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Scotland's Rural Third Sector: Breaking out of Siloed Policy

Melissa Mesek; Alejandro Pérez-Landa; Dr Anne MJ Smith; Dr Vasilios Stouraitis; Dr Shariq Sheikh

Abstract

In recent times rural communities have been exposed to significant challenges, some are social, others economic and some very unpredictable events such as pandemics and war. Nonetheless individuals and communities that constitute rural society continue to be resilient and seek solutions to localised rural problems through rural enterprise and entrepreneurship. Our paper examines Scotland's rural third sector. We ask the questions- 'Does policy appear as a coherent intersection between rural development and third sector or is support for the rural third sector a product of siloed policy?' We use content analysis to examine key government policy, website publications and strategies written by the respective directorates for rural development and third sector, but we are particularly interested in the nexus between them. Despite Government support for Community Led Local Development initiatives there is evidence to show from recent consultations that deficiencies exist in relation to supporting entrepreneurial action, viable impact metrics and structuring support for grassroots community projects. In addition, we show support for rural third sector is straddled across directorates which critically creates deficiencies in relation to providing coherent support for the rural third sector and specifically neglects the characteristics that shape third sector activity in rural spaces. We propose that further research is required to advance our understanding of rural third sector and further studies to inform coherent policy to support the rural third sector rather than an intersection between government directorates with multiple stakeholders.

Keywords: Rural Third Sector; Rural Development; Third Sector; Government Policy; Rural Entrepreneurship.

Introduction

Rural spaces are generally positively connotated with tourism, positive mental well-being, rich with agricultural produce, a perception of food security and attractive scenery; in other words, a sustainable social and economic space for those living in rural communities (Shucksmith, 2018). Despite notions of this rural idyll, there are decades of evidence (Newbery et al., 2017; Roberts and Green, 2013; Shucksmith et al., 1996) to suggest that the reality of living in a rural space often comes with disadvantage, constrained resources, and relative poverty (Bosworth et al., 2020; Willet, 2023). Governments do attempt to address the rural-urban divide, attracting new and viable businesses through economic policy and supporting infrastructure projects often delivered by third sector service providers (or public-private partnerships); however, this reinforces the understanding that rural economic conditions are not always attractive to the entrepreneur, to investment, and conventional market structures (Wyper et al., 2016). The Scottish Government's vision is for a rural future involving green, sustainable, socio-economic solutions through community action, and to attract entrepreneurship in the third sector enterprise projects and initiatives (Scottish Government, ndd). There is evidence to support the ideology of a vibrant rural third sector. Currently 34 percent of Scottish social enterprises are rural, despite just 18 percent of the country's overall inhabitants being rurally situated (Social Value Lab, 2017). In 2012, the Scottish Government undertook a literature mapping of the rural third sector and concluded there were extensive knowledge deficiencies such as definitional challenges and the role of local community, they identified several rural challenges in relation to volunteering, service delivery and transport, and finally, called for further research into the rural third sector (Scottish Government, 2012). Therefore, if the devolved government in Scotland is committed to creating sustainable, vibrant communities and providing a positive environment for a rural third sector (Scottish Government, nda), then to be effective, there must be evidence of rural policy intersecting with third sector policy or perhaps coherent policy designed for third sector enterprise in rural conditions. Yet, and despite, there being extensive literature on neo endogenous rural development, there remains concern that the government retains a dominant position in rural development, that community enterprise projects are shoehorned into a one-size-fits-all policy and rural third sector enterprise activities lack diffused power, (Bosworth et al., 2020; Burnett and Danson, 2017; Shortall, 2008; Shucksmith, 2010; Willet, 2023; Zografos, 2007). To explore the rural third sector, our research provides an analysis of relevant policy, website and strategy publications and contributes to the understanding of the rural third sector in Scotland; demonstrating both its robustness and deficiencies. Specifically, we perform a content analysis to answer our research question; We continue our paper with an examination of the broader rural canvas in a bid to examine the nexus between rural development and third sector activity, then we review extant literatures, unpack the characteristics of a rural third sector and create a framework for our analysis.

Characteristics of Rural Society and Place

In 1988 the European Commission (EC) published a paper on 'The Future of Rural Society', (EC, 1988). Built on three pillars - socio-economic cohesion, agricultural adjustment and environmental protection. The commission set out a road map for rural development and the support of rural society and future generations. The paper acknowledges that post war, the equilibrium in rural society had been disrupted, the balance of life which was so effective for generations had been tilted by post war industrialisation and migration from the rural to urban space, resulting in change to the institutional structures of rural organisation and economic markets (Dickson, 1980; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Smout, 2002). Moreover, the ecological equilibrium was disturbed, new farming

patterns and changes in land usage were affecting the environment and not always positively. Most concerning, the socio-economic picture was skewed, an ageing rural population, shrinking communities and according to EC (1988), half of the farmers in 1988 were over 55 years old without a successor. The resultant trends included rapidly changing demographics, and an emergence of new rural leisure activities, a downgrading of farming importance through a concentration of fewer farms with higher yields and an increase in outward migration (Clove, 1993; Shucksmith et al., 1996; Symes, 1981). Subsequently, the effect on communities was higher levels of unemployment, lower incomes, and increased levels of relative poverty. Thereafter, in 1988, a community approach to these problems in rural society was considered fruitful. The Commission stated that there must be tailored basic strategies, that they should be indigenous and respond to local socio-economic needs, and finally, ‘...demand of the Community that it takes the proper action to ensure the development of rural society’ (EC, 1988: 14).

Despite this focus, and after a pandemic and Brexit, it is surprising how 35 years on, socioeconomic shocks and the narrative around rural challenge and disadvantage has remained surprisingly constant with repeating characteristics (Bosworth et al., 2020; Tenza-Peral et al., 2022; Willett, 2023). According to Tenza-Peral et al. (2022) continuing depopulation is diluting the viability of many neo endogenous strategies and affecting viability of policy. Socio-economic cohesion requires effective relations between the community and institutions, and literatures show there are several ways in which these relations are being disrupted, through a sustained narrative around depletion and aging communities (Besser and Miller, 2013; Stockdale, 2006), the narrative supporting social innovation (Bosworth et al., 2020; Shortall, 2008), and repeated call for effective place-based policy and institutional approaches which are inclusive and locationally relevant (Bosworth et al., 2020; Burnett and Danson, 2017; Shortall, 2008; Shucksmith, 2010; Willet, 2023; Zografos, 2007). Unsurprisingly rural context remains a notable point of discussion especially in relation to understanding the situatedness of its social and economic assets and liabilities; interactions with context are different from one place to the next and rural entrepreneurship will be enacted differently according to surroundings and uniqueness of social capital (Burnett and Danson, 2017; Gaddefors and Anderson, 2019; Halfacree, 1993, 1995; Lang and Fink, 2019; Shortall, 2008). Skerratt (2013) highlights resilience as being a frequently discussed characteristic of the rural community but signals that the concept is not yet understood in a way that is enabling and that scholars should continue to question and reframe this concept in the rural spaces. These characteristics of *being* in the rural create uniqueness and heterogeneity for each space and that creates the challenge to achieve equality and inclusivity for all stakeholders with homogenous policy approaches. Willett (2023) acknowledges there is a gap between regional development programmes and community expectations and highlights the need to put local at the center of institutional decision making; the chasm separating the local experience from the institutional rhetoric. Despite Bosworth et al. (2020)'s call for a mix of top-down and bottom-up approaches to rural entrepreneurship, this is inevitably a dynamic most find difficult to navigate, while there is little evidence of grassroots examples. The disconnect and lack of intersection, or joined up thinking, between community and policy development that has haunted rural enterprise development for some time remains a topic under researched in terms of workable solutions (Shortall, 2008; Shucksmith, 2010; Tenza-Peral et al., 2022; Ward et al., 2005).

Building Social Value in Rural Places and Spaces

Third sector organisations and rural social enterprise are first responders in terms of solutions to local problems in rural locations and subsequently reach out to harness the raft of measures in

Scotland that provides funding and support (Scottish Government 2016b, 2020, n.d.). With calls for bottom-up strategies, the Scottish government has committed to bring forward legislation that support policies for Community Wealth Building (Scottish Government, n.d.) an ideology originally designed for cities as a way of supporting urban regeneration. With the Economic Development Association Scotland (EDAS) driving the CWB (Community Wealth Building) agenda forward and a focus on 'levelling up in rural economies' (EDAS, 2023), it is unknown territory in terms of how CWB concepts will transfer from urban to rural context without a full institutional commitment to bottom-up development strategies (Redwood et al., 2023). Nonetheless, current solutions are driven through a number of community led socio-economic initiatives and include social enterprise, community buy outs, social innovation projects, social business, community organisations and community led action groups (Anderson and Lent, 2019; Smith and McColl, 2016; Steinerowski and Steinerowska-Streb, 2012), thereby creating a landscape of heterogeneous bottom-up responses to unique place and space problems. Steiner and Atterton (2015) discuss how rural resilience can be built through social enterprises activity and subsequently how rural characteristics are considered and effectively harnessed and addressed through community action and interaction. Therefore, the argument is strong indeed to enable communities to respond to their unique challenges. However, it remains questionable why there is a repeating argument after at least three decades. Is the policy effective? Does policy diffuse power? Is policy too homogenous? Is policy flawed by design to favour population density and success metrics? These questions are important to ask in terms of reframing our conceptual understandings, informing better solutions and designing better, more effective policy (Skerratt, 2013).

Scottish rural society is anchored in community and with two thirds of social enterprise being rurally situated, there is unmistakable evidence of an indigenous appetite to grasp socio-economic opportunity and improve wellbeing (Bosworth et al., 2020; Tenza-Peral et al., 2022; Willett, 2023). Nonetheless, there remains structural weaknesses in rural economies and outward migration continues with the younger generation continuing to locate in seemingly more prosperous urban areas. The levels of underinvestment and uncertainty in agriculture means that there remains a sense of disequilibrium; most notably in terms of power centric institutions and lack of diffusion of that power (Redwood et al., 2023; Shucksmith, 2010). Rural spaces are changing, and potentially might shore up some weakening characteristics such as outward migration, for example, there have been shifts towards improved conservation with designated national parks and enhanced public spaces, building new economies for new income streams (although it is argued that the lack of rural infrastructure creates unfamiliar problems). Sustainability policy particularly regarding energy production has evolved to support development of wind farms and forestry that cover large parts of rural and remote rural Scotland. These developments do not always improve local wealth but feed the landowner through government tariffs. Finally, a space economy is now developing in rural parts of Scotland, and a thriving ecosystem is offering a new future to rural spaces (Scottish Development International, 2023). Yet the emergence and growth of a rural third sector appears to lack rurally defined support for heterogeneous and situated problems. There are indeed repeating patterns, repeating arguments, and the challenges facing communities and third sector organisations in rural places appear constantly. Based on a review of literature, Table 1 captures the key characteristics of a rural third sector.

Framework of Rural Third Sector Characteristics	
<i>Situatedness:</i>	Problems are experienced by the community based on their interaction with where they live and work, and it follows that solutions are relative to the specific place-based interactions. The repeating call is that rural is defined by the interactions of people with their surroundings and that a situated problem requires bottom-up contextualised solutions.
<i>Power and voice:</i>	Literatures call for diffusion of power, for bottom up and neo endogenous strategies, to date a repeating call yet little to suggest much headway. Is the government and Local Authority (LA) the force of power behind distribution of funds and support or has community a voice to shape and power to draw down necessary funds to solve situated problems.
<i>Homogeneity:</i>	The nexus between third sector, rural development and community enterprise is uncharted. Is policy created to support siloed thinking and homogeneity, can/could policy traverse contexts? Perhaps the lack of nuance is unlikely to respond to the specific challenge and problems experienced in rural contexts by rural communities, but, perhaps, power and voice might have capability to manage policy homogeneity.
<i>Capacity building:</i>	Solving problems situated in rural places requires capacity, most notably, leadership, social capital, skillsets and knowledge yet we know rural communities tend to lack capacity due to depopulation, low levels of mobility and outward migration.
<i>Inclusivity and equality:</i>	Access to education and health in the rural context is not equal, remoteness and access are key characteristics therefore broad homogenic strategies will struggle to accommodate rural conditions.
<i>Success/Performance Metrics:</i>	Performance metrics are important and need to measure impact from usage of public funds, and rightly there must be metrics but how can homogenic policy be monitored across different contexts using the same metrics when contexts are so polarised; urban and rural. Are metrics and KPI's constructed appropriately at the nexus between third sector, rural development and community enterprise to support rural third sector.

Table 1 Framework of Rural Third Sector Characteristics

We continue with a critical analysis of Scottish Government policy and strategy documents as well as website content in which we are searching for the policy nexus to support rural third sector, we want to examine the intersection of these two policy units in Scottish Government that produce policy for rural development and for Third Sector.

Methodology

We critically explore and analyse Scottish Government documentation in relation to third sector and rural development in Scotland, a qualitative methodological design for contextual and content datasets (Vaismoradi and Snelgrove, 2019). With excellent accessibility and availability of policy

documentation including reports, websites and policy publications, a content analysis was undertaken followed by an abductive approach to make sense of the interconnectedness of Scottish Government policy that deliver on rural development and third sector.

Krippendorff (1989) remarks that written text is one of the most obvious sources used for this content analysis and Stemler (2015) stresses that this analysis technique can help in making large strides in the understanding in many diverse topics particularly when dealing with large quantities of text. Firstly, we accessed the websites of two policy units, the Agriculture and Rural Economy Directorate and Covid Recovery and Public Service Reform Directorate, which houses third sector policy and includes community empowerment and land reform. The Scottish Government has website navigation which follows and links to related topics which frequently crosses back and forth between directorates. Albeit an interesting navigation design, it meant our search had to be purposeful and based on keywords; rural development, and third sector. This also meant that we had to move between directorates before navigating back to our main units of analysis.

Secondly, we reviewed in total thirty-eight points of content; some content stemmed from the directorate website with no date (nd) other content from dated publications, reports and consultations. Datasets were created from content across directorates, and reveals multiple stakeholders, competing agendas and extensive duality. Complexity and multiplicity are concepts of the search which are not only interesting but are also worthy of discussion and framing as part of our findings in the following section.

Finally, our retrieved content was divided into categories to assist with data management, then summarised, paraphrased, or generalised, in a way to keep the key content information and connection to the research. In Table 2 below, we present our analysis which shows key data sources organised into categories, then aligned with rural characteristics from Table 1 (Morse, 2008).

Data Analysis: Rural and Third Sector Intersections

	Data Source	Categories	<i>Characteristics</i>
<p>Directorate: Covid Recovery and Public Service Reform Directorate</p>	Community Empowerment. https://www.gov.scot/policies/community-empowerment/	Community	Situatedness Power and voice Homogeneity Inclusivity and equality Success/Performance Metrics
	Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016 - relinquishment and assignation provisions: islands community impact assessment https://www.gov.scot/publications/islands-impact-assessment-implementation-relinquishment-assignation-provisions-land-reform-scotland-act-2016/	Rural Community	Situatedness Power and voice Homogeneity Capacity building
	Environment and Land Reform: relations between non-governmental organisations and community groups_ https://www.gov.scot/publications/environment-land-reform-examining-relations-between-non-governmental-organisations-community-groups/	Rural Community	Inclusivity and equality Success/Performance Metrics
	Social Enterprise Strategy 2016-26 Available at: https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-social-enterprise-strategy-2016-2026/pages/6/	Third sector	Situatedness Capacity building Inclusivity and quality Success/Performance Metrics

	<p>Social Enterprise: Action Plan</p> <p>Available at: https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-enterprise-action-plan/pages/4/</p>	Third Sector Community	<p>Situatedness</p> <p>Homogeneity</p> <p>Power and voice</p> <p>Inclusivity and equality</p> <p>Success/Performance Metrics</p>
	<p>Third Sector Social Enterprises Policy</p> <p>Available at: https://www.gov.scot/policies/third-sector/social-enterprises/#:~:text=there%20are%205%2C600%20social%20enterprises,2%20billion%20to%20the%20economy</p>	Third Sector Community	
	<p>Third Sector Interfaces Available at:</p> <p>https://www.gov.scot/policies/third-sector/third-sector-interfaces/</p>	Third Sector Community	
<p>Directorate:</p> <p>Agriculture and Rural Economy Directorate</p>	<p>Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP)_</p> <p>https://www.gov.scot/policies/agriculture-payments/scottish-rural-development-programme-srdp/</p>	Rural Community	<p>Situatedness</p> <p>Homogeneity</p> <p>Power and voice</p> <p>Capacity building</p> <p>Inclusivity and equality</p> <p>Success/Performance Metrics</p>
	<p>Agricultural payments: Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)_</p> <p>https://www.gov.scot/policies/agriculture-payments/</p>	Rural	

Table 2: Data Analysis: Rural and Third Sector Intersections

Our categories are 'rural,' 'third sector' and 'community.' Each piece of content had to demonstrate direct linkage to one or more categories to ensure a consistent cohesion between methods and results (Morse, 2008). Our category descriptions are as follows: -

Rural: characteristics in policy and website content where the main geographic feature is communities located in low population density. This category aligned with the situatedness characteristic and provided evidence for the power and voice characteristic. The homogenic nature of rural policy content was noted.

Third Sector: policy and websites that connect to a social enterprise, social business, local action groups, community buy-outs, charities, and land reform. Policy repeatedly aligned with situatedness, homogeneity and power voice characteristics but defined by urban situatedness.

Community: collectives and groups of people, urban or rural, we discovered how broad the concept of community is and how widely it is used in policy to refer to occurrences of groups, yet rarely defined by locational characteristics. This category aligned with the power and voice and homogeneity characteristics.

These categories are important for locating intersections between documents, they underpinned the methods and allowed us to follow the visibility of rural characteristics in documents. In our following discussion we consider the content meaning and examine the interconnectedness using the characteristics of rural third sector, we consider how effective policy is at providing a meaningful nexus for those communities and individuals living in rural conditions who want to use third sector mechanisms to solve problems.

Intersections Between Rural Development and Third Sector Policy

Despite calls for contextual and specific policy (see Burnett and Danson, 2017; Roberts and Green, 2013; Shortall, 2008; Shucksmith et al., 1996), there is little evidence from our study of that there is a state of diffused power to support rural third sector and that power over funding awards remains in the hands of Government and LAs. Our concerns are that community, third sector and rural often appear siloed or with one having greater accessibility to policy benefits because of their non rural characteristics for example skillset availability or capacity building. Our research question was, does evidence from Rural Development policy and Third Sector policy intersect in any effective and meaningful way to support a sustainable rural future? Our evidence suggests there are flaws in policy design and that a sustainable rural future lacks diffused power, and the homogenic nature of policy neglects rural third sector characteristics. Silos are evident in Scotland's Food strategy, they set a new vision for Scotland: that by 2025 Scotland will be,

"a Good Food Nation, where people from every walk of life take pride and pleasure in, and benefit from, the food they produce, buy, cook, serve, and eat each day." (Scottish Government, ndb)

Indeed, aspirational but this policy has a focus on SME's and support for processing and it's a homogeneous strategy that lacks the situatedness of rural third sector and is therefore limiting in terms of rural support. Nonetheless, when we examine Third sector documentation, we find evidence of some policy diffusion from Scottish Government to LA, and one would assume a Rural situated LA would be best placed to administer funds and apply strategy. However, it remains the case, this is top-down strategy and lacks meaningful diffusion of power.

‘Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs) provide a single point of access for support and advice for the third sector within local areas. There is a TSI in each local authority area in Scotland. (Scottish Government, ndc)

In a similar vein, the Community Empowerment Act, the aspiration is institutional, and power sits with LA and the social enterprise strategy and action plan is equally aspirational;

“Our investment in social enterprises can therefore help ensure that more parts of the country are benefiting from economic growth and prosperity, while supporting rural development, protecting fragile communities and promoting the Gaelic language.” (Scottish Government, 2016a)

It is not included how these aspirations are going to be realised and no amount of funding is allocated to this specifically. Signposting from the Strategy document to the Action document could help in making these linkages more available. Despite promises the detail in the documentation lacks evidence of any sustainability. It is unclear how remote rural social enterprise or any other form of third sector mechanism might operate as a viable concern in areas that lack capacity, skillsets and a deep in poverty; social entrepreneurship requires income streams to sustain. Community wealth building is a tool that the Scottish Government is promoting through the flagship Community Wealth Building Policy (Scottish Government, nda). CWB is an approach designed to respond to local needs and provides a chance for place-based social enterprises to contribute more greatly to the economy. In this vein, the government has specific ambitions towards building onto existing initiatives which include the Investing in Communities Fund & Wealth Building Commitments, Buy Social and A New Future for Scotland’s Town Centres.

“To support Community Wealth Building we will provide an additional five hundred thousand pounds to help community third sector organisations to diversify their income streams through entrepreneurial activity. This will be money generated locally which in many cases is invested back into the communities in which they are based, helping communities to have more control of their local economy.” (Scottish Government, 2021b)

However, the success of CWB is considered in relation to the involvement of anchor organisations which might be somewhat lacking in the expansive rural regions of Scotland. Currently the Western Isles is a test bed for CWB policy, and it will indeed be interesting to understand how the concepts of CWB transfer into the rural domain (Redwood et al 2023). The conceptual nature of CWB is that wealth in the community is driven up from grass roots level with power to respond to situated problems and challenges; this is indeed promising, would diffuse power and directly deliver neo endogenous strategies for the rural third sector answering a call made by many rural entrepreneurship scholars (Bosworth et al., 2020; Burnett and Danson, 2017; Shortall, 2008; Shucksmith, 2010; Willet, 2023; Zografos, 2007)

When we found evidence in Land reform documentation which attempt to enable communities to manage where they live, and we were surprised how the mixed views are on the benefits of landownership. The argument is strongly for place-based bottom-up strategies yet without a sustainable approach to viable community projects, the entire process is considered negatively; rural third sector characteristics can be a fundamental flaw in a bid to achieve sustainability.

‘Overall, NGOs’ interviewed argue that from their perspective, change of ownership can negatively affect land management. The interviewees highlighted that Land Reform prioritises ownership over the type and style of management and that communities that come into land ownership often struggle to access resources for improving land management’ (Scottish Government, 2018)

However, land reform documentation states the following recommendations to try and mitigate some of the issues associated with community ownership and bottom-up strategies;

'A networked approach, whereby local assets and local knowledge is augmented by external assets and resources, is likely to be the most effective way to bridge the gap in resources and expertise when land is transferred to community groups.

Creating place-based plans and developing community projects, that are created by and for the local community, are more likely to encourage sustained community buy in and engagement with the project, helping to ensure long-term viability.

NGOs should engage in 'bottom up' communication as opposed to 'top down'. Efforts should be made to engage the community as opposed to informing them of plans. This is particularly relevant in the context of designing public consultations' (Scottish Government, 2018)

Despite linkages through website navigation the siloed homogenic effect of the documentation was broad, nonetheless there is one area where there is a clear intersection and coherent approach to rural third sector and it is in Pillar 2 of the Rural Development Programme an exceedingly small part of Scottish Agricultural Policy. There is a Community Led Local Development (CLLD) initiative aims to address social, environmental, and economic issues has funds administered by the local authority and includes actions affecting rural and island communities to:

'drive community action on climate change, enhance rural services and facilities, including transport initiatives, enhance natural/cultural heritage, tourism and leisure, support food and drink initiatives (for example short supply chains, community food), build co-operation with similar groups in Scotland, UK and Europe, empowering communities to exchange learning and knowledge with each other, realise their potential and build opportunities for all' (Scottish Government, 2021a: 637).

Perhaps concerning, CLLD does not appear to have funding committed after 2023 but there are signals there will be future funding, the recommendations are extensive and include very relevant points that are impact based;

'Impact

- *For more entrepreneurial projects, consider a "payment by results" model that rewards community wealth building activities and access to ongoing funding for further growth.*
- *Tailor measurements of success to the goals of the project.*
- *Adopt a more formative or dynamic evaluation philosophy including forum for LAGS to peer support each other and help improve all delivery.*
- *Provide clear guidance to projects regarding different kinds of impact and how they can be measured.*
- *Consider mechanisms for recording ongoing impact after projects have concluded, particularly for projects that are initiating long-term change such as those with a social or environmental focus.'* (Wilson et al., 2022: 2)

Interesting to note that rural entrepreneurship continues to be considered a critical mechanism for improving community well-being and providing solutions to rural challenges. Furthermore, it is imaginative and, presents a breakthrough in understanding metrics and performance indicators by suggesting tailored impacts metrics. There is a focus on local groups suggesting positioning towards neo endogenous strategies and a strong signal that this is heterogenic strategies, ways to enable

nuance and uniqueness of pace and space to be at the forefront of projects. Insightful recommendations demonstrate that rural third sector characteristics can guide design for policy. Moreover, a long-term support structure suggests sustainable approach to projects which would avoid the failure points so often recorded in cases of cyclical funding rounds that lead to project failure. This is a positive and coherent set recommendations and may offer coherence and an escape from siloed thinking.

For some years literature has attempted to inform rural policy specifically the case for diffused power and bottom-up strategies yet there is little evidence in policy design to reflect this advice (Redwood et al., 2023; Shucksmith, 2010). Moreover, the lack of intersection between policies mean that a siloed effect occurs and often the rural characteristics simply do not translate effectively from an urban feature or in competitive bids with impact metrics that are skewed by the disadvantages of rural third sector; situatedness, power and voice, homogeneity, capacity building, inclusivity and equality, success/performance metrics.

Shucksmith (2010) explains that rural development should be diffused and driven from those in the lived reality, Shucksmith (ibid) argues that innovation will be messy and non-linear, that it will be complex and challenging and that these are huge leaps in operating for the Government to realise. Oddly over a decade later and Brexit, our evidence shows that power remains in the hands of Local authority and Government (Wilson, 2022). With regards to community wealth building, the Scottish governments flagship policy (Scottish Government 2021b) which is arguably the response to new governance for rural spaces, but, unsurprisingly, rural third sector characteristics are at odds with the ideology of Community Wealth Building. A lack of capacity, anchor organisations, retained local authority power, it all disadvantages rural places and space and their rights to solve community problems at grass roots level (Redwood et al., 2023). Metrics are flawed because KPI's are lacking publication, and KPI's are too general to be meaningful and case studies report issues regarding process flaws, local action groups report difficulties accessing and achieving positive outcomes in relation to the metrics (Wilson et al., 2022).

Our evidence is consistent with the explanation that policy is currently siloed albeit aspirational and is lacking in terms of supporting community driven, bottom-up strategies in rural spaces. Local Authorities and NGO's continue to hold power over projects supported and funds awarded. Overall, there is a lack of situated policy design, remains few intersections in policy and sadly little evidence of 'joined up' policy (Shucksmith, 2010).

Conclusion: The Rural Third Sector

We set out to discover the intersections between two policy units in the Scottish Government the Rural and agricultural directorate and the community directorate responsible for third sector. The purpose of analysis was to find the nexus that enabled coherent policy to drive a rural third sector forward towards a sustainable future. We return to our research question, does evidence from Rural Development policy and Third Sector policy intersect in a meaningful way to support a sustainable rural third sector or are the directorates of government siloed? Despite there being a notable commitment to rural development and a significant commitment to community and enterprise development there are few points where one could argue that the coherence is specific enough to be defined as policy for rural third sector.

In each case situatedness meant different things. Rural development specific to their geography distinctive features and third sector favoring the situatedness is more associated with urban locational conditions. Situatedness is therefore a characteristic of course urban and rural third sector which, therefore, requires further definition to be useful for rural third sector. This point is mirrored in the rural characteristic we call homogeneity. Little evidence was available of rural third sector policy that is designed specifically for nuanced rural conditions. Despite decades of literature calling for diffused power and neo endogenous rural strategy, it is evident that our concerns are realised and that government, local authorities and NGOs as well as government agencies retain the power over community initiatives and impact metrics. Communities without a voice are not empowered communities and very quickly grassroots ideas and bottom-up strategies become unachievable. Wilson et al. (2022) offers some potential solutions and a draft of how policy might be shaped with recommendations for a new version of CLLD, the recommendations are positive and well considered in relation to context and challenges of and for a rural third sector. Future research into the rural third sector as essential to firstly, form coherent policy that as more than simply an intersection between siloed government directorates and secondly a vibrant rural third sector will harness social entrepreneurship and engage multiple stakeholders from the bottom-up which will help us to in our undertaking to better understand and reframe rural third sector as a concept.

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