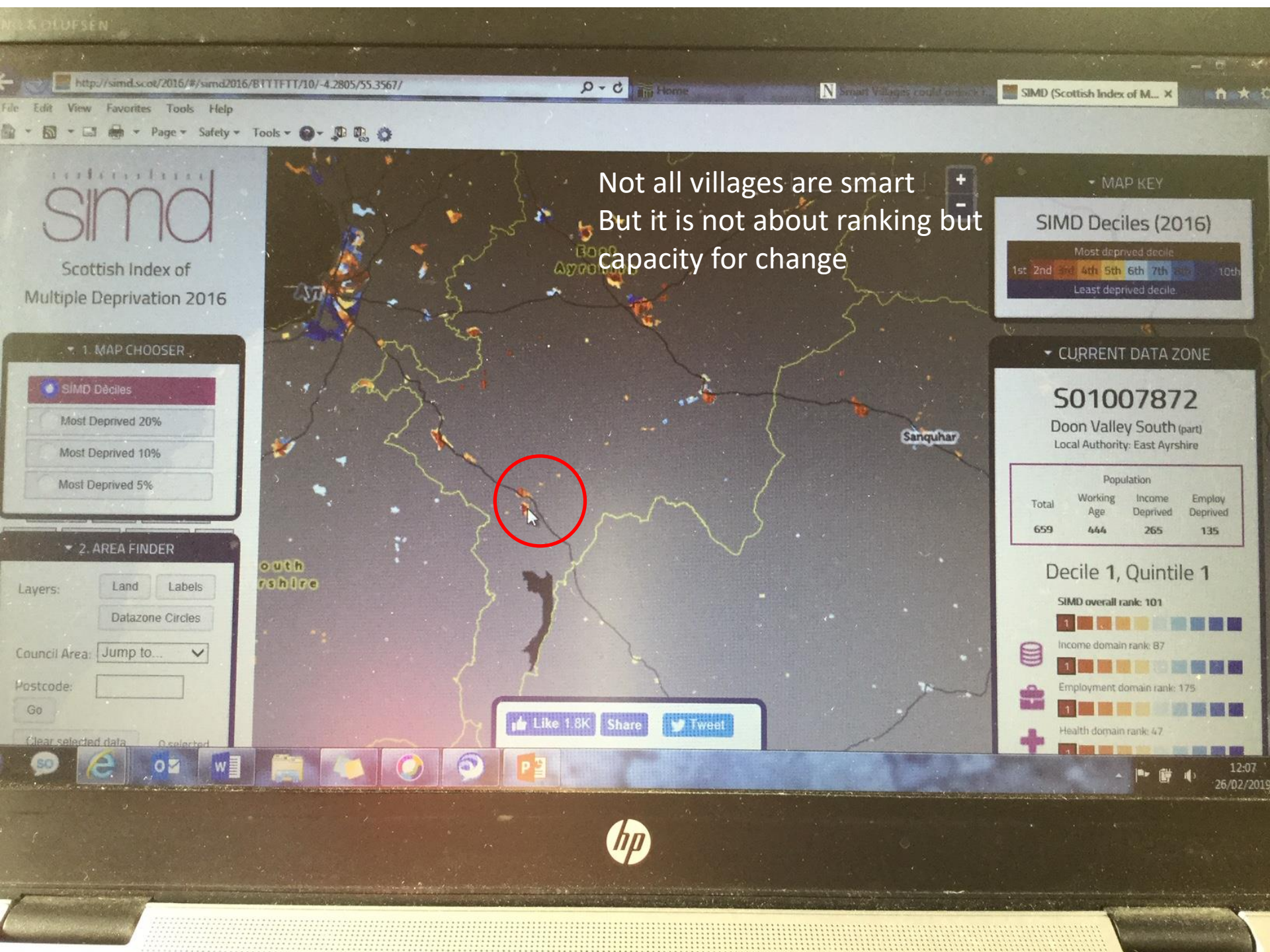
- Look at subjectively defined or objectively smart villages and assess socio-economic performance
- Look at changes of rank in relation to SIMD

But

- Ceteris paribus conditions not satisfied
- Confounding variables may be present (new housing)

Option 2

- Identify SV projects and assess outcomes (of all or sample) via Log-frame approach
- Assess changes in subjective, self-reported wellbeing in SVs and non SVs (either self ascribed or objectively defined)



Not all villages are smart
But it is not about ranking but
capacity for change

simd

Scottish Index of
Multiple Deprivation 2016

1. MAP CHOOSE

☒ SIMD Deciles

☐ Most Deprived 20%

☐ Most Deprived 10%

☐ Most Deprived 5%

2. AREA FINDER

Layers: ☐ Land ☐ Labels

☐ Datazone Circles

Council Area:

Postcode:

MAP KEY

SIMD Deciles (2016)



CURRENT DATA ZONE

S01007872

Doon Valley South (part)
Local Authority: East Ayrshire

Population			
Total	Working Age	Income Deprived	Employ Deprived
659	444	265	135

Decile 1, Quintile 1

SIMD overall rank: 101



Income domain rank: 87



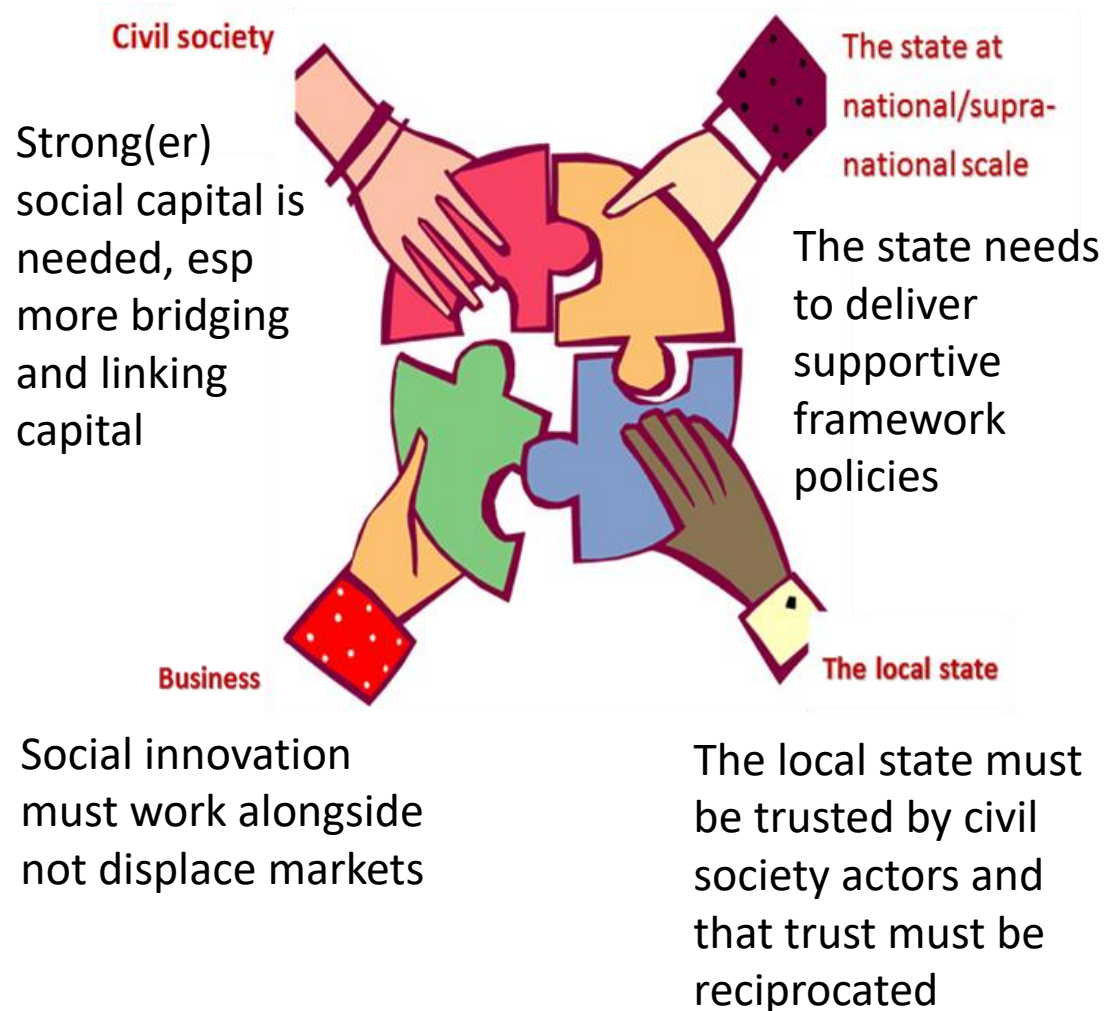
Employment domain rank: 175



Health domain rank: 47



If we can get the chemistry right the third sector can be highly responsive – often better than markets or the state - in delivering local sustainable development outcomes



To conclude

- Scottish rural development policy has taken a distinctly communitarian turn in the last two decades
- A broad-based institutional architecture is now there to support a diverse range of social, economic and environmental initiatives
- Good digital infrastructure is a desirable but not even a necessary characteristic of smart villages: Ecorys “not a precondition”
- Strong place-based civil society organisations often shape positive performance differences
- Third sector agency can be a game changer in remote/marginal communities, but is probably more modest in its impacts elsewhere
- Although smart villages policy does not exist in Scotland, the institutional architecture favours smart villages and local action
- We need to recognise some significant tensions between SG overarching aims and the actuality of supported smart villages (and the same issue exists in the EU framing)
- We cannot deliver on SDGs without social innovation and civil society engagement



THANK YOU



Horizon 2020
No. 677622