A Quantitative Evaluation of European Union Participatory Rural Development Schemes in Ireland

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To Niall and Dad. And to Mum, whose life story and opportunities awakened my interest in the pathways open to those in rural spaces and rural development – and who always supported every aspect of my education.

~

Dedicated to the memory of Jack Roche and Terry Keenan.

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Ní Bheidh A Leithéid Ann Arís

Abstract:

This thesis investigates the claimed and unintended effects of participatory rural development schemes in Ireland, with a focus on European Union programs such as LEADER. Decentralised community-led rural development schemes claim a number of effects such as improved social capital and empowerment of local communities through better decision-making. I draw on Ferguson's *Anti-Politics Machine* to critically assess what is the evidence for this and what are other relevant unintended effects. I use a quantitative approach and develop a highly granular dataset, totalling €1.34 Billion, aggregated from over 19,000 rural development projects across 17 years. I evaluate three key outcomes: elite capture, effects on social capital, and the political determinants of funding allocation. Chapter 1 examines elite capture by tracing long-run path dependency in community leadership using historical surname data and modern charitable board compositions. It finds evidence of elite control over time but suggests this is not unique to rural development and has limited resource implications. Chapter 2 assesses the impact of participatory schemes on social capital, operationalised through volunteerism, and finds a positive effect for EU-funded projects only. It also argues for the use of geospatial techniques and project-level data to overcome persistent methodological weaknesses in evaluation. Chapter 3 analyses the relationship between rural development funding and electoral outcomes, finding strong partisan patterns in domestic rural funding, but not in EU programs. The thesis argues that Irish rural development has undergone a process of depoliticisation similar to Ferguson's case in Lesotho, with technocratic approaches masking political decision-making. This research contributes to rural sociology, development studies, and policy evaluation by demonstrating how critical approaches drawn from the international development field, novel data, and quantitative methods can be combined to better understand rural development in Europe. It concludes by advocating for more critical, evidence-based evaluation approaches in Ireland and the EU.

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Introduction

Rural Development has occupied an important place in the policies and politics of many developing and industrialised countries since the industrial revolution. It is important not just for the improvements to agriculture, rural communities and environmental sustainability but also for the social and political effect of decreasing the gap in living standards between urban and rural citizens. This has taken on increased importance in contemporary times with the advent of rural support for populist/far-right parties in the West (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018) but also in countries such as China where rural development has become again a key policy priority (Cramer, 2016; Liu, Zang and Yang, 2020).

Rural development matters not only due to the intended societal consequences but also the scale of public funding that is administered through these policies, forming a significant portion of the EU budget. The issues of rurality are not new to sociology either, having formed an important backbone of early sociological studies and early quantitative work in the field (Ryan and Gross, 1943; Buttel, 2001). This thesis focuses on claimed and unintended effects of European Union participatory rural development schemes in Ireland, where decision making is decentralised to local communities who decide and manage their priorities for their area through locally managed projects. I am particularly interested in one participatory development program in Europe called LEADER which has invested over €30 Billion in rural areas of Europe since 1994, making it one of the largest development programs in the world. Participatory development is common to both European rural development but also international development under other bodies such as the World Bank. I make the case that the issues and literature affecting both are similar, that they share common methodological shortfalls in assessment of their effects, and argue

for the use of project level data using geospatial techniques and linked administrative data to more objectively evaluate their impacts.

Following critical development literature, particularly the work Ferguson's *Anti-Politics Machine* (1994), I seek to assess not only what development schemes claim to do, but also their unintended consequences. Ferguson confronted the peculiarity that despite decades of iterations, development programs seemed to repeat time and time again with little evidence of success. Focusing on a rural development project in Lesotho, Ferguson argues that development interventions often construct target societies as isolated, traditional, and deficient—justifying technical solutions to what are instead complex political problems through a 'discourse of development'. By framing development as a technical, bureaucratic undertaking, these interventions obscure the underlying power relations and historical contexts that shape poverty and underdevelopment. Ferguson contends that such projects do not fail in a conventional sense but they succeed in expanding bureaucratic state power while depoliticising the relevant structural issues. This "anti-politics machine" transforms development into a technocratic enterprise, stymying dissent and legitimising intervention under the guise of neutrality and expertise.

I develop a broad argument that relates European rural development schemes in Ireland to Ferguson's critique of development in Lesotho through the lens of his *Anti-Politics Machine*. I analyse three outcomes of rural development programs; elite capture, the effect on social capital and the relationship of funding to electoral results. The effect on social capital is a claimed effect of participatory development that has little evidence relating to it. Both elite capture and the relationship to electoral outcomes constitute unintended side effects of participatory development, or what would be referred to as an instrumental effect by Ferguson. Each of these is investigated using data from European Union and domestic Irish rural development programs. While each chapter has relevance

in its own capacity through the contribution to data improvements or policy concerns, when understood together, they advance the argument that rural development programs pursued domestically in the Irish context constitute their own *anti-politics machine* – and one that undermines the positive effects of EU rural development programs. I find that elite capture, which is often used to discredit participatory development, particularly the work of international bodies such as the EU or World Bank, is no more apparent in rural and community development in comparison to any other charitable sector. I find that the positive effects on social capital as argued for by participatory development proponents is only apparent for EU schemes, and not domestic schemes. Finally, I find that allocations of rural development funding is predicted by the political party with responsibility for the Irish Department of Rural and Community Development, leading to an increasingly partisan relationship between rural funding and electoral outcomes as decision-making increasingly becoming centralised over time. This electoral effect is only apparent for domestic rural development programs and not those of the European Union. Like Ferguson, I contend that overtly political effects have been achieved through the deployment of technical, neutral 'development discourse' in the Irish context. **The application of the 'discourse of development' allows what would otherwise be political decisions – such as which area to fund a major infrastructure project in and who would gain the political credit - to become somehow not seen as politically motivated when funnelled through sufficient amounts of technocratic rural 'development' inspired terminology**. I discuss what the implications of this might be for Irish rural development, but also rural development programs more broadly as similar processes of increased centralisation and political control apparent in the Irish case have also been identified in other member states of the EU. I ask what is lost by the failure to recognise the relationship between rural development and electoral outcomes, how centralised decision making undermines the positive effects found for social capital

improvements, and how the critiques of elite capture in participatory development are arguably overstated. I also ask what is lost by the centralisation of rural development initiatives over time. I conclude with an argument for, and demonstrate how, a research agenda that utilises quantitative, geospatial and causally informed methods can critically engage with the issues affecting rural development in the EU. This has significant societal relevance as rural and peripheral areas of Europe are increasingly at risk of becoming foundations of support for disruptive political movements such as the far-right, not unlike rural and peripheral areas of the US.

This thesis makes three broad contributions to the literature from the perspective of theory, data and policy. Firstly, it applies an overarching theoretical framework relating to Ferguson's *Anti-Politics* critique of development programs in the developing world to European Union rural development schemes, arguing that the same process of depoliticalisation is apparent despite the different institutional context. It also identifies issues common to both, such as elite capture, weak evaluative evidence, and centralisation of decision making before proceeding to investigate the empirical relevance of these commonalities. A second theoretical contribution is the connection drawn between European Union Community Led Local Development (CLLD) schemes and World Bank Community Driven Development (CDD) schemes. I argue that these have broad similarities in their implementation and the methodological challenges relating to evaluation.

Secondly, I contribute to the literature by proposing a better informed method to evaluate rural development schemes by utilising project level data, or data relating to individual projects geocoded to match administrative boundaries and statistics at the lowest geographical scale. This has a number of advantages that captures local variation in the allocation of funding, allowing for stronger statistical or causally informed

techniques and overcomes many of the evaluation shortcomings of current approaches as identified by evaluation support studies of the European Commission and critiques by the European Court of Auditors. This type of data and evaluation potential contributes to and allows for the use of quantitative methods within rural development assessments and rural sociology more broadly, a field which remains dominated by qualitative methods.

Thirdly, by utilising project level data, quantitative methods and geospatial techniques, I contribute directly to a long running policy debate with regards to the relationship between rural community development initiatives and social capital, as understood by volunteerism. This is one of the claimed effects of decentralising decision making of development processes to local communities and one of the three major claimed effects of CLLD in Europe. However, there is no conclusive evidence that CLLD has any effect on social capital and it remains an ongoing policy concern for the program as recognised by the European Court of Auditors (2010, 2022) due to a lack of evidence. This mirrors the lack of evidence for social capital in World Bank programs also. By using highly granular data in the Irish context and exploiting census questions from before and after the main intervention period, I do find an association between CLLD funding and volunteerism which is also supported by propensity score matching methods. Finally, I contribute to the all of these areas by utilising the case of Ireland which has a recently established government priority of domestic rural development programs. These provide a key comparison case for EU-led programs as they differ substantially in their implementation, allowing for a commentary that the mechanisms of funding delivery for rural development programs must is also relevant.

Chapter 1 *'Elite Capture in rural development programs: Investigating long run path dependency of local elites using historical surname data in Ireland'* assesses the long run path dependency between higher status surnames in 1911 and the surnames present on the

boards of community organisations in Ireland in 2022. **Elite Capture is an unintended consequence of participatory development schemes that has significant literature relating to it, and is often presented as one of the main problems undermining community based rural development programs**. However, I investigate this using novel data sources to understand if it can be identified quantitatively and secondly, does it matter in relation to other charitable groups and the resources obtained. This is achieved using logistic regression methods, the Historical CAMSIS (HISCAM) scale, IPUMS historical census data, and web-scraped charitable board membership data at local level. Secondly, it applies this to the distribution of rural development funding in the modern day to answer whether areas in which community groups show more evidence of long run path dependency, or elite control, are associated with higher levels of rural development funding obtained**. It finds that historical class position positively influences the probability that members of the local population will sit in leadership positions** on local bodies that make decisions regarding their area's development in the modern day. However, in a deviation from the prevailing narratives relating to elite capture in participatory development, **it finds that historical class position is associated with all types of charitable bodies, not just those in the community or rural development sector and that the additional resources obtained that is associated with this effect is limited**. These findings investigate one of the most commonly identified unintended effects of participatory development and finds that although there is significant evidence of elite capture in the composition of rural development organisations at local level, the impact of this is muted and not dissimilar from other forms of voluntary assembly. By examining one of the more frequently cited unintended consequences, it provides evidence that supports Ferguson's arguments, though it does not substantiate his claims regarding the local elite's substantive control over rural development institutions. I then proceed to

investigate other claimed and unintended consequences of rural development through voluntarism and electoral outcomes.

Chapter 2 '*The case for project level data in Participatory Development within European Union and World Bank schemes: The Impact on Social Capital*' is a quantitative assessment of the effect that participatory development is claimed to have on improving social capital. It also makes the case for project level data in assessments of participatory development's effects under both European Union and World Bank evaluations. **Project level data geocodes individual project locations using high quality micro data and matches this to the lowest administrative boundaries for which census or political data is available**. This is unlike other approaches that aggregates funding at a higher geographical level, obscuring variation within each intervention area. **This chapter also links four recognised methodological challenges (Casey, 2018) to solutions made possible by improved use of geospatial techniques** which isolates the effect of individual investment decisions at the village level, instead of the currently employed county or 'territorial' level. The four methodological challenges are; (1) lack of counterfactual analysis, 2) lack of comparison cases from non-participatory development approaches, (3) lack of a micro level and variation in the current data collected and (4) lack of a longer term time horizon. **It finds that an association does exist between participatory development investments and increases to social capital, measured through the local volunteering rate**, over time and in comparison, to non-participatory development approaches. The effect size is of practical significance and supported through secondary analysis using propensity score matching.

The selection of social capital as a demonstration of the usefulness of project level data and geospatial techniques is also relevant to Ferguson's work. Social Capital, particularly within international development, has been continually criticised for a lack of

empirical evidence, unclear or poorly defined definitions, and circular reasoning (Tarrow, 1996; Dhesi, 2000; Bridger and Alter, 2006; Halstead, Deller and Leyden, 2021). This has led to a number of critics highlighting the use of social capital as an *Anti-Politics Machine* in international development by ignoring local context and political factors in favour of less controversial ideas such as associational life, trust and voluntary organisations (Evans, 1996; DeFilippis, 2001; Harriss, 2002; Fine, 2010). A continued focus on the definitions and weak theoretical basis of social capital in the European context contributes to the lack of empirical evidence for the effects of rural development programs by diverting resources that should better engage with the actual effects of rural development programs, not just their claimed effects. I outline how this weak empirical approach has affected studies of CLLD in Europe, focusing significant amounts of research on theorisations and interpretations of a concept that is poorly supported in the academic literature. This has led to limited evaluative evidence as outlined by the European Court of Auditors (European Court of Auditors, 2022), similar to the lack of evidence for the concept in World Bank development programs. In an effort to contribute to this problem, I take one internally valid measure of social capital, volunteerism and demonstrate its effect using new quantitative techniques. **Separately, I show differences between EU and Irish Domestic government schemes, indicating not just that social capital is relevant but the mechanism and context by which development is pursued matters**.

Chapter 3 *"The Anti-Politics of Irish Rural Development: Political Determinants of funding*" is an investigation into the relationship between the allocation of rural development funding and electoral outcomes in Ireland. It also includes an extended theoretical section that traces Ferguson's argument relating to the centralisation of rural development in Lesotho and applies it to the Irish context and reforms since 2014. It argues that similar processes of bureaucratisation, depoliticalisation and centralisation are apparent in the Irish context and this is critical to understanding the gap between European policy goals

and implementation at member state level. I support this through use of data from 17 years of rural development schemes in Ireland together with election results from local and general elections to examine how the allocation of funding relates to the political party in control of the Ministry of Rural and Community Development. **It finds that the presence of the ruling political party's Minister, member of parliament(TD) and local election vote share are all positively associated with increased levels of rural development funding allocations**, which is not the case for any other political party. Secondly, **it finds that EU rural development funding is not associated with the ruling political party, likely due to a more objective means of allocating budgets at a lower geographical scale**. **The anti-politics critique of Ferguson is clear in this chapter by highlighting how what are overtly political relationships can come to be seen as not politically motivated when communicated through sufficient amounts of technocratic rural 'development' inspired terminology**. This is the apoliticalising effect of development schemes and the uncritical acceptance of 'development discourse' supporting it. I conclude with a discussion of the overall implications of the thesis, asking what is the effect of the depoliticization of rural development? By only focusing on technocratic non-controversial interventions, the scope of rural development is narrowed and more important or conflictual ideas are not considered within the range of possible interventions. The lack of focus on areas that may engender some level of political conflict or negatively affect certain interests such as rural housing supply, access to equal educational opportunities, economic impact of wage differentials between those working in the domestic and multinational economy, planning and environmental law, land hoarding, brain drain, retention of skilled labour, lack of local government powers, limited public transport, rural depopulation all influence and could be influenced by a more honest approach to rural development interventions but they remain outside the acceptable 'discourse of development' that structures the possibilities within the sector. In doing so,

the peculiarity that rural development schemes seem to repeat time and time again with limited evidence of success seems to be apparent not just in the African and less developed countries context that Ferguson identified, but also within the rural areas of member states of the EU.

Chapter 1: Elite Capture in rural development programs: Investigating long run path dependency of local elites using historical surname data in Ireland

Conor Judge

Abstract

Control of decision-making bodies by elite groups along class, gender or political cleavages are a common occurrence in a number of fields. For bottom-up rural development schemes, they are a well-documented phenomenon which raises important questions about the suitability of local participation and equal representation in development bodies and community groups. The composition of rural areas also makes them particularly vulnerable to control by elite family groups due to generational inheritance patterns of land ownership in a particular place. This paper assesses the long run path dependency between elite surnames in 1911 and the surnames present on the boards of community organisations in Ireland in 2022. This is achieved using logistic regression methods, the Historical CAMSIS (HISCAM) scale, IPUMS historical census data, and web-scraped Charity Regulator data at local level. Secondly, it applies this to the distribution of rural development funding in the modern day to answer whether areas in which community groups show more evidence of long run path dependency are associated with higher levels of rural development funding obtained from domestic and EU sources in an assessment of the additional resources obtained through elite capture. This paper contributes to the literature on inequality and policy approaches that redistribute between regions through a critical approach to rural development programs using historical and geospatial approaches. It assesses these themes in the Irish context through an EU funded program which is one of the largest in the world by value. The findings also complement research into elite capture in other development schemes such as the World Bank by use of a novel historical approach to the investigation of long run path dependency in rural areas.

Introduction

Control of voluntary decision-making bodies by elite groups along stratifications such as class, gender or political cleavages are a common occurrence in several fields. For development programs where decision making is decentralised at community level, they are a well-documented phenomenon in settings as diverse as Indonesia, India, Lesotho, and Europe (Ferguson, 1994; Pantoja, 2000; Shortall, 2004; Alatas *et al.*, 2019). This ongoing concern raises valid questions about the suitability of Participatory Development schemes as a feasible alternative to top-down – or government-led – development schemes. Participatory Development schemes, (known as Community Led Local Development (CLLD) in the EU, or Community Driven Development (CDD) under World Bank initiatives), prioritise a community development approach, particularly in rural settings. Communities, represented through locally formulated community groups, have effective control over decision making, budgeting processes and implementation of local projects within a defined territorial area. However, the question of who actually represents the 'community' has given rise to the role of elite capture in this field (Craney, 2020; Shapland, Paassen and Almekinders, 2021).

The problem of elite capture, where certain elites within a community capture control of development processes and organisations, has important implications for fairness within community development initiatives: it undermines arguments for local participation in decision making – which is a key pillar of OECD and EU Rural Development policy (OECD, 2018) – by questioning the extent and fairness of this participation. On a broader theoretical level, this analysis is focused on James Ferguson's critique of development programs by critical analysis of not what they claim to do, but by what effects they actually do have (Ferguson, 1994). This research is therefore situated within critical development literature, a field that has seen relatively little attention in the European context.

In this study, I analyse the long-term path dependency of more elite family surnames (measured by higher occupational status), and presence of these surnames in leadership positions on local voluntary groups over the course of a century between 1911 and 2022. This is made possible through the full dataset of all board members of all registered charities in Ireland as of 2022, whose surnames are cross referenced at local area level (electoral division) in the 1911 census, controlling for class and frequency. Previous research in this field is primarily based on qualitative case studies in a limited number of sites. This differs by use of a large-scale quantitative study at a national level that aims to find the association between historic familial class status and membership of voluntary decision-making bodies in the present day. The first research question is thus: "*Is there evidence of path dependency between higher status local family names in 1911 and family names of leaders of community groups in the present day?*" Secondly, it analyses the association between the number of matched surnames and the relationship with funding obtained in the modern period. In doing so, it attempts to provide an estimate of the importance of any elite capture effect on the amount of public funds obtained by a community in a particular area. The second research question is: "*Is path dependency in family names associated with of an increased level of development funding obtained by certain rural communities in comparison to others?*"

This research contributes to the literature through the investigation of the extent of long-term path dependency and elite control in European development schemes, on a national scale. This contributes to the wider literature on elite capture, which is usually focused mainly on lesser-developed countries and provides evidence of the same phenomenon in a country with a contrasting institutional context. It also provides evidence relating to non-participatory development schemes by utilising the Irish rural development context, providing a useful comparison case that is often lacking in other national contexts. The results find evidence of long-run path dependency in more elite family surnames and an association with leadership positions in the present day. It also

finds that this does not differ across charity type or size. Secondly, this finding is associated with increased levels of rural development funding obtained by local areas, but the effect size is relatively small. Finally, it finds that there is relatively little difference in the resources captured by areas with higher levels of long-term path dependency in elite surnames between participatory development and non-participatory development schemes.

The following section background section will (1) situate European participatory development schemes within the more established literature relating to participatory development under the context of World Bank initiatives, (2) outline the broad theoretical framework of critical development literature and its application to the European context, and (3) review empirical work in elite capture relating to both the European and wider context. Section 3 will provide a detailed explanation of the original data sources used in this paper. The methods used are described briefly in section 4. Section 5 and 6 outline the results and discussion of the two main approaches.

Background & Literature

Section 1 – Participatory Development: The Link between the World Bank's CDD research and European CLLD

A core contribution of this research is the application of critical Participatory Development literature to the corresponding situation in the European context. Drawing on the work of Casey in the Annual Review of Economics (2018), I will outline the historical development of Community Driven Development (CDD) in international development, while highlighting the similarity and differences to Community Led Local Development (CLLD) in Europe. Casey argues that Community Driven Development is one strategy employed by international aid organisations with the explicit aim of supporting high level goals of strengthening democracy and building institutions that support long-run economic growth. In practice, CDD "*devolves financial and operational control*

over public goods to communities, while simultaneously promoting an inclusive, transparent, and highly participatory approach to local decision making" (Casey, 2018,p.140). The potential advantages of CDD lie in the argument that local agents have superior information about preferences and resources which can be used more effectively than central government (Oates, 1972). Secondly, at a more abstract level, the work of Sen (1985, 1999) and Ostrom (2000) argue that CDD has an intrinsic value in empowerment of the poor, developing positive forms of collective action and therefore increasing social capital. While the empirical validity of these potential advantages is debated, the concept of CDD and participatory development became popular in World Bank approaches in the late 1990s and early 2000's (World Bank, 2003). It remains to this day an aspect of all development projects undertaken (Mansuri and Rao, 2012).

Within Europe, outside of the scope of international aid to lesser-developed countries, a conceptually similar idea, CLLD, began to appear in rural development programs over a similar timeframe. While there is little formal evidence of the linkages between EU and WB participatory development origins, they are effectively the same process:

"The idea is to engage the energy and resources of people and organisations as actors in development, rather than passive beneficiaries of policy; empowering them to contribute to the future development of their rural areas by forming area-based Local Action Group (LAG) partnerships between public, private and civil-society actors. Local Action Groups are the main tool for application of the LEADER approach to territorial development, directly involving local representatives to design and deliver local strategies, overseeing decision-making and resource allocation." (European Commission *et al.*, 2022, p.5)

One of the earliest participatory development schemes in Europe was the LEADER program, established in 1992, which has become included in all Member States Rural Development Programs. The LEADER program has totalled €19.81 Billion in planned EU funding to date, rising to significantly more when private and Member States contribution is added. This makes LEADER one of the single largest participatory development programs in the world by value.

Section 2 – Broad theoretical framework and application to the European Context

This paper's theoretical framework is predicated on the critical analysis of rural development schemes that first appeared in the 1990's, particularly the work of James Ferguson and Arturo Escobar (Ferguson, 1994; Escobar, 1995). Ferguson's *The Anti politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* is a criticism of the rural development industry in Lesotho during the 1970s/80s and remains an important text for understanding rural development, and development more broadly. Ferguson confronted the controversy that despite widespread attempts and investment in Lesotho (and other African societies), these schemes had limited success (Heyer *et al.*, 1981). The key distinction is that Ferguson outlines a critical approach by focusing not on what development schemes claim that they will do, but what they *actually* do, and what can be observed – arguing that these are instrumental effects produced by the development industry. In this case, no development scheme claims to strengthen the role of elites but in practice, that is one outcome that may happen through a participatory approach. Ferguson identifies examples of elite capture in the 'Village Development Committees' set up to assist the program implementation and represent the 'community' as one such instrumental effect. The membership of these committees was an outgrowth of the ruling government party membership as the development program effectively de-politicised and facilitated partisan decision making in these organisations. Outside of Ferguson, the elite capture phenomenon is a question common to a number of rural development interventions such as the Kecamatan Development Project in Indonesia (Barron, Diprose and Woolcock, 2011), the class, ethnic and gender based exclusions in Indian development schemes under the World Bank (Pantoja, 2000), and the lack of representation of more underprivileged members of rural society in European development schemes (Shortall, 2004, 2008).

Within European rural development schemes specifically and using the example of the LEADER program as the EU's largest and longest running participatory development (CLLD) program, questions about representation have been an ongoing concern, particularly given the scale of public funds involved and one of the claimed effects of CLLD, 'Improved Governance', such as greater democratic decision making based on local knowledge (European Court of Auditors, 2022). Community-led 'bottom-up' development schemes are argued to be more vulnerable to manipulation by locally dominant groups due to the lack of an institutional or official oversight at local level (Curtin, Varley and O'Donohue, 1991). Landowners, the middle-class and 'those with life-long 'local' connections' were identified as groups with privileged access and control in rural development programmes (Shucksmith and Chapman, 1998). This is complemented by analyses of 'partnerships', the term given to local bodies that implement rural development programs. These groups have been criticised of simply replicating divisions along class and education at local level in the UK (Shortall, 2004, 2008):

"The structure most government initiatives and most EU initiatives have worked at the local level is through a community development model, where, if you resource the local community development group it makes a presumption that it reaches all the people in that locality. But if you do an analysis of who belongs to local community development groups, its typically big farmers, teachers, fairly well-educated articulate people who work unpaid in the house. And it's not the people who have no running water in their houses or who left school at sixteen or had literacy and numeracy problems." (Interviewee #22 in Shortall, 2004)

Section 3 – Empirical Research in Participatory Development and Elite Capture

Elite Capture was an early concern in both CDD and CLLD. Holdcroft was one of the earliest to highlight its emergence in community development schemes of the 1950's (Holdcroft, 1984). As interest in CDD development schemes grew in the late 1990's, early critiques focused on the vulnerability of these initiatives to dominance by entrenched power relations and a concern relating to uncritical celebration of the 'local community' (Kothari and Cooke, 2001; Platteau and Gaspart, 2003). Since those earlier critiques,

studies into who actually participates in CDD initiatives has found that these generally tend to be members from wealthier, higher-educated and more politically concerned households (Mansuri and Rao, 2012). In recent years, an increasing number of writers have questioned whether Elite Capture matters given its magnitude relative to potential benefits and given the literature's lack of focus on other forms of elite capture. Shapland presents a convincing account of how the Elite Capture critique is used to justify increasingly top-down control of CDD programs despite a lack of focus on the elite capture that is arguably as common in donor organisations as in lower tier groupings (Shapland, Paassen and Almekinders, 2021). This complements work that questions simplistic assumptions of Elite Capture in CDD programs and ignores evidence where elites may control programs but still initiate pro-poor projects, or the lack of focus on pro-social functions of local elites (Musgrave and Wong, 2016; Fox, 2020). This is the distinction made between 'elite capture' and 'elite control', whereby the latter does not negatively impact non-elite members of a community (Musgrave and Wong, 2016, p.92). More recent work in a Chinese context argues for the positive role that correctly designed collective action governance and sanctioning can have on the role of elite capture in decentralised rural development schemes, while sustaining the important involvement of local elites (Cheng, Wang and Chen, 2021; Li *et al.*, 2023). Empirical evidence that has included data on preferences of excluded members of the community compared to those of the local elites has tended to favour the conclusion that elite capture cannot be thought of as benevolent for poorer members of a community (Mansuri and Rao, 2012,p.146).

In the European context, early concerns of elite capture related to the fact that 'local notables' may dominate community development partnerships (Curtin, Varley and O'Donohue, 1991). This concern allowed for the development of a largely theoretical literature that critiqued the role of local power relations in rural development schemes such as LEADER/CLLD. Critics argued that questions of local power relations were

ignored and how a class-less analysis of rural life downplays a more complex reality. It problematised the romanticised idea of a rural community, where a group a people have common interests as too simplistic (Shucksmith and Chapman, 1998; Storey, 1999; Shucksmith, 2000).

"There is a tendency for endogenous development initiatives to favour those who are already powerful and articulate, and who already enjoy a greater capacity to act and to engage with the initiative. This may even lead to a capturing of the initiative by elites or sectional interests, in extreme cases. More marginalized groups are less able to participate or engage with the programme, and are less likely to be empowered unless explicit attention is given to their inclusion" (Shucksmith, 2000, p.215).

While much of this literature focused on the terminology of social inclusion as opposed to elite capture, some more critical authors explicitly refer to this phenomenon (Bruckmeier, 2000,p.222). An early focus on class gave way to later research along gender and religion that questioned the representation within the local groups designed to ostensibly represent the 'community' at the local level (Shortall, 2004, 2008). Empirical survey work has focused primarily on the gender dimension of control of decision making bodies at local level and has been recognised as a problem by the EU Court of Auditors in a high level audit of the program (Thuesen, 2010, 2019; European Court of Auditors, 2022; Pollermann and Fynn, 2022). There has been less focus on the mechanisms and effects of unbalanced representation in the European context. An overly simplified focus on representation without factoring in the contextual factors that affect the available population of potential volunteers for charity membership may provide a better understanding of the mechanisms at work. For instance, it could be case that development groups with less turnover of board membership could be indicative of long-term control by a group of elites but, it could also be indicative of a smaller pool of people willing to take on such work in a more rural community due to significantly lower population density. It is also difficult to assess what constitutes 'elite capture' in local groups and how this differs from other voluntary bodies not involved in the development process such as

religious or educational based charities. Identification of 'elite capture' by only studying one form of voluntary assembly is a form of sample selection and does not allow for meaningful comparison with similarly constituted groups.

The research questions in this paper are focused primarily on two main ideas – is there empirical evidence of elite capture at a population level and can this effect be quantified in terms of resources captured? This broadens the analysis beyond a case study approach often employed in the European context and crucially, widens the scope to include organisations that are not primarily concerned with development by including other local charities. This approach provides better contextual information and comparison cases. The wider focus also allows for a commentary on the role of elite capture and whether it actually matters, in comparison to the magnitude of its effects, and in comparison to other voluntary groups.

Data & Methods

This paper utilises three original data sources in order to provide an estimate of the association of historically elite family surnames in community organisations over the long term, and secondly, to estimate the effect of this in terms of resources captured in the modern day. This section will outline the construction of the data and relevant variables used.

The first research question uses two main data sources for surname data, the 1911 Census of the UK and Ireland, and the complete database of all registered charities in the Republic of Ireland as of 2022. The 1911 census was chosen as it is the last available which is non-anonymised, allowing for individual level data, including full name and occupation in Ireland. It was obtained from IPUMS International which provides harmonised international census data available for research (Minnesota Population Center, 2020). While data was available for the full population at individual level in in 1911, this was

reduced to men over the age of 18. This is because women, due to the nature of the time period, do not have information relating to their occupation available in the vast majority of cases. This will overlook land inheritance patterns that operate through women, assuming a change of name on marriage. However, I argue, drawing on significant anthropological work that patrilineal land transfer was deeply rooted in 20th Century Irish society (Shortall, 1999). Cultural, social and patriarchal norms regarding land ownership means that land inheritance to daughters is a relatively new phenomenon. The archaic 'fee tail' system which could legally favour male sons, grandsons, nephews or cousins as heirs before daughters was only formally abolished in 2009 and to this day, less than 12% of farms in Ireland are owned by women (Doherty and Hinchion, 2018). Information relating to professions is available through the Historical International Standard Classification of Occupations (HISCO) scale. The HISCO scale provides an internationalised and standardised descriptive scheme for historical occupations to allow for comparison of similar occupations in different countries and historical periods. In order to allow for a hierarchical ranking of these occupations, the HISCO value for each name's occupation was converted into the Historical Cambridge Social Interaction and Stratification Scale (HISCAM). This provides an occupational unit's relative position within the national order of social interaction and stratification (Lambert *et al.*, 2013). The relevant conversion for the UK (male only) 1800 – 1938 was used as per guidelines. A median HISCAM value for each surname-area pair was computed in addition to a local frequency of that surname at a local area level. The proportion of Catholicism of each surname-area pair was also calculated. This resulted in 305,489 surname-area pairs when data was fully cleaned, to account for errors in input at source, blank names, missing occupational information etc.

The approach outlined in this paper makes an assumption about the connection between surnames in 1911 and 2022. As it is not possible, or at least highly computationally and labour intense to precisely match individuals in 1911 to board member names in 2022

through multiple censuses, I assume that surnames found in a very small geographical area in 1911 are related to surnames found in that same very small geographical area in 2022. As the nature of this research question is focused on generalised elite capture by family groups in rural areas, I argue that that is a valid assumption for two reasons. Firstly, unlike much of recent surname-based research, I am interested in immobility at a family level, not mobility at an individual level. Surname data is particularly well suited to analyses of this question due to several structural features of rural areas. Middle-class, landowners and large farmers are three groups that are identified in case studies as dominating interests of community groups and local development boards (Shucksmith, 2000; Shortall, 2004). These three groups likely overlap due to the association of large farming with class and land proprietorship. The generational inheritance pattern of family-farming and landownership suggests also that there is a long run stability in rural areas for this subset of the population. This stability and long-term attachment to a particular place is suggested by the other suggested elite category of "those with life-long 'local' connections" (Shucksmith and Chapman, 1998). It is likely that the surnames present in a local area in the early twentieth century are associated with intergenerational renewal, farming, landowning, class and dense social networks in the present day. Secondly, this study is focused on rural areas only and does not attempt to estimate the association over time within urban areas. This would not be possible due to changing administrative boundaries, extensive in-migration to urban areas and the assumption that a connection between surnames in 1911 and 2022 does not hold.

One limitation is common family names, which may represent different families with the same surname. This would particularly be an issue if common names were abundant in a geographic area, meaning that an assumption that these names are related to each other would not hold. However, I argue that the small geographical unit used again can overcome this. Even in the case of the most common surname in the period, 'Murphy',

the median number of occurrences in a geographic area is four. It could conceivably be the case that these distinct four occurrences are completely separate 'Murphy' family units with no relation to each other. This is highly unlikely given the common geographic concentration and the extremely large size of Irish families in that period, where 81% of women had over four children, 50% having seven or more (Brennan, 2004). I therefore make a simplifying assumption that even when name is repeated in a small geographic area, this is indicative of sons, brothers, cousins, uncles etc. within the same general family tree, or extended family unit. The very small geographical area that makes this assumption possible is the Electoral Division (ED) unit in Ireland. Originally designed to be areas of approximately equal tax income in rural districts in Ireland during the 1870s, these divide the country into approximately 3400 small local areas. These remain in use to this day and are spatially consistent across time for rural areas. Of the 3420 Electoral Divisions in use as of the 2022 Census, 2909 were retained in this analysis, with the missing EDs largely concentrated in the major city areas of Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford. These are unlike rural areas in that they are not consistent across time. This is due to the spatial division applied to administrative areas as population in urban areas rapidly increased. Over time, EDs have changed name from English to Irish equivalents and merged into neighbouring EDs in highly remote areas. Current ED shape files were cross-referenced against historical maps to ensure that areas referenced in the 1911 census are consistent with areas in the present day. In the reduced rural-only sample, Electoral Divisions have a median population of 538 people according to the 2022 census. This approach allows for control variables to be utilised from recent census information for the second research question.

The second original data source for the first research question is community organisation board member data. This was compiled from web scraping obtained from the website of publicly available Charity's Regulator in 2022. Community organisations are

often, but not always, registered officially as charities to support their governance mandate and increase their likelihood of obtaining state or EU funds. This provided full-board membership data for 11,399 registered charities in Ireland, totalling 71,956 names in total. This was reduced to 7,111 charities and 48,732 unique names when only rural areas (as per the areas with consistent boundaries) were considered. These community organisations were geolocated using address/postcode information and allocated to the relevant ED. Of these 48,732 surnames, approximately one third, or 16,556 had a match on the board of a community organisation located in the same ED in 2022. For each area-surname pair, a binary variable was created which had a value of 1 if that surname in that area was found on the board of a community organisation located in that area in 2022. This approach, however, cannot account for migrants into an area over the time-period or any other form of 'new entrants' to the population of charity board member names in the present day. However, the focus of this research is the class ranking of surnames and predicted long term path dependency in leadership roles for higher status members of a community. Therefore, the specific research question should be understood as: *given* a family surname is found in an area in 1911, does the occupational status of this family name effect the probability that this name is found in a leadership position on a community organisation in 2022?

The third original data source used in this paper is an original geolocated dataset of rural development funding at Electoral Division level in Ireland. This is created from publicly available individual project information between the years 2007 and 2022. Individual projects were geocoded to exact co-ordinates using address information. This was achieved through use of the Google Maps API, which is a relatively low-cost method. The total number of projects is approximately 16,000 in this dataset, totalling approximately €885 Million in public funding. Project co-ordinates were then cross-referenced with the electoral division they were located in. The 2022 census, was used to

create relevant control variables at electoral division level, including local population, a town/village dummy if an ED had a settlement within its spatial boundaries, and the local deprivation score based on the Pobal Deprivation index for Ireland (Haase and Pratschke, 2017). Other variables included are the local volunteering rate (the total number of people in an ED who regularly engage in voluntary work), a dummy variable for the location of the main CLLD organisation's offices and a distance to the nearest city, measured in kilometres, as a measure of rurality. Descriptive statistics for the main specification can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Min	Max	Mean	Median
Median HISCAM of Surname	33.04	99	48.55	48.24
Local Frequency of Surname	0	0.67	0.01	0.01
Rurality (Kilometres)	0.28	233.74	63.45	55.3
Local Population (1911)	10	5419	446.1	283
Number of Charities (2022)	0	72	5.94	2
Proportion Catholic of Surname	0	1	0.88	1

Method

This research has two main estimation strategies; The first of these is a logistic regression employed to ascertain the probability of a surname in 1911 being found on the board of a community group in 2022. The equation for this has the simplified functional form:

$$logit(P(match_{ij} = 1)) = \beta 0 + \beta town_j + \beta HISCAM_{ij} + \beta freq_{ij} + \beta pop_j + \beta char_j + \beta rural_j + \beta relig_{ij} + \sigma i$$

Where $match_{ij}$ is a binary variable which takes the value of 1 if a surname i is matched to a community organisation board in area j. $Town_j$ is a binary variable which takes the value of 1 if an Electoral Division j contains a town or village within its boundaries in the present

day, as community organisation/charity addresses are more likely to be found within built-up settlements. $HISCAM_{ij}$ is the median HISCAM value for a surname i in an area j in 1911. $Freq_{ij}$ is the frequency of a name i in an area j as the proportion of all names in that area in 1911. $Rural_j$ is the distance in kilometres of the geographical centroid of the Electoral Division to the nearest of Ireland's five cities as a simple measure of rurality. Pop_i and $char_i$ are area level controls for the local population and the number of charities found in an Electoral Division. $Relig_{ij}$ is the proportion of the name i that is Catholic in an area j. In practice, this approaches a dummy variable for Catholicism as the modal value is 1 owing to the lack of intermixing between Catholic and Protestant religions in this time period due to a highly stratified society along religious affiliation.

The second specification is a log-log regression utilising the number of matched surnames in an area. The main dependent variables for the second specification are the amount of Rural Development funding per capita obtained by areas either through EU CLLD funds or through national government non-CLLD funds between 2007 and 2022. This has the following functional form:

$$FundingperCapita_j = \beta 0 + \beta town_j + + \beta pop_j + \beta educ_j + \beta depriv_j + \beta unempm_j + \beta unempf_j + \beta rural_j + \beta vol_j + \beta office_j + \beta match_j + \beta char_j + \sigma_j$$

The control variables are the same as the previous specification. Additional controls include $Depriv_j$ which is the areas deprivation score, where a positive score indicate more affluency and a negative score indicates a more deprived area. Pop_j is the local population for an area as of the 2022 census. $Educ_j$, $unemp_j$, $unempf_j$, Vol_j are the higher education, male unemployment, female unemployment and volunteering rate for an area respectively. All of these demographic features may influence the allocation of project funding based on population density, economic need and levels of voluntary activity in an area. $Office_j$ is dummy variable for electoral divisions that contain the offices

of CLLD program implementers, which will be associated with projects that have one address but impact a wider area. The key variable of interest is the number of surnames matched to the board of a community organisation/charity from 1911. The number of matched surnames ($match_i$) may simply reflect larger areas with higher population or a higher number of charities, therefore, these are included as controls (Pop_i & $Char_i$). The log of matched surnames, number of charities, and rural development funding is taken instead of absolute values due to the highly positive skew of the distribution.

Results

This section provides some descriptive statistics and results of each of the separate specifications. Results from descriptive statistics support the view that rural and community development charitable organisations have an above average number of surnames from that area in 1911 found on the board of that charity in the present day. The average number of matched surnames on a charity board by charitable purpose is displayed in Figure 1. Charities whose main purpose was either 'Promotion of Community' or 'Rural Development' had over 40% of the surnames of their current board membership matched to surnames present in that area in 1911. Charity's with a more professionalised or meritocratic appointment system such as religious charities or animal welfare had a much lower level of matched surnames over time. Secondly, it is also possible to calculate the total number of cumulative days served by each board member from the webscraped charity data. This allows us to better understand the level of stability in the turnover of board members. The average[1] days served by all board members by charitable purpose is displayed in Figure 2. Again, rural development and community-based organisations are among the charity types with the highest average number of days served by their current

[1] Averages are used instead of totals to account for the differing size of boards

board members. Only housing charities have a higher average number of days served which is understandable given the longer term timeframe for completion of housing projects and the skills involved. These findings could be explained in a number of ways. It is possible that is support the hypothesis that community organisations have a high level of intergenerational inheritance of leadership of these charities but it is also the case that many community organisations exist in small communities with limited population size and a small pool of willing volunteers. We would therefore expect that the proportion of matched surnames would be higher. Similarly, the average number of days served could be indicative of control of these groups by a small number of persons but it could also be indicate of the value of longer term experience to their operation. Again, in smaller communities, it may be more difficult to find enough wiling volunteers to serve as legal board members and the average number of days served by existing board members will therefore be higher. In order to better understand the role of potential elite capture, it is important to factor in the historic class position which is what is achieved in the first specification.

Table (2) shows the results of the logistic regressions which estimates the probability of a surname in an area being found on the board of a community organisation in 2022. The most important variables of interest from the perspective of elite capture are the median HISCAM score and frequency. **The results show that the HISCAM score of a surname in 1911 is statistically significant at the 1% level and positively associated with an increased probability of that surname being found on the board of a community organisation in 2022.** However, with the addition of interaction for HISCAM and the proportion of the surname in an area being Catholic, it finds that the effect of historical class position on the probability of a surname being found on a charity board only holds for higher status Catholic surnames.

Figure 1: Proportion of matched surnames by charitable purpose

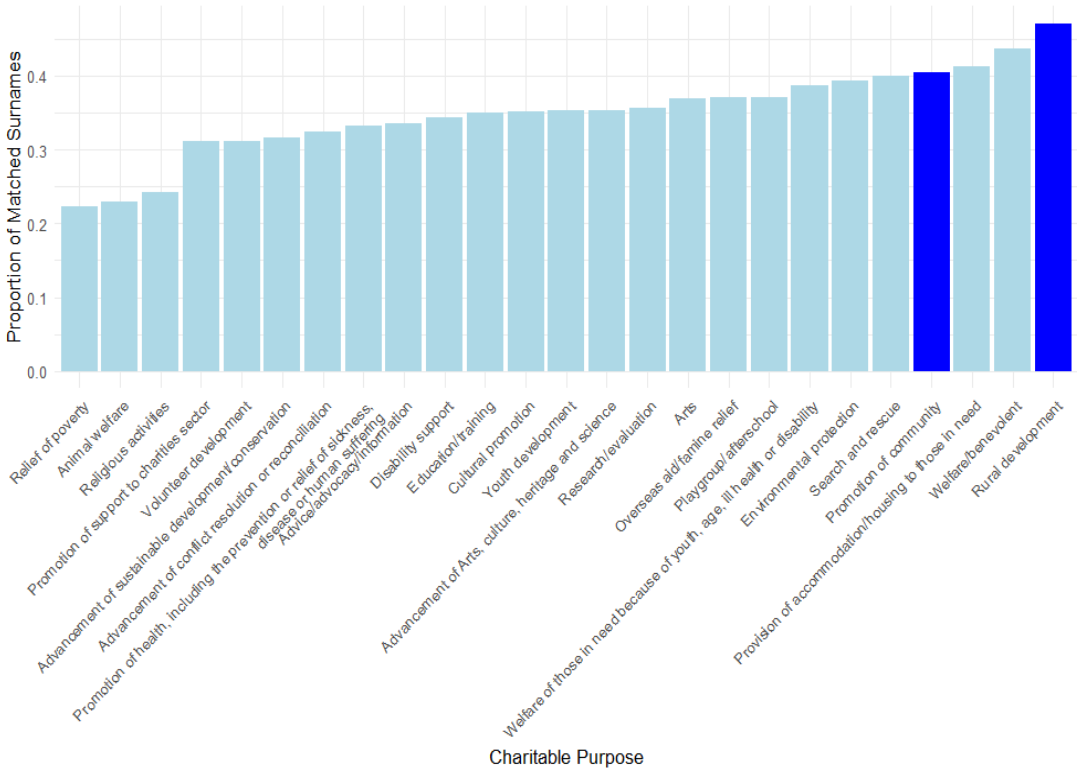


Figure 2: Average Cumulative Days served by charitble a type

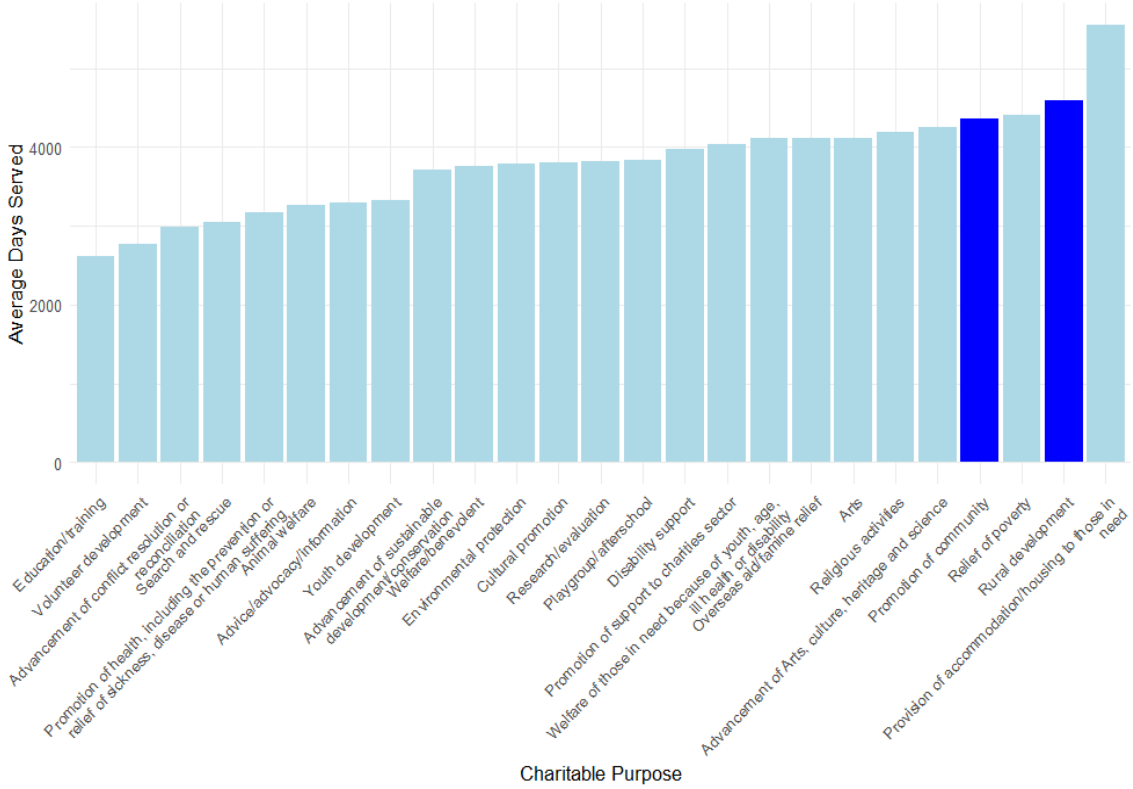


Table 2: Logistic Regression Specification

Probability of Local Surname matched to Charity Board

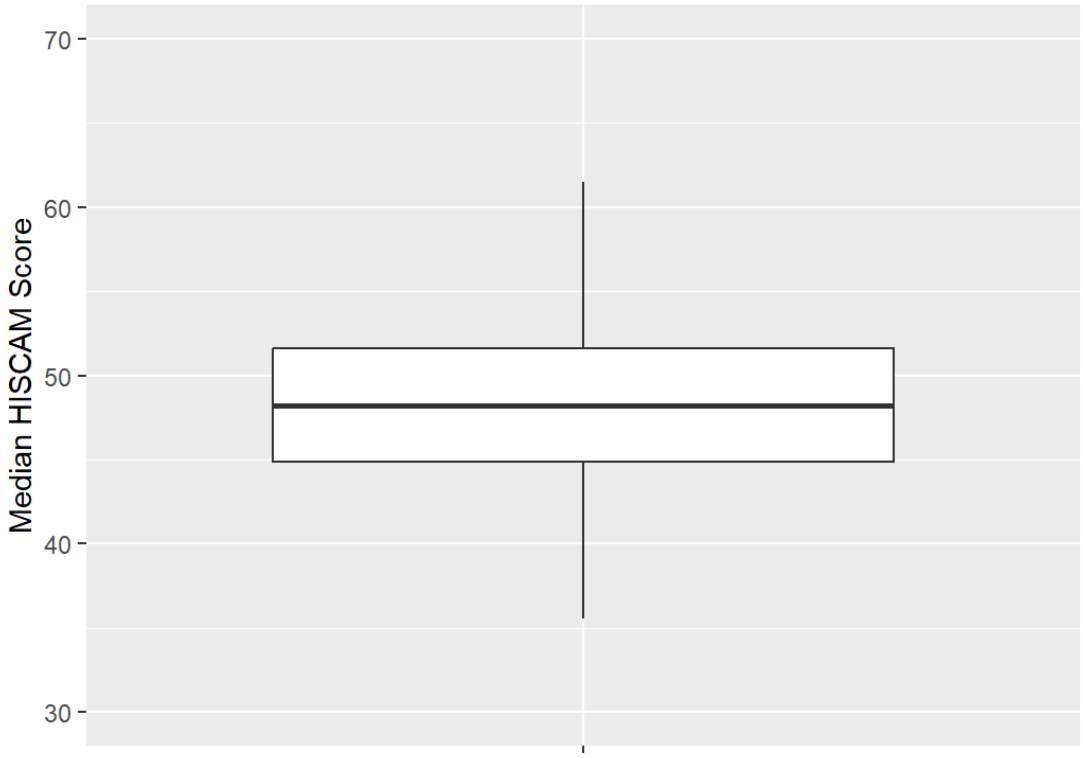
	Dependent variable:		
	Surname Match Dummy		
	Logistic		*Weighted Logistic*
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Town/Village Dummy	0.787***	0.786***	0.750***
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Median HISCAM of Surname	0.004***	-0.024***	-0.023***
	(0.001)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Local Frequency of Surname	25.488***	25.514***	35.005***
	(0.448)	(0.449)	(0.662)
Rurality (Distance to nearest city)	0.002***	0.002***	0.003***
	(0.0002)	(0.0002)	(0.0002)
Local Population	0.0001***	0.0001***	0.0001***
	(0.00002)	(0.00002)	(0.00002)
Number of Charities	0.053***	0.053***	0.080***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Proportion Catholic	1.017***	-0.618***	-0.766***
	(0.037)	(0.198)	(0.220)
Median HISCAM x Proportion Catholic		0.031***	0.032***
		(0.004)	(0.004)
Constant	-5.412***	-3.911***	-1.444***
	(0.069)	(0.190)	(0.211)
Observations	295,581	295,581	295,581
Log Likelihood	-52,856.710	-52,822.170	
Akaike Inf. Crit.	105,729.400	105,662.300	
Note:		*p**p***p<0.01	

The relevance of this result suggests an important phenomenon regarding the identification of an 'elite' in Irish rural society. Both the median HISCAM position of a surname and higher proportion Catholic surnames in an area are associated with decreased probabilities of a surname being found on a charity board in the present day. However, for a subset of the population, higher class Catholics in 1911, the result reverses. The size of this result equates to a 0.7% change in the odds of a surname match in 2022 for every

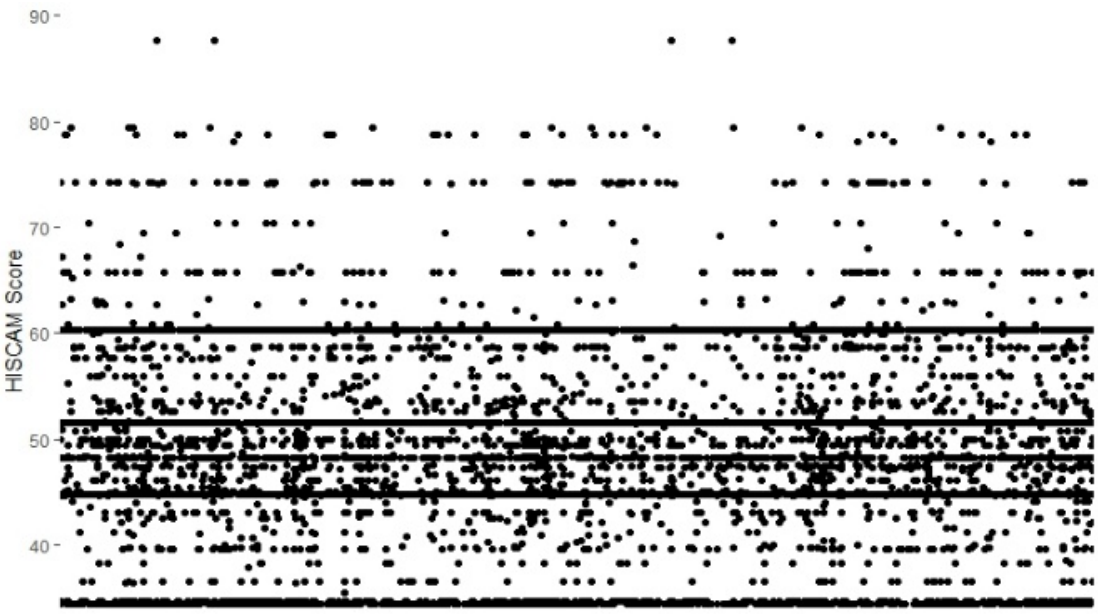
one unit change in median HISCAM when the proportion catholic of that surname is 1. When the proportion catholic of a surname is zero, the effect is negative at -2.4%. A rising Catholic middle class at this time is a well-documented phenomenon(Wall, 1958; O'Neill, 2015; Delaney, 2020) but the legacy of their impact into the modern day is less well known. Occupational stratification in Ireland in 1911 was relatively simplistic given the highly agrarian economy and lack of industrial development. Figure 3 shows the overall distribution of HISCAM scores for a sample of the population where three main clusters can be seen. These relate generally to three main categories or classes in rural Irish society at this time, farmers, agricultural labourers and merchants. Farmers, which comprise the largest category can be seen at approximately the HISCAM score of 46-51, a middle-class cluster at 61 relates to middle class merchants, grocers, shopkeepers etc., and a lower tier at approximately the score of 34-36 comprises agricultural labourers who were mainly landless day labourers. The coefficients reported in Table 1 can be used to calculate the average change in odds of a surname found on a community organisation's board in 2022. A one unit change in the HISCAM score is associated with a 0.7% change in the odds of a surname match in 2022 when that surname is entirely catholic in an area. These broad occupational categories are therefore associated with the following change in odds:

- Between agricultural labourer and farmer: 10.5% increase in odds
- Between Farmer and Merchant: 8.4% increase in odds
- Between Farm Labourer and Merchant: 18.9% increase in odds

Figure 3: Median HISCAM Values / Sample clusters of individual HISCAM Scores



Note: Outliers not shown in this plot (Small number of high HISCAM occupations)



These results provide evidence of a long-run path dependency for higher occupational status surnames in 1911 that are associated with leadership positions in charities in the present day, but only for a certain subset of the population – higher status catholic families

in 1911. This finding is robust in a weighted logistic regression which accounts for the high-class imbalance between the minority and majority class. Notably, this effect does not hold in counties which had sizeable non-Catholic minority populations (greater than 20%) in 1911. This can be seen in Appendix A3 which reruns the analysis on a subset of the total area – Counties Wicklow, Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal. These counties are mainly those that comprise the remainder of Ulster that was not incorporated into Northern Ireland despite having sizeable non-Catholic populations. The interaction effect is weaker when these areas are taken in isolation and subsequently it can be shown that this effect is entirely driven by Co. Donegal. This suggests that high-status catholic families were not able to exert the same influence on modern day charity board membership in these counties and familial historical social status isn't a predictor of charity board leadership in the modern day. Other factors, notably religious polarisation in these counties likely play a larger role. As expected, there are also positive associations with the probability of surname match in areas with more charities, larger populations or an urban centre. It is also the case, that more rural areas are associated with increased probabilities of a surname being found on a charity board, at approximately a 6% increase in the odds for every 30km from a city.

Given the premise of this paper in identifying an elite capture effect in rural development and community groups that participate in Community Led Local Development (CLLD) schemes specifically, it is important to understand whether the evidence of a long-run path dependency for higher occupational status surnames is particular to these types of charities. Figure 4 shows the results of the coefficient for the HISCAM-Catholic interaction effect across charity type which is collected from the charities self-reported charitable purpose as per their most recent annual report. This re-runs the analysis on subsamples that delineate by the six largest charitable purposes, and it is noticeable that **the effect size it observed cross all types of charities, with no**

statistically significant differences by charity type. The charity type that relates to participatory development (Community) are therefore no different to any other type of charitable organisation. When analysis is completed by charity size (as denoted by the financial value of their last annual report), there is again limited difference between small, medium, large or educational based charities in the probability of a surname being matched to a board in 2022, accounting for frequency, occupational status and religion.[2]

Figure 4: Coefficient Plot of HISCAM-Catholic interaction Term by charity type

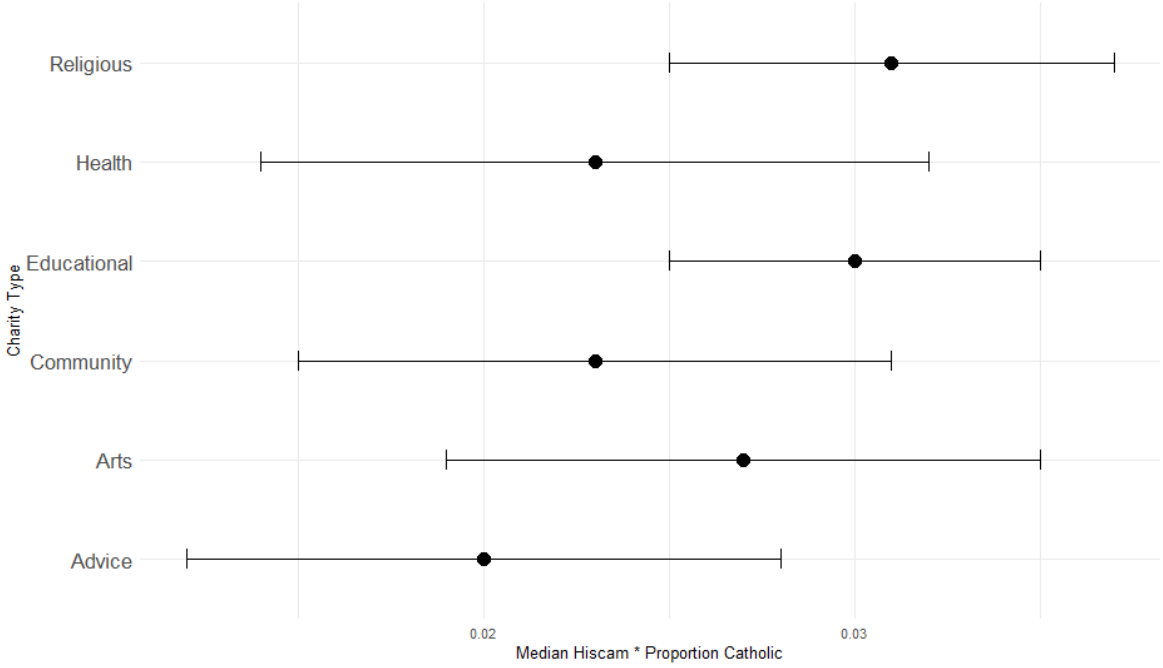


Table (3) shows the results of the second specification which seeks to provide evidence for the research question of whether increased level of matched surnames at area level is associated with increased resources captured by these potential elites. This provides a nuanced set of results regarding elite capture in rural development schemes. We see that the number of matched surnames is associated with a statistically significant positive increase in the funding per capita in both EU and Government development schemes, CLLD and non-CLLD respectively. However, we also see that the magnitude of this effect

[2] See Appendix A1/A2

is relatively limited. The results translate to approximately every 10% increase in the number of matched names is associated with a 1.1% - 1.18% increase in funding per capita in the previous 15 years. Notably, it is also the case that this effect is higher in the non-CLLD schemes, but this difference is not significant between program types. This would support the qualitative findings which highlighted the advantage of those with life-long local connections may have within rural development groups (Shucksmith and Chapman, 1998). As Musgrave & Wong outline (2016), increased resources (funding) obtained may only be one method whereby the elite may exert influence over a development scheme. The findings of this specification are a motivation for further analysis of whether this long-term path dependency translates into other forms of capture, such as in the preferences for certain types of spending.

Table 3: Specification 2 - Log-Log Regression

Total Rural Development Funding per Area (Area Level analysis)

	Dependent variable:	
	EU Rural Development Funding (CLLD)	Central Government Rural Development Funding (Non-CLLD)
Town/Village Dummy	1.682***	1.716***
	(0.106)	(0.092)
Local Population	-0.0001**	-0.00003
	(0.00002)	(0.00002)
Higher Education Rate	-0.024*	-0.019*
	(0.013)	(0.011)
Local Deprivation Score	0.045*	0.011
	(0.027)	(0.023)
Male Unemployment	0.065***	0.038**
	(0.022)	(0.019)
Female Unemployment	0.045***	0.049***
	(0.016)	(0.014)
Rurality (Distance to nearest city)	-0.001	0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Local Volunteering Rate	9.761***	3.800***
	(1.191)	(1.035)
CLLD office Dummy	1.210***	0.367
	(0.404)	(0.350)
Number of matched surnames (log)	0.110***	0.118***
	(0.030)	(0.026)
Number of local charities(log)	0.185***	0.067**
	(0.034)	(0.030)
Constant	1.272***	0.463
	(0.401)	(0.349)
Observations	2,843	2,843
R^2	0.294	0.289
Adjusted R^2	0.291	0.287
Residual Std. Error (df = 2831)	2.186	1.899
F Statistic (df = 11; 2831)	106.978***	104.777***

Note: *p**p***p<0.01

Note: Government funding 2016-2022 only. Per capita rural development funding (log)

One of the more interesting findings of this specification is the lack of a difference between CLLD programs and non-CLLD programs. Due to stricter regulations regarding EU funds, we may expect elite capture to be less of a problem in CLLD schemes. We do observe this but the difference between both of these is marginal and not statistically significant, meaning we cannot draw such a claim. The renewed interest on a national level in rural development in Ireland after 2016 provides a useful comparison case for the longer running EU/CLLD schemes. National level schemes do not follow a participatory development or CLLD model. Project selection and budgeting allocations are decided on by central government in a relatively opaque process, and project beneficiaries are often local government units or local groups who are often required to cede authority over a project to a government body. Usefully, the occurrence of this form of development allows this research to contribute to the 'compared to what?' problem within the participatory development literature (Casey, 2018,p.153), by providing a relevant comparison case in the same national context. Projects are often similar to CLLD equivalents and involve similarly sized sums of funding. While participatory development is often argued to be more vulnerable to elite capture due to the unsupervised nature of decision making, the evidence within indicates that this problem is at least as large, if not larger, in non-CLLD schemes. One plausible mechanism for this is that elites in communities may be as, if not more able, to exert influence on traditional political channels, and therefore obtain increased levels of funding for development schemes that are decided upon in a top-down central government framework. This supports the arguments made by Shapland that we must be careful not to ignore the effects or elite capture in higher tier organisations such as international development groups or donor organisations in international development (Shapland, Paassen and Almekinders, 2021). Similarly, elite capture is not a phenomenon unique to local level participatory development schemes only. The results also identify some differences between the

predictors of development funding with volunteering, the number of charities and local deprivation associated with participatory development only.

Discussion

This paper investigated whether a local 'elite' cohort in rural areas can be identified from a lack of change in higher-status surnames within community groups in a particular local area over the previous century. I also investigated whether this local elite is dis-proportionately associated with increased levels of rural development funding in the present day. For the first research question, the results indicate that there is a sizeable effect of long-term path dependency for higher status surnames in leadership positions over the course of a century in Ireland, but only for surnames that are proportionately more Catholic. The effect size is approximately a 18.9% increase in the probability of a family name being found on the board of a local community organisation in the present day between lower-and-middle classes in 1911, when that surname was Catholic in an area in 1911. This represents strong evidence of long-run path dependency and supports the qualitative literature in the European context. The effect size also complements literature in the non-European context by showing that the persistence of higher status family names in leadership positions of community-based organisations is not a feature of rural areas in lesser developed countries only. However, it also finds that this effect is not unique to community-based or rural development organisations only and is consistent across charity types and by size.

The second major research focus on this paper is the extent whereby this long-term path dependency could be connected to increased levels of resources (rural development funding) obtained by local areas. It finds that areas with a higher number of matched surnames are associated with higher levels of rural development funding controlling for other factors. While status or class is not tested directly under this model,

it does provide preliminary evidence that the association identified in the primary specification relates to a form of elite control of development resources. More importantly, this research was able to differentiate between participatory and non-participatory development schemes through utilisation of revived non-participatory approaches to rural development in Ireland. This finds no statistically significant difference in the amount of funding captured through the potential elite capture mechanism between either of these approaches.

While these are important findings and demonstrate that elite capture of development resources is not solely a feature of countries where the institutional context is assumed to be weaker but are also present for EU development funds within Europe, it does raise the third question of whether the practical importance of the effects identified are significant. **Results do find an increased probability of higher status surnames in 1911 serving on the boards of charities in that area in 2022 but it also finds no difference between charity type, no difference between charity size, the magnitude of additional resource captured is minimal in monetary terms and again, do not differ between participatory approaches and non-participatory approaches to rural development.** This wider approach allows for a questioning of the narrative that participatory development approaches are uniquely vulnerable to elite capture or that elite capture in these bodies alone are what matters. There is a need to caution against the poorly supported argument that participatory development is inherently less democratic or fair in comparison to any other form of local, bottom-up democratic institutions. It also cautions against using this argument to discredit this form of rural development, especially when it is not used to discredit other forms of voluntary activity such as school boards of management, religious charities or health charities who also manage public funds in a decentralised manner. This supports the argument of Shapland, Passen and Almekinders (2021) who argue that elite capture in other bodies is too easily ignored to the detriment

of participatory development. Future research could also factor in a similar analysis of the degree of historic surname path dependency observed in locally elected political representatives. At a national level, it has been estimated that legacy candidates (elected representatives from families of politicians) comprised on average 25% of elected parliamentarians in Ireland between 1944 and 2016 (Smith and Martin, 2017). The finding in this paper that of all names within the register of charities in the sample area, one third had a match to a surname in that area in 1911 is not dissimilar.

This paper finds that elite capture phenomenon in participatory development may not be as concerning as that implied by qualitative research and especially in comparison to other charity types. It still finds however, that it does exist, and historic class position positively influences the probability that members of the local population will sit in leadership positions on local bodies that make decisions regarding their area's development and how public funds are spent. This raises the question of how best to incentivise diverse participation to account for this fact and it must be asked that despite a limited additional level of resources obtained, *what* these resources are spent on may differ significantly. Future research should investigate what types of projects are funded or supported by community groups with higher levels of historic path dependency in their leadership.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that elite capture is present in the board composition of rural development bodies across Ireland. 'Improved governance' is a claimed effect of participatory development both in EU CLLD schemes and the international development sector. By decentralising decision making and encouraging bottom-up, community-based control of rural development resources, proponents of participatory development argue that fairer, more democratic and better decisions can be made. While the rationale for

improved governance through these mechanisms has substantial theoretical support, in practice, participatory development is vulnerable to control by local elites who claim to represent 'the community'. The elite capture critique is often used to discredit participatory development and as an argument for greater top-down control and oversight because of the implied democratic deficit. From an *Anti-Politics* perspective, elite capture is one of the many unintended potential consequences of participatory development approaches.

In a deviation to previous research, this chapter does not study community/rural groups in isolation. The inclusion of a comparison group, either in the form of other charity types or between different forms of development approaches (CLLD or Non-CLLD) is critical to contextualising what the relevance of findings for CLLD groups are. Despite descriptive statistics showing that despite higher concentrations of matched names and cumulative board days served in community/rural groups, there is no discernible difference between the prevalence of elite capture in charities partaking in rural or community development in comparison to religious, health, educational, or arts groups. This is an important finding and presents a more nuanced view of the roles of a historic class elite in voluntary bodies. While elite capture is seen as particularly a problem for rural/community participatory development, it's occurrence in other charitable bodies is often overlooked. This chapters also shows that the effect of elite capture is limited in relation to additional resources obtained, and there is no difference between European Union CLLD approaches and domestic non-CLLD alternatives with regard to resources obtained.

As one of the unintended consequences of participatory development that attracts the most criticism, the evidence here suggests that elite capture exists but it is not unique to development, or rural development only. Once we factor in the much smaller population sizes of where these charities operate at local level, the finding of long term

path dependence for higher status family names is less surprising. While critics of bottom-up decision making should rightly be concerned with who makes decisions for the local community, they should not be blind to the fact that this isn't a process unique to rural development bodies only. It would also be erroneous to argue that elite capture or the democratic deficit in rural development groups should be a rationale for a return to greater oversight in the absence of the argument that the same rationale should extend to the entire third sector where long run path dependency of local elites is just as prevalent.

Chapter 2: The case for project level data in Participatory Development within European Union and World Bank schemes: The Impact on Social Capital

Abstract

Participatory Development, or Community Based Development programs are inherently difficult to assess. This is due to the number of external macroeconomic factors during the period of intervention, unclear or poorly defined expected outputs, other programs affecting the same target area simultaneously, and the lack of an appropriate counterfactual. The difficulty in rigorously analysing program effects leads to a lack of scientific knowledge on whether programs are functioning as envisaged and contributing to intended theoretical goals despite widespread policy responses. This is a recognised issue in Community Driven Development (CDD) carried out by the World Bank but also in Community Led Local Development (CLLD) in rural areas of the European Union. This paper focuses on existing evaluation challenges for Community Led Local Development in the EU and argues for the use of project level data, quantitative, geospatial, and where possible, causally informed techniques to account for some of the limitations of existing evaluation approaches in the academic literature and European Commissions' evaluation support studies. It also develops the argument that despite disparate institutional contexts, participatory development in both the EU and World Bank programs share similar empirical shortcomings regarding their intended effects and four methodological challenges common to both. I find that for one intended effect of participatory development, social capital, an association does exist in comparison to non-participatory development schemes. This is achieved through use of project level data (n=16,000) from 15 years of rural development programs in Ireland, geospatial techniques and linked administrative data. It uses one specific measure of social capital, the local volunteering rate, made possible through high quality census data to quantify the extent of this effect of participatory development on volunteering, incorporating change over time and counterfactual methods. This paper contributes to the literature on participatory rural development schemes using a new method of evaluation in the European context which can provide empirical evidence to concerns common to both European rural development and international rural development literature. In doing so, it contributes knowledge to rural research approaches both inside and outside of Europe, particularly regarding the relevance of social capital.

Introduction

Participatory Development schemes, where local communities or people participate in development processes that effect their area have a long historical tradition. In the past, this has taken the form of agricultural co-operative societies, community development groups and village assemblies. Due in part to the perceived failure of large scale, top-down 'Big Development' approaches of the late 20th Century. Participatory Development has evolved into a key pillar of development approaches, particularly in rural areas and the international development field. In tandem, European rural development approaches under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) made a similar shift from large scale top-down approaches in the 1970's-1980's to a localised, integrated approach from the early 1990's to date. The surge in popularity of the work of Sen, Ostrom and Putnam also gave participatory development academic support with a new focus on local collective action to provide purported benefits in the realm of poverty reduction, improved social capital and enhanced local governance (Sen, 1985, 1999; Ostrom, 2000; Putnam, 2000). This contributed to rapid growth in support by the World Bank for Community Driven Development (CDD) projects from $325 million to $2 billion between 1996 and 2003 (Mansuri and Rao, 2004). This continues into the current period where lending to CDD programmes has averaged approximately 10% of total bank-wide lending, or approximately €6 Billion in new CDD lending annually (World Bank, 2020, 2022). There was similar rapid growth in Community Led Local Development (CLLD) Schemes in Europe after 1991 (Cork Declaration, 1996). In the case of one CLLD program, EU funding has grown from €0.44 Billion between 1991 and 1993 to €1.76 billion between 1994 and 1999. To date, this single program (LEADER) has invested an estimated €20 billion across European rural areas, rising to over €25 billion once national contributions

are added (European Court of Auditors, 2022,p.10). The projected financial allocation for the 2023-2027 period was an additional €7.7 billion (European Commission, 2024).

Despite the implementation of Participatory Development approaches in numerous national, and regional contests in the Global South as well as every Member State of the EU, rigorous knowledge of its actual effects remain either an open or much debated research question. Original theoretical underpinnings argued for the positive effect of participatory development on poverty reduction by situating control over development funds in the hands of those communities, improved social capital through effective collective action and improved governance practices through a participative democratic decision making. Despite this, there is **no evidence** of Participatory Development's **pro-poor effects** nor has the role of **social capital** ever been definitively captured(White, Menon and Waddington, 2018; Wong and Guggenheim, 2018). The intended positive effect on **democratisation and transformation of local governance** also has limited evidence. These are recognised shortcomings in the field despite a wealth of literature in the case of CDD (Casey, 2018) and CLLD (European Court of Auditors, 2010, 2022). However, there is some evidence that Participatory Development is effective in terms of decreased costs of implementation and improved project results in both contexts. The shortcomings in identification of these **three central intended effects of poverty reduction, improved social capital and transformational governance practices** are due to several interrelated reasons. Firstly, there is a substantial **difficulty in selecting and isolating an appropriate counterfactual** for participatory development intervention at community level. As the effect of participatory development on that community is of concern, we cannot direct observe this. Therefore, neighbouring similar communities or areas must be selected. This gives rise to the **second methodological challenge where participatory development approaches often are enacted at a widespread scale, covering all communities in a regional or national context that**

qualify leading to a lack of a valid comparison. There are some instances where the use of a relatively arbitrary cut-off or matching methods have been used but these remain an exception rather than the norm (Nguyen and Rieger, 2017). This gives rise to the '*compared to what?*' problem as recognised by Casey, writing in the *Annual Review of Economics*, whereby it is rarely asked if development projects could have been delivered through another mechanism, such as that used by local government (Casey, 2018). The broad-based policy response is closely related to the **third problem regarding granularity and a lack of variation in the data** collected. Participatory development approaches are conducted at a 'community' scale, such as a village or rural 'neighbourhood'. Many of the research challenges are similar to the challenges in conducting neighbourhood research in the urban environments (van Ham and Manley, 2012). Due to these very small demarcations, quantitative data require a high level of granularity and very large sample size for there to be enough valid observations to analyse at a population level. Similarly, participatory development, especially under the World Bank is often conducted in areas with weaker statistical capacity at a national level, increasing the difficulty in obtaining valid indicators at micro level (Cameron *et al.*, 2021). Even in Europe, where national statistical capacity is less of a problem, the challenge of sample size is compounded by the low population density in many of these rural communities which is not the case in an urban neighbourhood. Also, within the EU, data for CLLD programs is required to be collected at the level of the local territory and not the communities or villages within this territory0F[1]. This legislative requirement makes within territory variation difficult or impossible to observe. Finally, the **fourth methodological challenge lies in the failure to evaluate interventions on a longer-term horizon**. This is especially pertinent in the

[1] Local territories refer to the operational area of 'Local Action Groups' (LAGS) within CLLD programs. Local territories are specific sub-regional areas with a population between 10,000 and 150,000. However, they do not necessarily need to follow domestic or European administrative boundaries meaning that territorial statistics are often not available. (European Network for Rural Development, 2024).

context of the intended effects of improved social capital, transformed governance and poverty support where it is less feasible to see short term effects. Donor-funded interventions prioritise evaluations of that particular intervention only, and have limited concerns with longer term effects that may come after the program's end date (Holmlund and Vijayendra, 2021). In the EU, evaluations are conducted on a single programming period of seven years in line with EU budget timeframes and multi-program evaluations are rare in both the policy and academic literature.

This paper makes the case for project level quantitative data in the European context as a key contribution to existing research limitations in the field of Participatory Development and contributes to evidence relating to a robust measure of social capital (volunteerism) in community development schemes. It also acts as a bridge between two fields of academic literature that are often not linked, quantitative, econometric approaches in the field of International Development (Wong, 2012; Avdeenko and Gilligan, 2015; Nguyen and Rieger, 2017) and European rural development literature which is often more qualitative or theoretical in academic output (Ray, 1997; Shucksmith, 2000). Acknowledging the disparate institutional contexts of countries supported through both schemes, there are still striking commonalities in participatory development approaches used and research concerns arising out of both World Bank and European Union participatory development programs. These commonalities are particularly apparent in the three intended but poorly supported effects of poverty, social capital and transformed local governance. Through application of methods more commonly utilised in the International Development field to the European context, in tandem with advanced geospatial techniques and a much higher quality of statistical data at micro-scale found in Europe, I argue it is possible to account for some of the existing methodological limitations in the participatory development literature. Certain European member states have also recently reverted to traditional top-down development models in rural

development led by central government, likely due to a shift towards economic over social concerns in the aftermath of the financial crisis, austerity and concerns about local autonomy (Shucksmith, Brooks and Madanipour, 2021). Given the scale of these interventions in some member states, they provide comparison cases often missing in evaluation approaches and aid potential counterfactual methods. This paper also contributes directly to the timely research challenge affecting CLLD, and the LEADER program in particular, in Europe. It directly confronts the limitations of evaluation support studies as published by the European Commission (European Commission, 2023) and outlines how project-level data can overcome some of these limitations. It is also a new method of evaluation for CLLD and the first published quantitative/counterfactual analysis of CLLD using a national level dataset in Europe.

This following section will (1) review the current evaluation limitations for CLLD in Europe (2) outline the common findings for participatory development between EU and World Bank programs and (3) in the case of one common research concern, social capital, review empirical evidence relating to this concept. Section 3 will explain the general data process for creation of usable project-level data in CLLD in Europe, outline advantages and limitations as well as scope for future research. Section 4 will focus on one intended effect of participatory development, improvements to social capital, and show how project-level data could potentially provide evidence relating to this at a population level while accounting for the four general methodological concerns previously outlined. Section 5 will situate these findings within existing knowledge of CLLD in Europe and CDD elsewhere and make the case for future development of this method in other member states, other merged data sources and integration into data reporting requirements and monitoring mechanisms.

Background and Literature

Within Europe, existing research by the European Commission has identified a number of limitations to current evaluation approaches. These generally relate to a broad swathe of CLLD specific concerns including project costs, audit requirements and traditional monitoring issues. However, the focus have increasingly aligned with evaluation issues in the international development field relating to social capital, governance and improved project results. The change in focus is arguably due to the negative or lack of evidence for these effected as cited the European Court of Auditors in their special reports on CLLD, the LEADER program in particular (European Court of Auditors, 2010, 2022). In the most recent evaluation support study by the European Commission, three key limitations are outlined; gaps in data, lack of comparable projects and issues about the quality of collected data through survey/interview methods (European Commission, 2023). The first of these, data gaps, refers to the lack of a binding agreement in legislation to collect data relating to broader CLLD goals of social capital or improved governance during the 2014-2020 EU budgeting period. Therefore, there is no standardised data across member states. This is somewhat ameliorated by improvements in monitoring requirements set out in legislation for the 2023-2027 budgeting period (Commission Regulation 2022/1475). Monitoring systems also differ across member states and which member states respond to being interviewed under evaluation frameworks mean that results obtained are often not generalisable to the full population of CLLD groups in Europe (European Commission, 2023,p.56).

Secondly, and similarly to the issue highlighted by Casey under CDD (2018), there is difficulty in comparing CLLD projects and non-CLLD projects. This is compounded by the fact that some programs implemented as Member state level have clear demarcations in the type of investment that is eligible to be funded which minimises comparability.

Thirdly, there are significant concerns relating to the quality of data that is collected for evaluation. There is a strong argument that self-selection and response bias is present as local groups must agree to be interviewed or be used as a case study by evaluators. These local groups are nearly always dependent on the administrative funding that CLLD provides, either from an institutional perspective or direct salary costs. There is arguably some degree of capture to this financial dependence on the existing and future contracts to implement CLLD programs. Evaluators also identify social desirability bias for local groups to offer positive judgements of their local area and their work on the program. Finally, although not officially recognised by the authors, sample selection can also be present as evaluation is often conducted late in the programming period but due to various delays, the intended delivery of Rural Development Programs(RDP) often overruns. Due to the requirements at EU level for evidence to inform the next budgeting period multiple years in advance, evaluation often takes place before complete implementation of the program by all local groups or even Member States. This is the case in the most recent Evaluation Support Study as only national and regional RDP's at over 70% of total financial execution were used to identify case study country/regions with a sufficient number of completed projects. Within these regional/national rural development programs, a similar selection process is required to select local groups for evaluation (European Commission, 2023, p.36). Therefore, evaluation is based on the most financially advanced RDP completions at EU level and also, the most advanced local groups within these RDP's. This entails a significant level of sample selection, and results are likely an upper-end estimate which categorically ignore the issues facing local groups and national/regional RDP's that have the most difficulty in completing the CLLD program in the proposed timeframe. The lack of appropriate level of geographic granularity has also been highlighted in previous evaluation reports (Dwyer *et al.*, 2022,p.62). There are currently some attempts to improve the methods and data available

for evaluation, particular in some Member states (Whelan, McGuinness and Barrett, 2021) although availability of indicators at the geographical level required remains a challenge (Kelly, McGuinness and Devlin, 2024). Also, despite a detailed identification of the problem of focusing on one programming period only, programming approaches have not adapted (Dwyer, Bradley and Hill, 2008).

The limitations to evaluation outlined above are common to the identification of a number of intended effects of CLLD in Europe. One of these intended effects is perceived benefits of participatory development to building social capital, originally understood through the Putnamian definition of collective action, trust, norms and networks as supportive of development in European rural policy (Shucksmith, 2000). Much of the research into this topic is largely theoretical, especially in the early years of participatory development approaches in Europe (Ray, 2000; Shucksmith, 2000; Trigilia, 2001). In keeping with general tendency within Participatory Development for implementation without supporting evidence, social capital embodies this process with an upsurge in interest between social capital and Participatory Development in the late 1990s and early 2000s despite few if any empirical results. This led to a justifiable backlash and criticism against the unfounded assumptions of association and even causality between participatory development and social capital (DeFilippis, 2001; Fine, 2001). In the European sense, the effect of social capital was identified early as one without a clear theoretical underpinning or, any evidence to support it (Slee, 1993, 1994; Thornton, 1997) and one that continues to have a limited level of evidence to support claimed effects (European Court of Auditors, 2022,p.28).

In recent years, there has been some attempts to provide empirical support on the impact of social capital through CLLD in Europe. These have mainly taken the form of case studies (Wiesinger, 2007; Caraveli, 2017; Permingeat and Vanneste, 2019) in various

rural regions of Europe with limited generalisability. These studies build on a long qualitative history of research into CLLD programs within European rural sociological literature (Ray, 2000; Shucksmith, 2000; Shortall, 2004; Böcher, 2008; Bosworth *et al.*, 2013; Dax *et al.*, 2016; Slee, 2021). More comprehensive approaches includes the application of network analysis methods, particularly network diversity indices, to the measurement of social capital in CLLD in Europe (Nardone, Sisto and Lopolito, 2010; Pisani *et al.*, 2017), some of which has been recently included in the evaluation support studies of the European Commission (European Commission, 2023). An argument made for this approach rests on the measurement of 'direct' measures of social capital such as trust or network relations instead of indicators commonly used such as volunteering, group membership or charity density (Nardone, Sisto and Lopolito, 2010,p.70). This approach has merit but it is still subject to the some of the same methodological pitfalls in current evaluation methods, particularly from the perspective of scale. There is a high number of proposed indicators (Pisani *et al.*, 2017,p.203) which involve a burdensome time commitment for surveys from local groups who also have an interest in presenting this information in a socially desirable way. The high time commitment also limits the applicability of this method to the full population without significant cost and buy-in from local groups and the associated problems of sample selection and social desirability bias. While it may be a suitable method for understanding network relations within local community-led groups, it does not necessarily fulfil the criteria for stronger, objective evaluations of social capital induced benefits from CLLD in Europe. In addition to this, it fails to counter the methodological challenges outlined for participatory development assessments more widely. It cannot capture measures of social capital at the community or village which projects are implemented, only at the wider territorial level. Therefore, within territory variation cannot be observed from this method and the potential for counterfactual analysis is limited. In reviews of evaluations and their impact within

European Rural Development, one of the key limitations for policy impact is the limited scientific foundation of the methods used, a lack of counterfactual approaches and a lack of clear quantitative research results (Copus and Dax, 2010; Andersson, Höjgård and Rabinowicz, 2017; Castaño, Blanco and Martinez, 2019).

World Bank CDD programs also have had a high level of interest in the purported effects of social capital and a similar timeframe for their emergence and critical backlash (Fine, 2001; Harriss, 2002; Bebbington *et al.*, 2004). Early literature on this topic cautioned on the naïve application of complex terms to development terminology and highlighted the unclear causal direction for social capital's effects (Mansuri and Rao, 2004, 2006). Comprehensive meta-analysis from multiple CDD programs finds that there is no evidence that CDD programs increase social capital in the short term and any effects are marginal, if found at all (Wong, 2012; White, Menon and Waddington, 2018; Wong and Guggenheim, 2018). The continued use of social capital as a proclaimed goal of participatory rural development despite no evidence to support this has clear parallels to the use of poverty reduction as a proclaimed goal, or point of entry for rural development in Ferguson's *Anti-Politics* critique, and highlighted by other authors (Harriss, 2002,p.12). In both cases, an intended goal of the program is continually not achieved and evaluations relating to demonstrating this are poorly defined, have a weak methodological basis or simply delayed until the next programming period without a serious effort to measure their effects. Meanwhile, the program cycle repeats, and it is possible to be left with the scenario where 30 years of development approaches rest on a theoretical claim that has never been demonstrated empirically. The instrumental effect of this allows for the justification of interventions rural areas and the achievement of other 'side-effects' (instrumental effects) in rural development (Ferguson, 1994,p.256). The continuing lack of evidence for one of the central original arguments for the application of participatory development approaches in the European and international development context is also a policy concern,

particularly given the billions of euros which continue to be invested with limited evidence of their intended effects over the last three decades. This section has outlined the attempts at empirical research in this field and how these are still subject to the same evaluative limitations that affects participatory development research more widely. **The next section proposes an alternative research design that overcomes some of these methodological challenges and crucially, when this is done, we do see an association between participatory development and a measure of social capital in the European context, (a) over the longer term, (b) between program types and (c) using more objective analysis methods. This accounts for the current methodological challenges of limited time horizons, lack of comparison cases, data limitations and decreased sample selection/social desirability bias respectively.**

Data – Requirements and Construction of Project-Level Data

This section outlines a data collection and analysis method using geospatial and quantitative techniques which are uncommon in evaluations of participatory development, and highly uncommon in CLLD evaluation in Europe. It makes the case for this data in response to the four methodological challenges and displays three advancements that are required for wider assessments of participatory development (PD) and for analysis of the impact on social capital. The main dependent variable is discussed and issues regarding comparability are addressed. The four methodological challenges previously outlined can be broadly summarised as (1) lack of counterfactual analysis, (2) lack of comparison cases from non-participative approaches, (3) lack of granularity and variation within data collected and (4) lack of a longer term time horizon. In order to account for these shortcomings, **a number of advancements are required.**

Firstly, data at a micro level is required. Evaluations of participatory development programs, and CLLD is particular, are generally evaluations of the area of the program implementers. In Europe, these areas ("territories") are smaller than the NUTS3 scale and

may or may not be consistent with local government boundaries such as a county. Local program budgets for territories are decided based on a number of factors relating to national budget size and the demographic, economic and social conditions in that area, exogenous to the actual process of participatory development. Within these areas, the allocation of funding is not decided based on these factors and is the outcome of collective action by voluntary and community groups in applying for funding. Therefore, **in order to understand the variation across different local territories, variation within each of these territories must be understood,** with micro level data at town or village level a requirement. A **second requirement** is the need for an adequate comparison case. Even if variation within local territories can be captured through micro level data of funding, programs enacted in these territories usually fall under the umbrella of one type of development approach, bottom-up participatory development. Rarely are local areas subject to another form of development intervention at the same time and to a similar degree, this makes it very difficult to compare participatory and non-participatory development approaches in a feasible manner. Therefore, **adequate assessments of participatory development need to contain similar programs that are active in the same area that do not have a collective participatory element to allocating funding.** These could be similar to the top-down, centrally allocated funding of development approaches before the widespread policy adoption of participatory development since the 1990s (European Commission, 1988). I **argue that it is possible to account for these requirements by use of geospatial methods to isolate project funding at micro level (town or village), below the geographic aggregation of the larger area (county/'territory')**. Through use of countries with an alternative rural development policy and approach, it is also possible to compare participatory and non-participatory development approaches in the same timeframe and area. A **third requirement** relates to the identification of effects that may not be apparent over one programming period and

the **need for comparable data across multiple programs in order to assess longer term effects**. All of these requirements make the application of counterfactual methods and approaches more feasible.

There are multiple advantages of the data collected through my approach. It is a full population dataset of all rural development projects in all areas at a national level, avoiding the use of a sample and the sample selection issues apparent in current methods. It captures variation at micro level regarding where and what type of funding is actually spent in a village or community. This variation is not observed when data is only collected at larger geographic units as is common in national or European level evaluations. It has a high level of geographic accuracy through use of address information and geocoding, this is supported by extensive collaboration with program implementers who have incorporated this data into their own program application and planning. It can control for demographic influences on participatory development across areas through use of linked census data. These are omitted predictors of participatory development when evaluations only assess factors relating to the program implementers such as their staff or board membership. Linked census data allows for assessment of change over time which is not possible when only program KPI's are used in isolation for a single programming period. It therefore adds a longitudinal approach to what is formerly only cross-sectional analysis. Longitudinal approaches and variation at local level allow for causal methods to be employed, going beyond associative analysis.

The data collection process involve three steps, (1) project level information with address data, (2) geocoding of projects to exact locations within a given territory and (3) cross referencing of geocoded project level data to relevant administrative data that is representative of that community, such as census data at a low level of aggregation (community / village). This approach has a number of advantages. It is much lower cost and highly scalable, especially since in many cases, this data already exists and is freely

available. The low cost and high scalability allow for much greater numbers of areas to be assessed which is more generalisable to the entire program, avoiding issues of sample selection previously identified. It acts as a validity check on results provided by case studies and interviews, arguably providing more objective results that are not subject to response bias or social desirability bias. It provides descriptive statistics about how public funds are spent, can be applied retroactively to previous programs which allows comparison across programs and allows for more advanced quantitative methods to be employed. Finally, it is a generalisable method that is applicable in any member state. In this paper, the above data collection process is employed to create an original geolocated dataset of rural development funding at micro level in Ireland. This is created from publicly available individual project information between the years 2007 and 2022. Individual projects were geocoded to exact co-ordinates using address information. This was achieved through use of the Google Maps API. The total number of projects is approximately 16,000, totalling approximately €885 Million in public and EU funding. Project co-ordinates were then cross-referenced with the electoral division (ED) they were located in. Electoral divisions are the second lowest areal unit for which census data is publicly available for in Ireland. They have an median population of 579 people and average area size of 23.4km^2. Data from the 2006 and 2022 census was used to create relevant control variables.

Figure 1: Project Locations at National Level

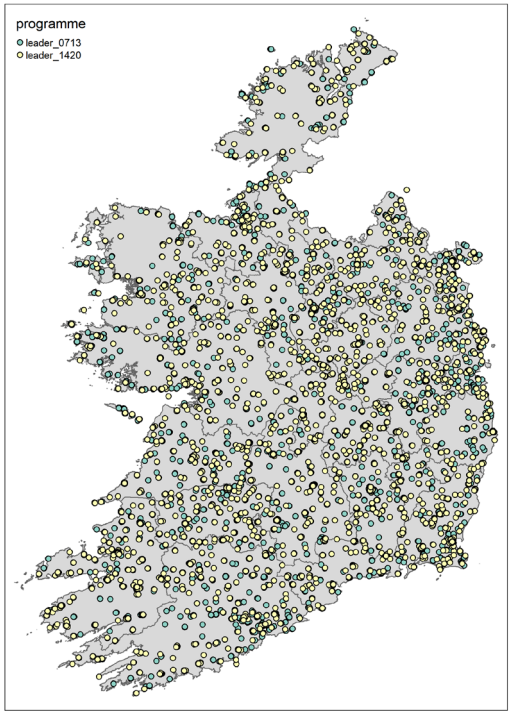
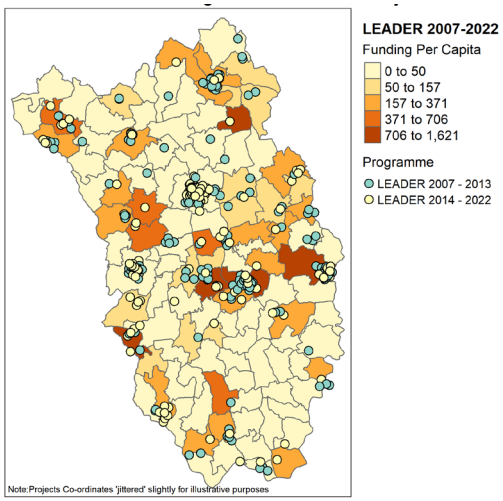


Figure 2: Example of Project level data for one local territory



The main outcome variable used in this paper is the local volunteering rate and the relationship to the treatment variable (CLLD funding) at electoral division level (case). This is made possible by the exploitation of two census waves that included questions on volunteering, in 2006 and 2022. The timing of these census waves allows for analysis of the impact of EU funding in the two intervening EU budget periods of 2007-2013 and 2014-2022 (Extended due to Covid-19). This allows for a baseline level of volunteering *before* CLLD and non-CLLD investments are factored in. The volunteering questions differ slightly between both census periods. In 2006, respondents were asked if they have volunteered in the 'last 4 weeks' and in 2022, respondents were asked if they 'regularly engage' in voluntary work.

Strictly speaking, these census questions are not directly comparable due to the change in the question phrasing and due to a change in the way possible answers were coded. In 2006, political and cultural organisations were one category and this was split

into two categories in 2022. The other categories remained broadly the same, including defining volunteering through 'helping or voluntary work without pay' in both sets of questions, with 'in your community' replacing 'any other voluntary activity' for the second period. I am only using aggregate volunteering due to these changes in the way political party volunteering was coded in the second period.

A second limitation is the change in the phrasing of the question between 'regularly engage'(2022) and 'in the last four weeks' (2006). If respondents understood 'regularly engage' as any time beyond the period of one month, it would upwardly bias the estimates of 2022 volunteering. We also observe that the overall growth in the volunteering rate is approximately consistent with the trends in population growth over the period. Population growth in Ireland across both periods was 20.9%, while the overall volunteering rate changed by 23.1%, and the rate for those not involved in volunteering changed by 22.4%, indicating no significant divergence. Additionally, drawing on a survey of rural volunteers in Ireland (n=607), we have indicative evidence that 62% of rural volunteers engage weekly and additionally 11% do so daily (Farrell, 2018). The remaining cohort may be subject to other factors, such as the seasonality of voluntary work, with declines in winter months and a rise in summer months, especially amongst sporting organisations. I argue that this should play a limited role in the comparability of both questions as they were both asked in the same month, 23rd April 2006 and 3rd April 2022, which conveniently straddles both the beginning and ends of the major sporting seasons of Gaelic football, soccer, and rugby. These limitations notwithstanding and given the scarce availability of high quality micro level data on volunteering, I argue that is still one of the best available data sources for studies of volunteering, especially in comparison to other more subjective measures of social capital. The 2022 question was also open to respondents in a household under the age of 15, whereas the 2006 question was limited to those aged over 15. I argue that this difference is minimal especially after adjusting the 2006 data to factor in the

(relatively minor) contribution of volunteers under the age of 15 years old1F[2]. Using the age breakdown of volunteering in 2022, the 2006 volunteering rates were adjusted to reflect the percentage of volunteers under the age of 15 based on 2022 rates. This assumes that under-15 volunteering is consistent across time but the effect is minor as under-15 year old volunteering only comprised 4.2% of total volunteering in 2022.

The description of variables and basic summary statistics are outlined in Table 1. These variables were selected from the available census data on the basis of existing literature that has established an association between education, religion, age, family status, ethnicity, residential stability, and unemployment to the likelihood to volunteer (Ruiter and De Graaf, 2006; Benton, 2016; Enjolras, 2021; Higgs, Page and Langford, 2021). In order to account for the existence of 'in-house' projects which may have a wider geographic impact but be located at one particular address, a dummy variable for CLLD group's offices is included. Finally, given evidence that rural areas also exhibit higher levels of voluntary activity, a distance to the nearest city variable is included. It is a simple approximation of rurality but one that would have a high level of correlation with more detailed rural-urban typologies which are not available at electoral division level (CSO, 2019). CLLD funding per capita and non-CLLD funding per capita are the main predictive variables of interest. There are representative of participatory development and non-participative development schemes respectively. The funding value (€) is given by the total sum of all rural development projects in a local area between the years 2007 and 2022, divided by the local population. For the 2022 census wave, additional variables were available that measured self-rated health and an employment indicator that differentiated between long term and short-term unemployment. These were not asked any previous

[2] See Appendix A1 – Volunteering Question Comparability

census wave and cannot be included in the main specifications, but they have been utilised in analysis of the determinants of volunteering in 2022[3].

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Min	Max	Mean	Median
Change in Volunteering Rate	-15.27	19.78	1.81	1.64
Volunteering Rate 2006	4.46	29.47	15.07	14.78
Population (Δ)	-29.63	587.44	18.15	14.91
Age Dependency Ratio(Δ)	-23.2	29.02	3.33	3.28
Higher Education Rate(Δ)	-29.23	43.28	1.45	0.64
Religious Rate(Δ)	-54.72	8.22	-10.36	-9.87
Same Address Rate (Δ)	-13.41	34.15	2.25	1.97
Ethnicity Other than Majority(Δ)	-12.86	35.59	2.18	1.63
Unemployment Rate(Δ)	-44.66	41.88	0	0.42
Rurality (Kilometres)	1.27	233.74	65.15	56.73
Family Stage: Retired(Δ)	-11.9	30.65	7.93	7.7
Family Stage: Preschool(Δ)	-21.53	16.07	-2.89	-2.89
Family Stage: Early School(Δ)	-21.74	20.65	-1.61	-1.67
Family Stage: Pre-Adolescent(Δ)	-23.01	17.1	0.43	0.42
Family Stage: Adolescent(Δ)	-33.64	22.51	-0.57	-0.53
Family Stage: Adult(Δ)	-49.45	35.12	0.45	0.82
Family Stage: Emptynest(Δ)	-24.41	23.53	-0.76	-0.77
Family Stage: Pre-Family(Δ)	-23.31	20	-2.99	-2.81
CLLD Funding per capita(€)	0	14337.53	148.17	21.14
Non-CLLD Funding per capita (€)	0	46229.28	107.06	0

Note: Δ denotes changes in these variables between 2006 and 2022

Method

I analyse the degree to which any evidence of a relationship between rural development programs and a measure of social capital can be found and crucially, if this differs between the type of development program. This paper also draws on a deep understanding of rural development in this national context through first-hand experience as a community organiser working on these programs. It also draws from close collaboration with program implementers to provide empirical evidence on the location

[3] See Appendix A2

and relationship of projects to economic and demographic variables using geospatial methods to construct an advanced dataset and inform their local development strategy.

Two main specifications were undertaken; (1) Investigation of the determinants of the change in the local volunteering rate between 2006 and 2022 and, (2) Propensity Score Matching that estimate the average treatment effect of a community being affected by a CLLD investment on the change in the local volunteering rate. The equation for specification (1) has the following simplified functional form:

$$VolChange_j = \beta 0 + \beta BaselineVol_j + \beta DemographicChange_j + \beta EducChange_j + \beta ReligiousChange_j + \beta UnempChange_j + \beta FamStageChange_j + \beta GeogControls_j + \beta DevFunding_j + \sigma_j$$

Where $VolChange_j$ is the change the local volunteering rate between 2006 and 2022 in an area j and $BaselineVol_j$ is the volunteering rate in 2006. $DemographicChange_j$ is the change in the population, age dependency ratio, residential stability rate (measured as the number of residents in that address one year previous), ethnicity (measured as the proportion of the population with an ethnicity other than the majority) in an area. $EducChange_j$, $ReligiousChange_j$ and $UnempChange_j$ measured the changes in the proportion of the population with higher education, changes in the proportion of the population that are religious and changes in the unemployment rate in an area. $FamStageChange_j$ measures the changes in the rates of each of the family stages listed in the data section. $GeogControls_j$ are denoted by a dummy variable of whether an area contains a town or village within the boundaries of that electoral division, a dummy variable if an area contains a CLLD group's offices and the distance in kilometres to the nearest of Ireland's five cities of Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Cork, Waterford or Galway. $DevFunding_j$ is the variable of interest and is coded as either the per capita development funding received or as a binary dummy variable indicating If an area has been exposed to a certain type of development funding from CLLD or non-CLLD sources.

The second specification creates matched groups based on adequate pre-treatment covariance balance between the predictors of volunteering. A binary treatment of whether an area was exposed to CLLD funding or not was used to assess the effect of this treatment on the outcome, or the change in the local volunteering rate over time. Multiple models were employed to better isolate the effect of participatory development schemes on changes to volunteering which are further explained in the results section.

Results

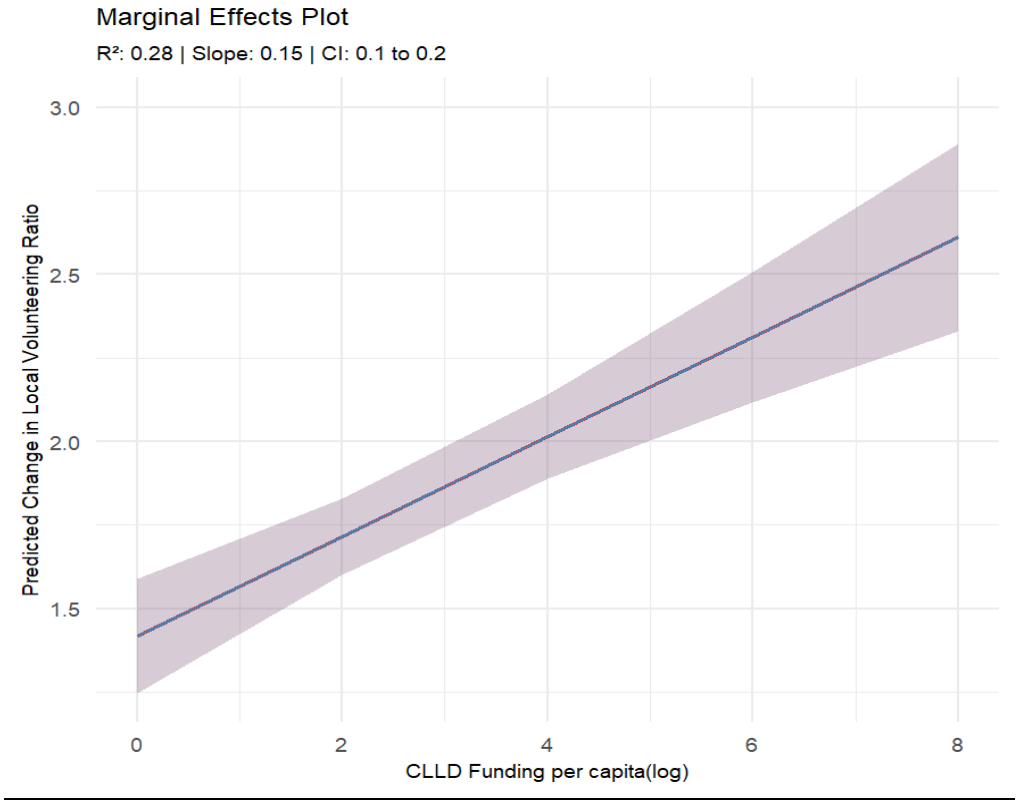
The focus of existing literature relating to participatory development schemes and social capital has asked whether the theorised association between this form of development and social capital actually exists. In this paper, I show that this is the case through a cross-sectional analysis of the major determinants of volunteering using high quality census micro data in 2022, controlling for the effects of CLLD funding in an area. This finds that either per capita CLLD funding or simply exposure to CLLD funding is positively and significantly associated with the local volunteering rate, after controlling for other significant predictors of the volunteering rate at the local level including population, education, retirees, unemployment, ethnicity, religion, self-rated health and rural-urban status3F[4]. Every 1% increase in CLLD funding per capita is associated with an increase in the local volunteering rate of 0.193 units, or a 10% increase is associated with an increase in the local volunteering rate of 1.93 percentage points, indicating substantial as well as statistical significance. The effect of non-CLLD funding is less than one third of the size of the CLLD effect and only significant at the 10% level. These results are robust to county and local territory fixed effects. This is empirical evidence of participatory development's association with a measure of social capital, it also is evidence that it is greater than the association with non-participatory development funding. While an important finding and

[4] See Appendix A2

not empirically demonstrated on this scale before, it is also unsurprising. Participatory development, or CLLD, naturally involves volunteering by local community members to progress and implement rural development projects in their community. Further to this, communities with already high pre-existing levels of volunteerism (and the determinants of this such as education, health status, time availability etc) are much more likely to be in a position to have the resources and skills available to take advantage of grant funding schemes, participatory in design or otherwise. The positive association should not be misunderstood for any sort of causal effect as volunteering is both an input into development funding and an output of the process.

However, the advantage of the approach laid out in this paper allows for analysis to progress one step further and ask whether participatory development is not just associated with higher volunteering rates but also whether it influences the volunteering rate. It allows us to ask what the extent of the relationship between participatory development and social capital is and whether this is of practical significance. This is an important consideration not just for the proposed theoretical effects of participatory development but also an important consideration given the vast sums of European Union budget spent on these programmes with little evidence of increases in social capital. One method by which we may observe a change over time in volunteering and relate this to participatory development funding is through the comparison of the change in the local volunteering rate between 2006 and 2022. The effect of CLLD funding on the change in the local volunteering rate can be seen in Figure 3. This shows how the predicted value of the change in the volunteering rate changes, holding other variables constant, in relation to increases in the CLLD funding per capita obtained in a local area. There is a strong positive effect of increases in CLLD funding and the local volunteering rate.

Figure 3: Marginal Effects Plot



Every 1% increase in the funding per capita from CLLD sources is associated with a 0.137 unit increase in the local volunteering rate between 2006 and 2022 which is a substantial effect. This equates to a 10% rise in funding per capita associated with a 1.37 percentage point change in the local volunteering rate. We do not observe any significant effect of non-CLLD funding per capita having an effect on changes in the local volunteering rate. Similarly, when areas are coded with dummy variables indicating whether or not there received funding from CLLD sources, areas that received funding from CLLD funding sources only are associated with an increased in the local volunteering rate of 0.6 percentage points and no effect is observed for areas that received funding from non-CLLD sources only. These results can be seen in Table 2. One possible counterargument is that non-CLLD funding only truly begun in substantial terms after the year 2015 with the re-establishment of a Department of Rural and Community Development with a full governmental ministerial portfolio. However, if we disaggregate by program and compare only the funding for CLLD and non-CLLD since that date, a similar if smaller, effect is observed[5]. These findings are

[5] See Appendix A3

robust to county level fixed effects, CLLD group territory fixed effects and robust standard errors.[6]

Table 2 also identifies a number of other influences on the change in the local volunteering rate over time. Negative effects include an increase in population, the age dependency ratio, proportion of ethnicities other than the majority and residential stability. There are also marginal negative effects relating to changes in the proportion of families at preschool or pre family stages and a positive relationship with the retiree rate. The only change that approaches a similar effect size to that of CLLD funding per capita is changes in the religiosity rate. There is also a rural-urban divide to changes in the local volunteering rate as increased distance from one of Ireland's five cities is associated with increases in volunteering. On further analysis, this effect is found to be non-linear, tapering as distance increases. However, areas at the extreme peripheries are associated with a 2.3% rise in volunteering over time compared to areas located at the outskirts of cities. Similarly, a town or village within an Electoral Division is associated with a 0.4 percentage point decrease in the change in local volunteering. Other possible explanations for the change in the volunteering rate over time are sensitive to areas that may have experienced a particular civil society event that may have led to rise to volunteerism. One such social movement is the 2014 Water protests campaign, which was the largest protest movement in Ireland in the aftermath of the 2008 Recession, with an estimated 100,000 people demonstrating in late 2014. The locations of these are factored in and while statistically significant, the results relating to participatory development are retained (Appendix A5). The other major effect is COVID-19 and while there were predictions that this would lead to increases in volunteering, there is no reason to suggest that it would affect areas benefitting from CLLD or non-CLLD schemes differentially. The results in Table 2 provide strong evidence that participatory development schemes are associated with increases in the social capital found in a community, as measured by volunteering, controlling for a baseline rate of volunteering and changes in these determinants over time. At the extremes, the Electoral Divisions recording the largest increase in the local volunteering rate obtained ~€1.7M in CLLD funding

[6] See Appendix A4

between 2006 and 2022. The areas with the largest decreases received only €101,158 in total, with the majority of this (€82,048) obtained in one area only. None of the areas with the largest decreases obtained funding from non-CLLD sources. The next section will attempt to strengthen these results using a counterfactual method, propensity score matching.

Table 2: Primary Specification

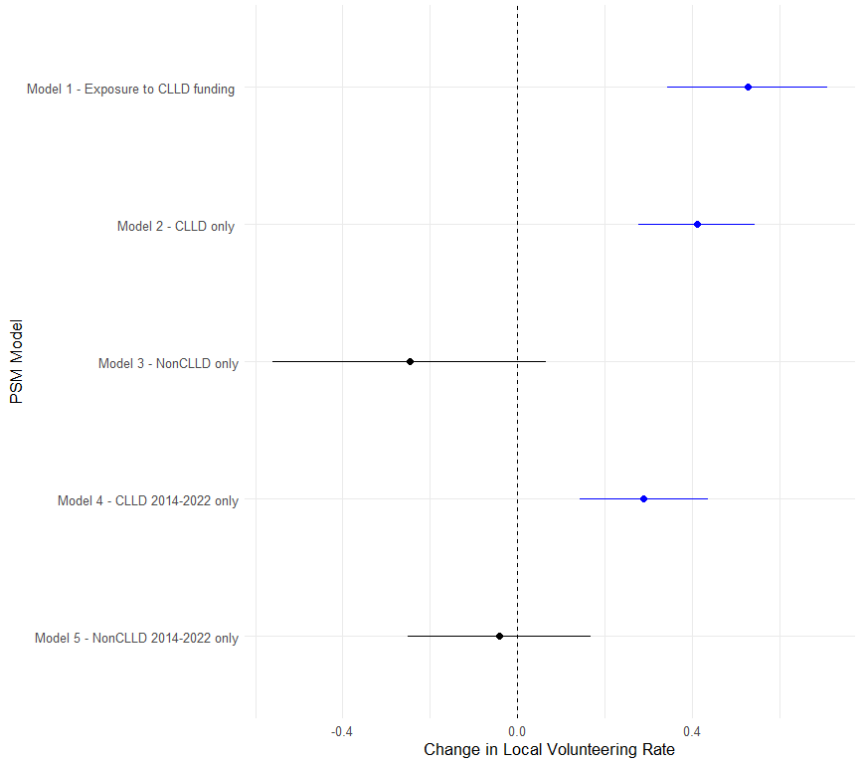
Change in the Local Volunteering Rate 2006-2022

	Dependent variable:		
	Change in Local Volunteering Rate		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Volunteering Rate 2006	-0.483***	-0.494***	-0.490***
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Population(Δ)	-0.013***	-0.013***	-0.013***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Age Dependency Ratio(Δ)	-0.110***	-0.113***	-0.113***
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Higher Education Rate(Δ)	0.063***	0.063***	0.061***
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Religious Rate(Δ)	0.149***	0.153***	0.152***
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Same Address Rate(Δ)	-0.093***	-0.094***	-0.095***
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Ethnicity other than Majority(Δ)	-0.092***	-0.099***	-0.097***
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Unemployment Rate(Δ)	0.008	0.008	0.007
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Town/village	-0.152	-0.486***	-0.407***
	(0.131)	(0.150)	(0.154)
Rurality(Distance to nearest city)	0.020***	0.019***	0.019***
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
FS:Retired(Δ)	0.037*	0.041*	0.039*
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.021)
FS:Preschool(Δ)	-0.040*	-0.042**	-0.043**
	(0.022)	(0.021)	(0.022)
FS:Early School(Δ)	-0.019	-0.017	-0.018
	(0.021)	(0.020)	(0.020)
FS:Pre-Adolescent(Δ)	0.004	0.005	0.005
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)
FS:Adult(Δ)	0.023	0.022	0.021

	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)
FS:Emptynest(Δ)	-0.029*	-0.028*	-0.030*
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
FS:Pre Family(Δ)	-0.030*	-0.029	-0.030*
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
CLLD Group Office		-0.940*	-0.817
		(0.515)	(0.515)
CLLD funding per capita(log)		0.137***	
		(0.025)	
Non-CLLD funding per capita(log)		0.010	
		(0.029)	
CLLD funding only			0.609***
			(0.133)
Non-CLLD Funding only			0.240
			(0.353)
Both CLLD and Non-CLLD Funding			0.624***
			(0.177)
Observations	2,886	2,886	2,886
R^2	0.285	0.295	0.292
Adjusted R^2	0.274	0.283	0.280
F Statistic	66.717*** (df = 17; 2840)	59.215*** (df = 20; 2837)	55.630*** (df = 21; 2836)

Note: County Level Fixed Effects. *p**p***p<0.01

Figure 4: Propensity Score Matching Models Coefficient Plot



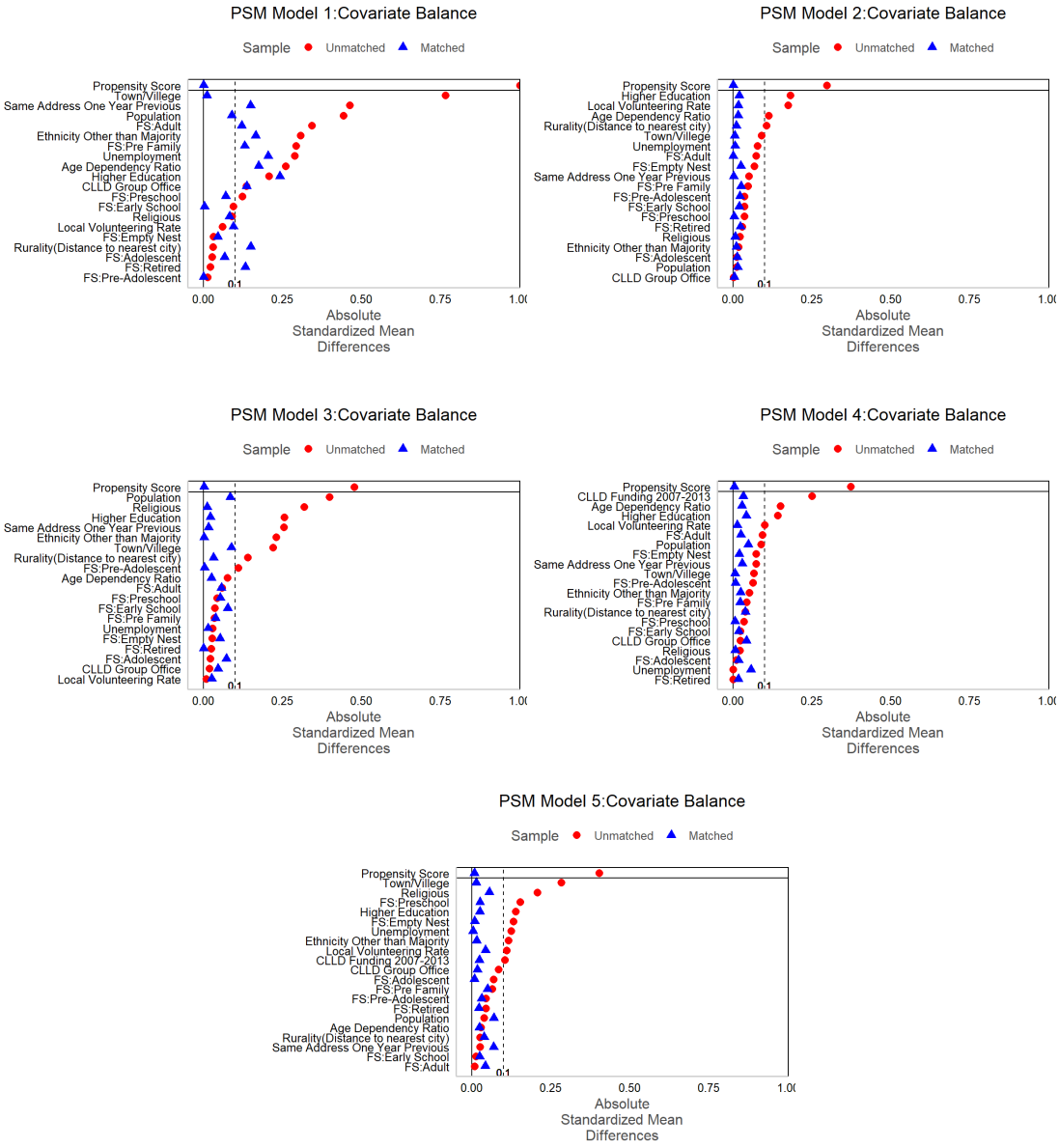
The second specification utilises propensity score matching in order to provide a stronger counterfactual framework to the analysis. Propensity score matching (PSM) attempts to estimate the causal effect of a binary treatment (such as an area treated with CLLD or non-CLLD funding) on the outcome. It does this through controlling for pre-treatment covariates of the outcome variable, in this case the change in the volunteering rate between 2006 and 2022 based on covariates of volunteering in 2006. Two groups are created, with an adequate covariate balance between the treatment and control group. Treatments in this analysis are whether or not an electoral division has received funding from CLLD sources, Non-CLLD sources or one of these sources in isolation. Results are more robust to model misspecification and estimate the average treatment effect in the treated (ATT) of the exposure to CLLD funding. The average marginal effect on the local volunteering rate in 2022 was estimated using full matching on the propensity score, where every treated unit is matched to at least one control unit and every control unit is matched to at least one treated unit. A probit link was used for the propensity score model and covariates of volunteering were used based on the 2006 census, prior to exposure to rural development programs in 2007. These covariates of volunteering follow the previously discussed predictors of volunteering based on the literature, allowing for consistent data between census waves. A linear regression model with the change in the volunteering rate between 2006 and 2022 as the outcome variable was used, incorporating the treatment, covariates, their interaction and full matching weights in the estimation. Multiple models were used and listed here for the sake of transparency relating to the various interpretations of what can be considered the treatment effect, the coefficient plot for all PSM models can be seen in Figure 4. Firstly, the 'treatment' of whether an area had ever received funding from CLLD sources was tested. This model found significant positive results of exposure to CLLD programs (ATT=0.536, SE=0.183, p=0.00401) but covariate balance

was not below 0.1, which is commonly accepted as a cut-off for adequate balance. The selection of this treatment also suffers from significant correlation between areas that receive some CLLD funding and some non-CLLD funding. In order to better delineate the effect of each form of rural development funding, it is required to isolate the effects of each. The second and third models achieve this. Model 2 estimates the treatment effect for areas that had received funding from CLLD sources only, and none from non-CLLD sources, finding significant positive effects of exposure to CLLD funding in isolation (ATT=0.41, SE=0.133, p=0.00196). A similar treatment of exposure to non-CLLD funding only did not find any significant results (ATT= -0.247, SE=0.313 , p=0.431). Finally, to account more accurately for the timeframe, exposure to CLLD funding only after 2015 was considered as the treatment effect in Model 4, controlling for total funding obtained in the preceding period. This also finds a significant positive effect (ATT=0.289, SE=0.146, p=0.0482) and no such effect for a similar analysis that uses exposure to non-CLLD funding after 2015 (ATT=-0.041, SE=0.209, p=0.844). All models except for the first model had a standardised mean difference for the covariates of <0.1, suggesting adequate balance between groups, which can be seen in Figures 5. The results of the first specification suggest that exposure to CLLD funding positively influences changes in the local volunteering rate. A statistically significant positive effect is observed for CLLD funding on its own, whereas no such effect is found for non-CLLD funding when considered independently. The effect size is approximately half of one percentage point increase, with a range stretching from 0.41 to 0.526 depending on how treatment exposure is interpretated. This is less than, but similar to the results found in specification 1.

All models are consistent following robustness checks and sensitivity analysis. Estimates are consistent following doubly robust estimation and moderately robust to unobserved confounders as results remain statistically significant for Gamma values ~ 2 using a rosenbaum sensitivity test. Bootstrapping each model over 1000 iterations yields

robust standard errors with results remaining within the 95% confidence interval and a bias value close to zero.

Figure 5: Propensity Score Matching Balance Visualisation



Discussion

This paper makes the case for an alternative approach to evaluation of Community Led Local Development in Europe, and participatory development approaches in general. It identifies commonalities in participatory rural development research within and outside

the EU, outlines four main methodological challenges that must be addressed before proposing a method to do so using simple quantitative and geospatial techniques that are easily applied to other contexts.

Previous research that investigates improvements in social capital though CLLD in Europe have generally had a case study approach, qualitative methods, or a proposal for network analysis at local level. While these approaches have merit in understanding the dynamics of CLLD at local level, they are not generalisable to a national or regional scale, are subject to a number of methodological pitfalls affecting research in participatory development and would be highly costly/unfeasible to reproduce at scale on a European level. The European Court of Auditors reports consistently argues that perceived benefits of social capital through CLLD has not been demonstrated despite commitments by the European Commission to do so (European Court of Auditors, 2010, 2022). Research relating to participatory development outside of Europe, especially in the case of the World Bank, where methods are more advanced, also does not find any empirical evidence of the impact of participatory development on social capital (Casey, 2018; Wong and Guggenheim, 2018).

The data and methods outlined in this paper utilise newly developed approaches to assessments of CLLD at a micro-level and a highly granular indicator of social capital, the local volunteering rate, made possible by recent additions to census data in Ireland. These two new developments in data allow for the use of large scale quantitative assessments of CLLD investments in an EU member state. It also allows for an assessment over a longer-term time horizon of 15 years, significantly longer than current single program evaluations. The results find a significant and substantial association of CLLD investments in a local area on the volunteering rate in 2022, even after controlling for other major determinants of factors affecting volunteering. Secondly, by utilising a one-off

question asked in the 2006 census, it calculates the change in the local volunteering rate between 2006 and 2022 and again finds an association between this change and CLLD funding between 2007 and 2022. Notably, no effect on the change in the volunteering rate is found for non-CLLD rural development funding. The practical relevance of these effects is that every 10% rise in funding per capita from CLLD sources is associated with a 1.37 percentage point change in the local volunteering rate from its 2006 baseline rate. When CLLD exposure is measured as a binary variable, areas with CLLD funding only are associated with a 0.609 increase in the local volunteering rate. Finally, using propensity score matching to estimate the causal effect of exposure to CLLD funding, controlling for pre-treatment covariates, a significant positive effect is found for CLLD exposure of between 0.41 to 0.526 percentage point increase in the local volunteering rate across multiple models, which is similar to the regression results. No such effect is found for non-CLLD exposure in isolation or after controlling for CLLD exposure in the preceding timeframe. This is significant evidence that Community Led Local Development schemes do have a positive association with social capital, as measured through increases in the local volunteering rate. Notably, this association is either lower or non-existent for non-CLLD schemes in this analysis. These findings support the theoretical arguments that CLLD supports improved social capital in rural areas of Europe and one of the justifications for participative development programs in general.

There are some limitations to the use of project level data and a more quantitative approach. While generally accurate, errors in data input and recording mean that geocoded projects are not always allocated to the correct co-ordinates. This is especially true in the case of projects that while having one address, may impact a wider area. Inaccuracies of this type are generally easy to identify and adjust for due to the non-local nature of project names. The data collected and analysed in the following section was never intended to be geocoded and as such, it sometimes lacks accurate address data. This limitation has largely

been overcome through extensive data cleaning and collaboration with local project implementers in this instance but could easily be overcome through better data collection guidelines at European or member state level. This project-level data has already been used to contribute to knowledge in 13 local development territories in Ireland (approximately 30% of landmass) as part of the national bid for implementation of the 2023-2027 LEADER program's Local Development Strategies which forms part of the national CAP strategic plan. This involved close collaboration with those working at a grassroots level to validate and contribute to the mapping, identification of trends and arguments for the targeting of certain areas under subsequent rounds of EU funding. It also significantly adds to the validity of this approach by successfully cross referencing with those who have a detailed local knowledge of community development in that area. This type of analysis has enhanced scope for further expansion through improvements in data requirements at national level, combinations with other administrative data such as political or survey data and crucially, cross-national comparative research, of which there is almost no quantitative evidence of this type for CLLD in Europe. These future developments can contribute towards application of improved methods for evaluation of Participatory Development in the EU such as matching methods, counterfactual analyses and natural experiments.

While these estimates are an empirical demonstration of the association, and quasi-experimental evidence, between participatory development and social capital, they are also a starting point for more advanced analysis. This paper displays the methodological relevance of project-level data, linking individual rural development projects geocoded at a micro scale to other administrative data. In doing so, it overcomes the current methodological challenges affecting assessments of participative development as identified in the literature relating to World Bank schemes but also relevant to the European Union rural development context by allowing observation of within territory variation, comparison with non-participative development schemes, and an assessment of effects

over the longer term. Further data collection advancements, geospatial and econometric techniques can be applied to this data and to data collected in a different national context. These advancements are critical to inform a better understanding of European Union Rural Development funding, which despite the significant amount of funding invested, very little is known about its actual effectiveness.

Conclusion

This chapter has contributed to several disparate areas in rural development, linking World Bank and EU literature, highlighting methodological limitations common to both and presenting principles for advancements in data and evaluation methods. In doing so, it does find an effect on one measure of social capital, local volunteering, from participatory development interventions. These are important advancements that provide for the first time, robust evidence of an association between social capital and participatory development using a low-cost method that can be generalised, allowing for more rigorous evaluation methods.

However, it also develops parallels drawn between Fergusons' Anti-Politics critique where social capital is understood as a point of entry for the depoliticalizing effect of the development apparatus similar to the effect of 'poverty reduction'. In a deviation from Ferguson's argument, this chapter has shown that through advancements in the data and methods used, it may be possible to establish that an effect *does* exist between a claimed effect of a participatory development approach and its actual effect. While improved social capital might be previously poorly supported in the literature, this may be a feature of the weak evaluative approaches or definitions used which can be overcome. This evidence serves to justify the use of social capital as a continued output of participatory rural development. Importantly, evidence is only shown for one measure of social capital in one country, but through assessment of the generalised methodological challenges and data

requirements, the argument has been developed to allow for applicability in other member states and outside Europe. Further cross-national research using the principles laid out here is required to demonstrate the role of social capital in CLLD, and participatory development more widely.

Chapter 3: The Anti-Politics of Irish Rural Development: Political Determinants of funding

Abstract

Despite extensive policy literature on EU rural development programs, they have failed to incorporate the equally extensive academic literature that is more critical of how the program operates in reality, and its relationship to domestic politics. While this disconnect is often attributed to a failure to translate academic findings into policy or bureaucratic inertia, I make the argument that Ferguson's *Anti-Politics Machine* (1994) is critical to understanding the gap between European policy goals and implementation not only in less developed countries but also for rural development in the EU. I trace Ferguson's argument relating to centralisation of control of rural development in Lesotho and apply it to the EU LEADER program and domestic rural development schemes in Ireland. Through an in-depth theoretical analysis of Ferguson, I identify corresponding practices of bureaucratisation and depoliticalisation of rural challenges in Ireland. Secondly, I support the argument that rural development has an extensive political component in reality with empirical evidence linking electoral data and a unique dataset on rural development projects in Ireland between 2007 and 2024 totalling €1.34 Billion in value across ~19,000 individual projects. It finds evidence of associations between allocations of domestic rural development funding and the ruling party's electoral outcomes at local, ministerial, and national levels. Importantly, it can differentiate between domestic and EU funding which have different mechanisms of allocating funding, In doing so it raises legitimate questions about how the structure of EU programs were used by national actors to re-centralise power over rural development. It concludes that an implication of the failure to connect theory and practice undermines the intended goal of bringing Europe closer to its citizens.

Introduction

The concept of Development has been and continues to be subject to significant criticism as an outdated Eurocentric idea with colonial origins that western governments, international agencies and NGO's apply to the Global South (Escobar, 1995; Ziai, 2013). The debate surrounding the role of development remains an unresolved issue in anthropological literature (Li, 2007; Korf, 2022; Obeng-Odoom, 2023). The simplified premise is that development assumes that less developed countries, labelled as such in relation to Europe and North America both should and can develop in a similar way, using many of the same practices and interventions designed by the West, despite the difference in time and circumstances when these countries were at comparable levels of economic and social development. Less developed countries are constructed as such, despite inaccuracies, through the use of 'development discourse'[1], or simply the literature and policy that is used by development planners and practitioners to justify particular interventions or projects. The accepted discourse is an outcome of the acceptable ideas that development consultants, policy planners and academic advisors are aware of which makes their work useful to the 'development' industry (Ferguson, 1994,p.28). Importantly, development discourse remains overtly apolitical and avoids commenting on controversial or conflictual problems.

However, almost all of these critiques are focused on the relationship between the Less Developed Country (LDC) and Europe, North America, and international agencies under their remit such as the World Bank. There has been little critical use in applying a similar argument to development within western countries, or within member states of the European Union. In a similar manner that Less Developed Countries can be constructed, through suitable 'development discourse', as backward, agrarian, not connected to the

[1] A note on syntax: Through The Anti-Politics Machine, Ferguson refers to 'development' through quotation marks to identify it as the dominant problematic concept that he seeks to be critical of. I have chosen to maintain a similar format for emphasis in a small number of examples.

international economy, and at an earlier stage of economic or social development - rural areas within developed countries can be also. This construction of a particular view of rural areas can provide a justification for rural development, where like LDC's developing in a similar manner to the Global North, rural areas are to develop so that their economic development converges on urban, central areas - a very basic tenet of European cohesion funds dating to the founding treaties of the European Union. *"In particular, the Union shall aim at reducing disparities between the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least favoured regions. Among the regions concerned, particular attention shall be paid to rural areas, areas affected by industrial transition, and regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps…"* (European Union, 2016). However, If rurality is constructed in this manner, and similar 'development discourse' applied – it must be asked what are the consequences of this? What are the other, or unintended, effects that are apparent even if economic convergence isn't forthcoming? These are the same questions asked by James Ferguson in one of the most influential critiques of the rural development sector, and international development practice more generally in the *Anti-Politics Machine* (1994). He makes the argument that by framing interventions as purely technical and neutral solutions, development programs can strip away their political dimensions, with the consequence of depoliticizing actions that are inherently political. I ask are Ferguson's criticisms of development in LDC's and the Global South, also valid for rural development in western countries?

This chapter explores the connection between the critical development literature and relates it to Irish rural policy in the modern day. It traces James Ferguson's argument on the unintended, other effects of development programs in Lesotho and applies a similar tracing to the same effects that can be observed in the Irish context drawing on literature and extensive on-the-ground knowledge of the program. Firstly, I show how control of rural development came to be centralised under government control using the same

organisational structures initially constructed to be independent of political interference. In relation to the effects identified by Ferguson, I show how development projects came to be **used by the ruling political party in both examples to further their own political goals, but also achieving these politically sensitive goals under the guise of neutral, technocratic rural development interventions**. Taken together, these two unintended effects; **expansion of bureaucratic state power and depoliticalisation of rural development are two instrumental effects of rural development programs.** They are instrumental in that these are never the explicit or intended stated goal of development interventions but rather a product of the processes of how development programs function. This functioning arises out of a particular construction of rural areas and the perceived influence of state intervention, purposely ignorant of any critical or divergent information that would complicate simple, uncontroversial technical solutions to the technical problems identified. These two instrumental effects identified by Ferguson constitute the '*Anti-Politics Machine'* and can be observed in both his example of Lesotho, and, I argue, in Ireland in the present day. **The use of the 'discourse of development' allows inherently political decisions – such as the choice of who benefits from investment funding and who is publicly acknowledged to be responsible – to appear apolitical when framed in technocratic, rural development related terminology.** Secondly, it seeks to provide empirical evidence of this argument by comparing different styles of development programs across time, linking electoral data and a unique dataset on rural development projects in Ireland between 2007 and 2024 totalling €1.34 Billion in domestic and EU funds across ~19,000 individual projects. It finds **evidence that areas with greater vote share or a member of parliament for the ruling party are associated with higher allocations of domestic rural development funding.** It also finds evidence of local favouritism shown to areas under the influence of the relevant government minister. Importantly, it can differentiate between these

associations both before and after relevant reforms, commenting on the difference in the mechanism of funding allocation between domestic and EU rural development schemes. In doing so, it raises questions relating to the legitimacy of EU funds and how domestic governments seek to circumvent their influence. This has implications for what this may mean for the ability of EU rural development funds to ameliorate political discontent in left-behind areas of Europe, increasingly an overt goal of EU cohesion policy in the current political climate (European Commission, 2025).

The following background section will present an extended theoretical argument that traces Ferguson's treatment of the reforms relating to the Thaba-Tseka Development program in Lesotho in the *Anti-Politics Machine* to the reforms relating to the rural development sector, and particular the LEADER program in Ireland. Section 3 will provide a brief description of the data sources and methods applied while Section 4 outlines results. The chapter concludes with an extended discussion of the argument that a corresponding *Anti-Politics* (1994*)* process can explain much of recent developments in Irish rural development, and potentially can be applied to other EU member states.

Theory/Background

James Ferguson's *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* is a criticism of the rural development industry in Lesotho and remains an important text (~12,000 citations) for understanding rural, and development more broadly (Ferguson, 1994). Ferguson confronted the controversy that despite widespread attempts and investment in rural development in Lesotho and other African countries, there appeared to be limited success (Williams in :Heyer, Roberts and Williams, 1981). He explains the persistence of these programmes through a Foucauldian analysis that outlines the un-recognised relationship between planned interventions in rural areas and the

unintended outcomes that they produce. Development interventions produce what appear to be a particular set of 'side-effects' that, when assessed using Ferguson's perspective, are actually unintended instrumental effects *produced* by the development apparatus. Ferguson argues that an instrumental effect of the development industry both expands a particular type of bureaucratic state power while at the same time, depoliticalizing what are sensitive political interventions. Ferguson makes this argument through an in-depth analysis of documentation and interviews of development practitioners, local politicians and local people regarding the Thaba-Tseka Project in rural Lesotho between 1975-1984. This section traces Ferguson's argument relating to Lesotho and applies it to the EU LEADER program and domestic rural development schemes in Ireland in the modern day.

1) Key Premise of 'Governmentality'

Ferguson lays out a conceptual apparatus that 'development' discourse relies on, one of which being 'Governmentality'. This is the assumption that the primary features of the economy/society are under the control of the national government and respond to planners blueprints (Ferguson, 1994, p.72). The relevance of this assumption is that analyses that support the idea of the state as a neutral body to implement policy are most useful as they, in theory, support the idea that an area is responsive to 'Development' planning and interventions. Analyses that don't do those this are at best unhelpful and therefore banished, especially if they raise issues that are politically difficult or conflictual, or outside the control of the nation state. In Lesotho, this involved the construction of a view of the country as an agrarian subsistence economy with limited access to markets. Conveniently, this is an idea that is easily solved by neutral, technical interventions, such as roadbuilding and the encourage of farmers to export livestock. It completely ignores the very real and long term access to markets in Lesotho, that existed prior to the existence

of the state and the delicate context of migratory wage labour across the border in neighbouring South Africa. These facts are both unhelpful because they directly identify the role of domestic constraints and international influences, highlighting an area that development planners are relatively powerless to do anything about unless they were to acquire a political stance. Therefore, the rural development idea that forms through the 'development discourse' is a standardised, exportable package found across disparate national contexts implemented by a small pool of experts; devoid of any contextualised challenges of any particular place. This allows for the identification of technical problems for the purposes of providing technical politically neutral solutions to them.

In Irish rural development, similar unhelpful analyses or ideas are banished, the premise of 'Governmentality' is intrinsic to development planning and technical, apparently politically neutral problems and solutions are prioritised. It is relatively easy to develop funding proposals and grant applications to fund a carefully pre-defined set of **uncontentious ideas such as a community centre, playground or sports facility but other ideas such as rural housing affordability, public infrastructure or rural out migration are not.** Ineligible activities are explicitly ruled out in the operating of programs and include agriculture, horticulture, forestry, fisheries, retail operations, training, schools, research bodies, vehicles, childcare, healthcare, elderly care, housing, and "*anything that normally comes within the remit of Local Authorities and/or is included in the development plan of [Local Government]"* (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2019). This leads to scenarios where much needed ideas such as 'Rural Infrastructure' headline a fundable category but only within the set of eligible criteria and tightly defined to relate to community, training, social/cultural or recreation. Despite this sub-theme focusing on "*improving access to basic services for people living in rural and remote areas and groups who are at risk of social exclusion*" which "*might involve the introduction of a new service or the re-introduction of a previously withdrawn service*", the eligibility criteria of excluding anything that is or is planned

to be under the remit of local government renders this characterisation largely meaningless. (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2019,p.13). **Conflictual political problems of rural areas never factor into the box of possibilities for what a rural development project looks like or can be. This is especially the case when project ideas are explicitly deemed ineligible precisely because of the political fact that these areas fall under the remit of another, more important government department.**[2] The most useful analyses ignore politics completely, failing to consider any effect of party politics on government policy.

In Ireland, obvious political fact are not referred to in 'Development' planning. Nowhere in the National Rural Development Plan (Government of Ireland, 2021) is the political challenge of simultaneously announcing €1 Billion for rural areas is the acknowledgment of how exactly this allocation will be divided in a political system that prioritises localism and candidate based voting (Marsh, 2008). Also overlooked is the question of why and when this 'Department of Rural Development' was established. It came into existence as a full Ministry in 2017, immediately following widespread political losses made by the ruling party in the 2016 general election, particularly in rural areas due to the perception of a two-tier economy and rural areas being 'left behind' (Halpin, 2016). These political factors are not unlike the identification by Ferguson that the Thaba-Tseka Development Project (TTDP) represented a political gesture to mountain areas following the 1970 elections. The Lesotho government knew it's political base was weak in these areas and would be enhanced by the creation of a new administration district and publicity of the programs' projects (Ferguson, 1994,p.246).

[2] This was apparent in the category of 'Rural Broadband', another sub-category of rural infrastructure. While an exciting idea when developed by the Department of Rural and Community Development and included in the initial policy planning, the more senior Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment quickly developed an encompassing definition that effectively meant that this fundable category came to mean in reality just the purchase of computers and in-building Wi-Fi boosters to a maximum of €10,000 (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2019,p.181).

'Development Discourse' does not acknowledge these unhelpful political facts that undermine the premise of 'Governmentality', and fails to acknowledge that governmental decisions are always an exercise of power. Instead, a de-political conception of the state prevails, with bureaucracy as an ostensibly neutral vehicle of community development that is often attributed to a lack of understanding, organisational inefficiency, or just incompetence. Ferguson demonstrates this through the changes in a particular development program in Lesotho that came to be absorbed into the state. I trace a similar process in Ireland that likewise, centralised control of rural development back under government influence. The significant differences between the context of Lesotho and EU member states such as Ireland must be acknowledged in terms of per capita GDP, rule of law, trust, democratic accountability and institutional quality. However, I contend that the broad contribution of the application of Ferguson to European rural development is relevant due to similarities in development discourse. Ferguson argues that generalisation is possible due to the standardisation of development interventions, discourse and expertise regardless of a country's context and particularly with regards to the premise of governmentality. Speaking in terms of Tanzania and Zimbabwe, Ferguson outlines how development interventions are "*remarkably uniform and standardised from place to place", "implemented by a relatively small, interlocked network of experts*" and *"part of a standard discursive practice associated with development in a broad range of contexts"* (Ferguson, 1994,p.257-260). These are all common to European formulations and construction of rural areas as less developed that can be helped by a broad standard package of interventions that can be applied in divergent national contexts by a specialised sector of rural development experts and consultants.

2) <u>'Decentralisation and Integration'</u>

The Thaba-Tseka Development Project (TTDP) in Lesotho was selected by Ferguson to demonstrate a more general argument about development programs and their relationship to the state, it being one of countless rural development program's affecting Lesotho and similar countries at that time. Ferguson's treatment of it was concerned primarily with establishing a connection between his theoretical construct of 'development' and actual implementation. The project had two distinct periods, Phase 1 (1975-1978) and Phase 2 (1978 – 1984). It arose following a joint mission of the FAO/World Bank to the Maseru district in Lesotho in 1974. Funding of approximately $15 Million USD (approximately $100 Million USD in current prices) was agreed in 1975, contributed primarily by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the World Bank. **I also take a particular program by an outside organisation as a demonstration of the parallel argument to Ferguson in the case of Ireland in current times. The LEADER program is a European Union Rural Development program**, arising in the early 1990's as a new approach to rural development, moving away from a narrow sectoral focus on agricultural subsidies to factor in the wider rural community. It was influenced by European Union policy documents at the time, especially '*The Future of Rural Society'* and the '*Cork Declaration*' (European Commission, 1988; Cork Declaration, 1996). It is implemented in every member state and to date, an estimated €25 billion has been spent through the program across Europe (European Court of Auditors, 2022,p.10). In Ireland, an early adapter of the scheme, a LEADER program of some form has been in existence since 1991. Like the TTDP, it is an area-based, integrated rural development program with an emphasis on bottom-up 'Community Led Local Development' by local groups, **similar to the TTDP's Village Development Committees. It shares many theoretical arguments and empirical challenges/goals of the World Banks 'Community Driven Development'** (See Chapter 2). It has had multiple phases which are now generally aligned with the seven year EU budgeting period.

For the purposes of is argument, I am concerned with the changes between the period before 2013 and the 2014-2020 period in Ireland as an equivalent to Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the TTDP.

In order to illustrate Ferguson's argument, some organisational context is required. In phase 1, the TTDP had a *"clear, well-defined place within the Government of Lesotho state apparatus: it was an area-based development project within the Ministry of Agriculture. Like other area-based projects before it, the Thaba-Tseka Project did not fall into any one of the Ministry of Agriculture's divisions, but was treated as a separate division of its own, under the direct supervision of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry. Funding from donors came through the Treasury to the Ministry of Agriculture, from where it was then passed on to the project. During this phase, there was little contact with other Government Ministries".* (Ferguson, 1994,p.195) The programme was led by the 'Project Director' who also sat on a 'Project Coordinating Committee' with the permanent secretaries of the Ministries of Finance, Interior, Works and Agriculture. Below the Project Director were project staff.

For the TTDP, the Project Director, drawing on the desire that the central government had to establish a new administrative district in Thaba-Tseka proposed that the TTDP, then the most significant government presence in that area, serve as model for district administration and development as an 'Integrated Rural Development' Program. It was to 'Integrate' the activities of multiple Ministries – Agriculture, Works, Rural Development, Education and Health – under the umbrella of the project co-ordinating activities in a decentralised administrative structure (Ferguson, 1994,p.197). Therein lies the two key features of this model, 'Integration' of former competences of the Ministries as a division of the TTDP, and 'decentralisation' where policy/plans were formulated at the district level, not nationally. Arguments that supported this new approach included the creation of a system better in touch with the needs of local people from which an advisory

body of elected and appointed personnel was established – the '*District Development Committee'* (DDC). Efficiency was also argued for, avoiding duplication of multiple Ministries on specific tasks. Unofficially, Ferguson identifies the unwritten idea in support of the changes was also the **avoidance of bureaucracy in Maseru, the district capital** where '*delays of many months and even years regularly handicap local government operations. If all the district funds were forwarded directly to the district administration each year, no one would be left waiting for funds or approval from Maseru'* (Ferguson, 1994,p.199). These arguments found support among the original TTDP Co-Ordinating Committee who officially approved and evaluated this as a successful change in 1979.

The LEADER program in Ireland initially also had a relatively simplified position with the Department of Agriculture. Funding came directly from Brussels through the Department and then forwarded to the program implementers in each local area, known as 'Local Action Groups' (LAG), bypassing local government entirely. The program in each area was led by the LAG CEO/Manager who dealt directly with the Department of Agriculture as was the program's intention – to be led locally by local people in their areas. Ideas relating to 'Integrated Rural Development' (IRD) increasingly came to the fore in Europe throughout the 1980's, with pilot schemes launched in the mid 1980's in select mediterranean regions (Garofoli, 1992; Thomson and Psaltopoulos, 2008) and in Ireland in 1988 (O'Malley, 1993). IRD formed a key part of documents that influenced the creation of the LEADER program, particularly *The Future of Rural Society;*

"*All the schemes must dovetail into an overall development logic. Thus it is here that the integrated rural development programmes launched in connection with the reform of the Funds will be needed to ensure that the initiatives taken are properly related to each other.*" (European Commission, 1988,p.8).

Similar to the TTDP, the evolution of the ideas of 'Integration' and 'Decentralisation' came to be institutionalised in the seven key principles of a program called LEADER. Specifically Principle 3 (Local Partnership) which relates to local decision making and

Principle 4 (Integrated and multi-sectoral strategy). The degree to which these principles came to be witnessed depends on which member state and time period under consideration but in the case of Ireland, they were generally successfully reflected in the structure of the program prior to 2014 (Cawley, 2009). In Ireland under the LEADER programme, the 'Integration' and 'Decentralization' of rural development did not directly involve placing the resources and staff of a Government Ministry under the control of a local development project or creating a new administrative district, nor could it have, given its nature as a European Union initiative. However, it **provided local action groups (LAGs) with the *resources to pursue* a broader range of development projects** based on a self-designed Local Development Strategy. This means that many areas outside of what would have formerly been understood as traditional rural development projects could be pursued. Ostensibly, these could influence any aspect of rural life and importantly included what could formerly be **understood as a remit of another unrelated Government Department** such as rural public transport, childcare, job creation or environmental supports. As long as they fit a Local Development Strategy, designed by the LAG and local communities without the direct input of Government or under the control of elected representatives, they generally could be pursued. In some LEADER areas, depending on the ability of the LAG staff, local resources and volunteers, integration was highly successful with some arguing that they could be a feasible replacement for municipal government(O'Keeffe, 2009). This was not to be the case in Lesotho.

3) Resistance

Resistance to the planned Integrated Rural Development Program in Lesotho was swift as Government Ministries immediately refused to integrate their budgets or cede control of their staff to the program in a perhaps predictable development. Reforms were proposed to the now problematised 'Canadian project', particularly with reference to the creation of a 'District Coordinator' (DC). This reform was publicized by the Government of Lesotho as part of wider decentralisation reforms in 1980, replacing the older 'District Administrator' post. However, the new post had an explicitly higher rank as the most senior government official in the district, directly reporting to the Senior Permanent Secretary in the civil service and even the Prime Minister himself, bypassing the various ministries involved. Those direct links made it much more possible for Cabinet to have knowledge of, and control of developments in the district. Ferguson outlines those two 'centralising effects' in the 'decentralisation' reform; (1) power within the district was centralised with the District Coordinator (DC) and (2) the power of cabinet was enhanced through the ability of the District Coordinator (DC) to directly report to it. The role of the Thaba-Tseka Coordinating Committee (TTCC) and Project Director were left unclear in this reform and the 'structural ambiguity' regarding interpretation of responsibilities was seized upon by the new DC who 'immediately perceived the program as a threat' and set about controlling it. Older tensions such as integrated budgeting or conflict between Ministries and the program resurfaced, however, this time the DC had effectively the final say in how to interpret the bureaucratic 'structural ambiguity' of the organisational structure designed. Unsurprising, they often sided with the Ministries, backed by central government to the loss of the program (Ferguson, 1994,pp.207-209). Formerly 'integrated' areas such as health, works, water, or education detached from the TT Development Project (TTDP) and reverted to reporting directly to central government or the new DC.

After much delay, and as the Programme Director became increasingly ineffective in implementing any of the programs original plans, he resigned in late 1981. This led to an evaluation by the CIDA and revision that effectively removed all focus on 'integration', hard quantifiable targets were dropped, mentions of non-agricultural developments removed and the TTDP reverted to a short term agricultural development project with no relationship to any ministry outside of Agriculture. It was to be subsumed into the Government of Lesotho structure by a clearly defined end of project timeline of March 1984. It was not to be the basis of an integrated, decentralised district administration and by 1984, came to be absorbed completely into the Ministry of Agriculture.

I make the argument that a similar resistance by the state is witnessed in the reform of local government in 2014 in Ireland, particularly with reference to the role of rural development in government administration. Unlike Lesotho, resistance was not immediate but can be understood as part of a longer term trend since ideas such as integrated rural development and direct local control gained popularity in the early 1990's. The difference in the Irish case is that, these ideas were initially successful - at least for a period. It is necessary to take a longer term perspective in order to understand the opposition to integrated rural development, or autonomous, decentralised rural development organisations in the Irish context. Writing in 1988, an Irish journalist covering European affairs and author of one of the most influential commentaries on modern rural Ireland, 'Death of an Irish Town' (1988), John Healy neatly summarised the coming challenge of the 1990's regarding the reform of European Union Structural Funds away from agricultural price supports.

"*in the early eighties..[Brussels] had already diagnosed the problem. The funds were not getting down to the poorer grassroot regions and they called a Conference in Strasbourg of local authorities, city councils, regional councils and Government planners. Ireland had no Government minister there, none of our planning people. I was, myself the only Irish newsman to cover the conference…All were given the message by the Regional Commissioner that they had no option but to* ***fight for greater autonomy for the regions****… National Governments were controlling the funds voted by Europe for development of the*

regions. If the Eurocrats wanted growth in the regions, the regional planners must have direct access to the Brussels bureaucracy and the bureaucracy must be able to vote funds direct to the regions for approved projects, or what we have since call come to call "Integrated Development Programmes." (Healy, 1988,p.101)

"It is imperative then that monies from the funding system for the regional development programmes come direct to the planners in rural Ireland instead of being held in Dublin for laundering purposes. ***For if we allow the centralising*** *of the Social and Regional Fund monies in Dublin in the exchequer,* ***we will*** *have* ***centralised real power to a far greater extent that it exists as of now.*** *To me it is going to be THE political issue of the coming decade*" (Healy, 1988,pp103-104, emphasis in original)

In much the same way that proposals for integrated development and local autonomy sought to bypass the Maseru bureaucracy, the European Union's regional funds arguably had this same intention. For a time, perhaps due to the scale of available funding or the limited state capacity in a less economically developed Ireland, the approach gained considerable traction. Autonomous rural development companies, or LEADER partnerships as they were informally known were established across Ireland, local decision making was allowed for and integrated rural development programs sprang up in response to direct EU tenders and applications for funding. This led to a successful uptake of the rural civil society activism and community development approaches, which was regarded as particularly successful in a European context (O Cearbhaill and O'Reilly, 1997; Moseley, Cherrett and Cawley, 2001). However, as these groups flourished, becoming more codified with distinct non-overlapping areas of operation with borders different to that of local government, they soon came to be seen as threat (Callanan, 2003). One former elected member of local government recounted that when the EU LEADER program was first established in their electoral area, all elected members were summoned to a meeting with the County Manager (the most senior executive officer of that local government). The County Manager extolled the danger of the EU program and how it is a direct challenge to local government in Ireland, citing the democratic deficit and control by Europe.

"The partnerships enjoyed considerable independence from the local authorities. In fact, it could be said that the LEADER partnerships compensated for the absence of governmental structures below the level of the county, in Ireland. Gradually, however, measures were introduced to bring them within the oversight

of the local authorities, beginning in the late 1990s during which time local government reform was also taking place." (Cawley, 2016,p.39)

Initially managed by the Department of Agriculture, increased oversight came to be established at each programming renewal with responsibility for LEADER transferring to a newly established 'Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs' in 2002 which was later abolished. In 2011, this responsibility passed to the 'Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government' which added considerable delays to the program start date amidst increasing bureaucracy (Cawley, 2016). The movement of responsibility to Ministries with responsibilities for local government also allowed for a review of the structure of rural development groups. A newly established *Local Government/Local Development Alignment Steering Group* was quick to highlight the lack of input that local government authorities had in the LEADER partnerships, the lack of strategic decision making with respect to local government plans and possible efficiencies that could be gained such as sharing offices. It suggested an *integration* of the of partnerships and local authorities (Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, 2012a). Many of these proposals were incorporated into the '*Action Plan for More Effective Local Government*' (Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, 2012b) and given legal status with '*The Local Government Reform Act of 1 June 2014'* (Government of Ireland, 2014).

The Local Government Reform Act established *Local Community Development Committees* (LCDC) in each local authority with a statutory responsibility for 'improving the coordination of community and rural development programmes, comprised of public and private sector representatives. It was widely publicized by the Government as a long-needed reform and an improvement to the powers of local authorities based on the fact that they would now control up to 30% of their tax take instead of the present none at all (Hogan, 2014). It could also be politically justified given the need for public savings in the

aftermath of the banking bailout and austerity program of 2010-2013. It is noteworthy that the reform had a level of 'structural ambiguity' not unlike the reform of the District Coordinator in Lesotho.

"The LCDCs have a very important role to play in the new system put in place in January 2014 and yet this research has uncovered a huge degree of uncertainty and confusion with regard to the role of LCDCs….It must not be underestimated how much potential power is being vested in the LCDCs. Whoever controls the LCDC has the potential to direct how Social Inclusion and Rural Development funding is dispensed throughout the county"

"It is clearly stated and enshrined in the Local Government Reform Act 2014 that the LCDC will be independent of the local authority in the discharge of its functions. However, little thought has been given to mechanisms to ensure that LCDCs will remain independent of the local authorities on which they rely for their funding and administrative support. If an LCDC is facilitated to the extent of having its meetings organised, its minutes taken and its agenda set by local authority executives, it will be challenging for an ordinary member of the LCDC to upset that status quo" (Rylands, O'Connor and Power, 2015)

In many, if not all cases – this is precisely what came to happen. **The administration of the LCDC as organised, agenda set and controlled by the Chief Executive Officer** of the local authority (local government) , which like the newly installed District Coordinators in Lesotho, could interpret their role in rural development in a manner now backed by a legal framework and what they understood as a superior position in relation to the formerly independent LEADER partnerships. This led to extensive tensions and legal challenges for the LEADER program in the period thereafter. LEADER partnerships were effectively installed underneath the LCDC's to administer the program on behalf of local government or face risk of closure. Their former autonomous role was constrained greatly by the increased 'coordination' by local authorities and financial arrangements that tied release of funds to real time auditing. LEADER partnerships were now aware that they were now subject to much greater central government oversight through the Chief Executives of local authorities co-ordination with the Ministry of Local Government. Strategies taken by LEADER partnerships varied from acquiescence to co-operative to conflictual but it was clear that their autonomy and power had been greatly centralised and constrained.

The position of local government in Ireland must also be acknowledged. It is exceptionally weak compared to European counterparts with a continued centralisation of its former areas of expertise over time such as the removal of tax-raising powers, control of water/sewerage, transport planning, education, planning law – which at various times have all been removed and centralised with national organisations. Ireland is routinely criticised by various European local government monitoring bodies such as The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities at the Council of Europe for its centralised governance structure.

*"However, the [Local Government Act 2001] grants the [*Department of Environment, Community and Local Government] (DECLG) *a major role in the oversight and policy formation in relation to local government activities and overall responsibility for financing local government, the promotion of local government legislation and the transposition of most EU law relating to local government……..."The Action Programme, although it praises decentralisation in spirit, does not provide massive concrete steps in that direction. The rapporteurs are concerned that some of the actual steps proposed may go in the opposite direction"* (Jaunsleinis and Yildiz, 2013, p.11, p.30)

In a follow on report ten years later published in 2023, the situation has not changed despite reforms with Ireland ranking only marginally higher than Moldova, Hungary and Russia on the 'Local Autonomy Index' modelled on the European Chater of Local Self Government (Association of Irish Local Government, 2023).

"Although new functions have been transferred to local authorities, local government is far from managing a substantial share of public affairs under its own responsibility. Despite decentralisation reforms since the previous monitoring report, the system remains essentially centralised… As the overview has shown, in many respects the position of local government is weaker in Ireland than in most other European countries. It has a more limited set of functions, represents a smaller share of public affairs, and can only marginally influence the size of its resources. The ***strong position of the chief executive*** *also limits the role of the elected representatives."* (Prebilič and Helgesen, 2023, p.12)

It is in this context that the wider ranging functions and competencies that **LEADER partnerships developed over time could arguably be said to have had a greater presence in rural area than the co-existing local government**. Unlike local authorities, they had access to significant sums of European funding with substantial

autonomy in how this could be spent, initiating a range of projects that the local government simply did not have the capacity to rival. The well-known irrelevance of Irish local government also lessens engagement as local citizens are less likely to contribute to local democracy if its functions and resources are controlled from above. The engagement that LEADER partnerships could stimulate, particularly in areas with a strong history of positive engagement with local communities was significantly higher than any consultation or engagement by local government (O'Keeffe, 2009). Not unlike Lesotho and the TTDP, for a government wishing to extend its presence in rural areas, the structure and models of integrated rural development programs were an obvious starting point.

The Local Government Reforms of 2014 did not just mean a centralisation of power in each local authority but paved the way for centralisation of rural development funding at national level. The LCDC structure that rubber stamped funding decisions relating to rural development funding also gave local authorities knowledge of how these programs operated, something that had never been under their core competencies before. As the 2010's progressed, and particularly after the 2016 general election which saw poor results for the government party, widely regarded as a result of a perception of a two-speed economic recovery between rural and urban areas (Halpin, 2016) - central government funding for rural development grew rapidly. A highly publicised "€1 Billion for Rural Ireland' was announced, a '*Department of Rural and Community Development'* was established as a full cabinet position, a national planning scheme, *Project Ireland 2040* was published, as well as an '*Action Plan for Rural Development'*, later developing into a dedicated rural development plan, '*Our Rural Future, Rural Development policy 2021-2025*'(Ring, 2018; Government of Ireland, 2021). At the same time, matched funded (where domestic governments could contribute to match or exceed the funding contributed from the EU budget) for EU schemes such as LEADER dropped by 41% (Cawley, 2016,p.45). A plethora of new programs were announced such as the 'Rural Regeneration and

Development Fund', 'Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme', 'Town and Village Renewal Scheme', 'Community Recognition Fund', 'Community Centre Investment Scheme' and so on. In application documentation, these schemes paid lip service to a community development approach similar to LEADER but in practice, **funding decisions are made centrally within the newly established Department of Rural and Community Development** with little details of the award rationale ever given[3]. Additionally, some schemes required that a local government body be the lead applicant, removing non-government bodies from even competing for funding rounds. In addition to this, LEADER partnerships faced bureaucratic deadlock in attempting to implement their programs[4] which was inaccurately blamed on ostensibly stringent European requirements. This understandably led to frustration on the part of community groups who were generally unaware of the nuances between EU and central government schemes or the complexity/bureaucracy of administration that had been newly imposed. Concurrently, central government schemes required a fraction of the paperwork in order to be approved, less eligibility criteria, and now had access to significantly higher sums of funding, leading to **many community groups favouring those schemes instead of the traditional LEADER approach**.

While it may seem ambitious to situate the 2014 local government reforms and centrally administered rural development policy as a response to the establishment of integrated rural development programs in the 1990's given the passage of time. There is ample precedent of similar agencies coming under pressure or being 'integrated' into an existing Government department. The most infamous example is the Combat Poverty

[3] At the launch of one of these schemes, Departmental officials cited the number of applications as the reason that 'internal scoring of projects' could not be released. The audience, career professionals in local development noted the irony that for much smaller sums of funding that they managed, the assessment criteria was required to be published in the minutes of all project documentation.

[4] It would be normal to be regularly be challenged by local authority staff with little knowledge of the program on minor issues such as inaccuracies of €0.01 (on projects of several hundred thousand euros), caused by the poorly designed IT system that we were required to use.

Agency, which similarly to the integrated development groups was established in 1986 as an independent statutory body to inform government on the need for, and plan for the incorporation of anti-poverty policy in national economic and social planning. Over successive governments, it came to do this role successfully, building a strong level of public trust and engagement as well as a vocal critic of government policy backed by research outputs (Irish Times, 2008; Carolan, 2023). However, following the economic downturn and political justification for the eradication of apparently duplicated publicly supported bodies, the Government announced that the agency would be 'integrated' in to the Department of Social Protection which widely criticised by opposition parties and anti-poverty campaigners (Combat Poverty Agency, 2009; O'Halloran, 2010). This ended the groups independence and ability to speak out against the government (O'Brien, 2009). Furthermore, the defunding of organisations in the community sphere who may ostensibly challenge government policy is emblematic of the Irish Government's longer term attitude to the third sector. In the early 2000's at the height of the economic boom, 50% funding cuts and warnings to voluntary and community agencies that their work was 'too political' were also pursued (Harvey, 2015).

Despite the substantial time that integrated rural development bodies were in existence and somewhat came to be a well-known institution in the state, it would be erroneous to believe that this meant they were accepted. Rather, the political possibility of their eradication was not always available and it is clear, particularly in the case of the Combat Poverty Agency that the Government could easily reverse their earlier decisions to establish 'independent' groups if they deemed that this independence was becoming a threat to their legitimacy or political survival.

4) Outcome

A significant amount of media and academic treatment of reforms in the Irish rural development sector focus on the issue of bureaucracy as simply a failure of organisation by the government (Ryan, 2010; Cadogan, 2012, 2013; Rylands, O'Connor and Power, 2015; Irish Examiner, 2017). Similarly, In Lesotho, those involved in the Thaba-Tseka Development Project always imagined that the "*Government somehow didn't understand the plan*" and "*sincerely saw "decentralisation" as an apolitical administrative reform*" (Ferguson, 1994,p.225).

"t*he "development" planners regarded the paralyzing bureaucracy of the government apparatus in Lesotho, with all its "inefficiency," as some sort of mistake - the result of poor planning, perhaps, or a bad organizational chart, or perhaps lack of education….the central bureaucracy in Maser was never understood as a political fact, as the mode of exercise of a form of power*" (Ferguson, 1994,p.225).

However, in both cases, 'decentralisation' was always to be a political issue, not a technical reform. For Ferguson, like the intended goals of livestock development, decentralisation also failed but achieved other significant effects – expansion of state bureaucratic power and depoliticalisation of highly political interventions. The central government administration and Maseru bureaucracy came to obtain control of the formerly autonomous CIDA Thaba-Tseka project and could use its publicity, its apparently locally led village development committees and its resources to further their political goals. These are the real impacts of development projects, not in what they fail to do but what they do actually do. These impacts shouldn't be understood as just side-effects but the instrumental effect of development and associated development discourse (Ferguson, 1994,p.255). The institutional effect of expanding state bureaucratic power and the ideological effect of depoliticizing the point of entry for the state are together the instrument-effects of the development industry constituting the *Anti-Politics Machine.*

I argue that a similar *Anti-Politics* argument can be applied to Irish rural development. Like Lesotho, decentralisation and integration were not simply technical reforms explained by inefficiency or bureaucracy, but primarily a political issue. **The application of the 'discourse of development' allows what would otherwise be overtly political decisions – such as which area to fund a major infrastructure project in and who would gain the political credit - to become somehow not seen as politically motivated when funnelled through sufficient amounts of technocratic rural 'development' inspired terminology**, or as Ferguson would identify as 'development discourse'. Likewise, the removal of genuinely independent civil society/community development bodies, that challenge local government or speak critically of national policy could be seen in other contexts as a highly political authoritarian reform, weakening public debate and suppressing dissent. However, in the context of, and through the language of 'integration' and 'decentralisation', their removal and independence becomes a simple technical change in the interests of claimed efficiency or democratic decision-making, despite all evidence contrary to this. Central government in Ireland has come to obtain a much higher degree of control of the rural development sector and also make use of its publicity and resources to further party political goals under the guise of apolitical, technical interventions, constituting its own Anti-Politics Machine.

Ireland is not an isolated example and ongoing integration and control of the rural development sector by governments has been highlighted in numerous member states such as Spain, Ireland, Wales, England, Poland and the Czech Republic (Navarro, Woods and Cejudo, 2016; Müller, Sutter and Wohlgemuth, 2020; Konečnỳ et al., 2021). In Poland, LEADER groups have experienced refusal by some in local government to work co-operatively and release funding due to political competition between incumbent politicians and challengers with a background in rural development organisations. (Furmankiewicz, Thompson and Zielińska, 2010). The LEADER programme has trended towards

centralisation in multiple member states but an in-depth analysis of this generalised mechanism has not been forthcoming (Thuesen, 2011; Cawley, 2016; Dax et al., 2016; Shucksmith, Brooks and Madanipour, 2021). Ireland merely represents one of the one of the most substantial changes witnessed in Europe (Dwyer et al., 2022,p.65). This is especially apparent in comparison to Ireland's past experience in the 1990's where it had the highest per capita number of local socio-economic development partnerships in Europe, which operated below the scale of local government and supported the policy goals of the EU partnership model of rural development (O Cearbhaill and O'Reilly, 1997; Moseley, Cherrett and Cawley, 2001; Moseley, 2003; Cawley, 2009). Future work could feasibly apply the argument relating to Ireland in this section to the same process across the EU.

This paper **tests for any evidence of a relationship between rural development allocations and electoral outcomes at local and general elections**. Following the extended theoretical argument, it hypotheses that a relationship will exist between rural development funding and the presence of politicians from the government party (Fine Gael) in control of the relevant Ministry. It also hypotheses that this relationship strengthens over time as reforms relating to rural development becomes institutionalised within local government and the centralised Department of Rural and Community Development. Thirdly, it hypotheses that a similar relationship will not be observed for EU LEADER/CLLD funding due to the decentralised nature of decision making at local level and territorial budgeting based on more objective indicators such as population, level of rurality and deprivation indices.

Data & Methods

Theoretical arguments about the political control of the rural development sector in Ireland are academically relevant, but that is where current literature generally ends. I

seek to demonstrate this empirically, and what are the effects of these changes. It has already been shown in Chapter 2 that government led rural development schemes do not have an impact on volunteerism, or social capital as it is referred to in policy documents, in comparison to EU CLLD schemes, such as LEADER. In this section, I aggregate data on both types of funding, European Union CLLD and Irish Government schemes in order to investigate how electoral results predict funding allocations, particularly as they relate to the political party in government, and in control of the Department of Rural and Community Development. This analysis aims to investigate any **correlation between allocations of rural development funding and political influence identified through local election seats or the presence of a government member of parliament (TD)**.[5]

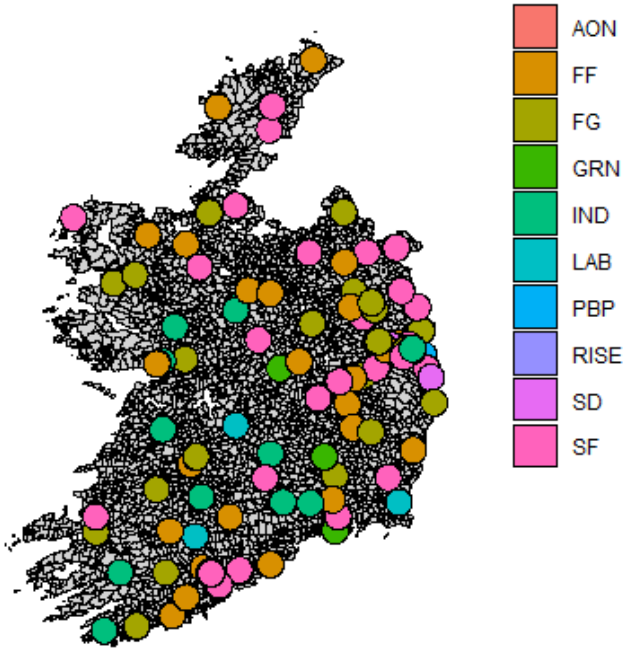
Following the description of data presented in previous chapters, this analysis used similar project-level data of government and non-governmental rural development programs between the period 2007-2024. Similar to the data presented in previous chapters, these geo-coded projects were matched to the relevant electoral division which are the smallest geographical building blocks for higher level electoral constituencies. Local election results from the 2019 and 2024 elections were collected at Local Electoral Level for all parties. Local Electoral Areas, as per this data, have an average population of approximately 61,000 and an average area size of 423km^2, of which there are 166 in total. It was not possibly to collect data from earlier elections are boundaries were reformed in 2014. City LEA's were excluded as they are generally not eligible for rural development funding. Given the highly centralised nature of decision making in Ireland and this theorised influence, the location and party of all TD's (Members of Parliament) were also collected based on their constituency office address. A circular buffer zone of radius 10km was constructed around each office address and spatially-joined with the relevant electoral

[5] TD is Irish for Teachtaí Dála, or Deputy to Dáil Éireann, the parliament of the Republic of Ireland.

divisions that intersected in order to construct a local 'area of influence' based on the simple idea of a gravity model (Capoani, 2023), which can be seen in Figure 1. This method is preferable instead of using constituencies due to the relatively small number of rural constituencies in Ireland which are all multi-seat and loosely based on the historic county system. If levels of funding were aggregated to constituency level, we would lose much of the local level variation within those constituencies. Information relating to their party, what role they held in Government (such as cabinet minister) and which term of office they assumed was also collected. Term one relates to 2016 – 2020, while Term two relates to 2020-2024, as per the general elections of 2016 and 2020 respectively.

The primary dependent variable is the log of rural development funding per capita, at electoral division level for either Government or CLLD programs. In the case of Government schemes, it was possible to differentiate funding at the end of term 1 (2020) and at the end of term 2 (2024). The primary predictors of rural development allocations are the presence of a local TD, their political party, their role in government such as Cabinet Minister and the numbers of seats gained by that party in the 2019 and 2024 local elections. The **party of interest** is Fine Gael who have been the primary government party in Ireland since 2011, as coalition leader between 2011-2016, minority coalition leader 2016-2020 reliant on Fianna Fail for a Confidence and Supply agreement, and effectively equal coalition leader between 2020 and 2024. Importantly for this analysis, Fine Gael have always held the Ministerial position for the Department of Rural and Community Development until the most recent government formation of January 2024. Secondly, the Minister responsible for the 2014 Local Government Reforms was a Fine Gael politician who also became the EU Agriculture and Rural Development Commissioner in 2014.

Figure 1: TD Offices and 10km Radius



Multilevel modelling at three levels is used; electoral district (or village level), sub-constituency level based on a radius of influence of the local member of parliament (TD) and constituency level for local elections (Local Electoral Area). I seek to answer the research questions of:

1) *What are the political determinants of rural development funding, if any, for EU CLLD and central government projects in Ireland?*
2) *Is rural development funding associated with electoral outcomes for the government party? Does this differ in comparison to EU programs? Does this strengthen over time?*

Electoral results are understood as the number of seats obtained by a political party in a local electoral area at either the 2019 or 2024 local elections. A second electoral outcome also measures the presence or lack of presence of a political party's member of parliament for all electoral districts within 10km of their constituency office, coded as a dummy variable. Additional dummy variables denote further information about this member of parliament such as their status as a Cabinet Minister or Minister of State. A number of demographic control variables that may influence an areas tendency to obtain rural

development funding are also included. These comprise the age dependency ratio, deprivation index score, as well as education, unemployment and volunteerism rates. Some geographical variables, primarily whether an area has a town or village in an electoral district, an office relating to EU CLLD funding and the number of previous EU projects in that area are also included.

Despite significant sums of public monies being made available to rural development in Ireland, there is very little knowledge of where this funding has been allocated at a sub-county level. The geocoding of project data to local level in this analysis makes this possible for the first time. Figures 2 and 3 show the distribution of rural development funding by rural Local Electoral Area's between the period 2007-2024 in absolute terms and relative to population. It is immediately apparent that despite a much longer timeframe for EU funding, the sums involved are dwarfed by Irish Government funding that has primarily been in operation since 2016. Secondly, the distribution of domestic funding is much more unequal. A significantly larger share of the funding is concentrated in a few local electoral areas, whereas EU funding is distributed more widely across areas, with each receiving a smaller amount. The average funding for an area from EU sources is approximately € 3.95M, and from domestic sources €6.56M but the IQR is €2.6M and €7.1M respectively. For the areas that received smaller amounts of funding, they fared better from EU sources which can be seen in blue to the left of the graph, while for areas that received higher amounts of overall funding, this is driven primarily by Irish Government sources. Domestic sources of funding comprise the majority of the sum invested in both absolute and on a per capita basis. The more equitable distribution is to be expected for EU funding since budgets are decided by local territorial factors such as population, rurality and deprivation indices. In some government programs, there is a nominal 'county' limit such as how many applications can be received from an area or in some cases, a commitment to fund a specific number of projects per

county. This requirement is flexible however, applied to some programs, not all and there is generally limited sub-county rules that encourage a more equal spread of funding available. However, these rules can contribute to the favouring of smaller, less densely populated counties.

Figure 2: Total Funding by Local Electoral Area 2007–2024

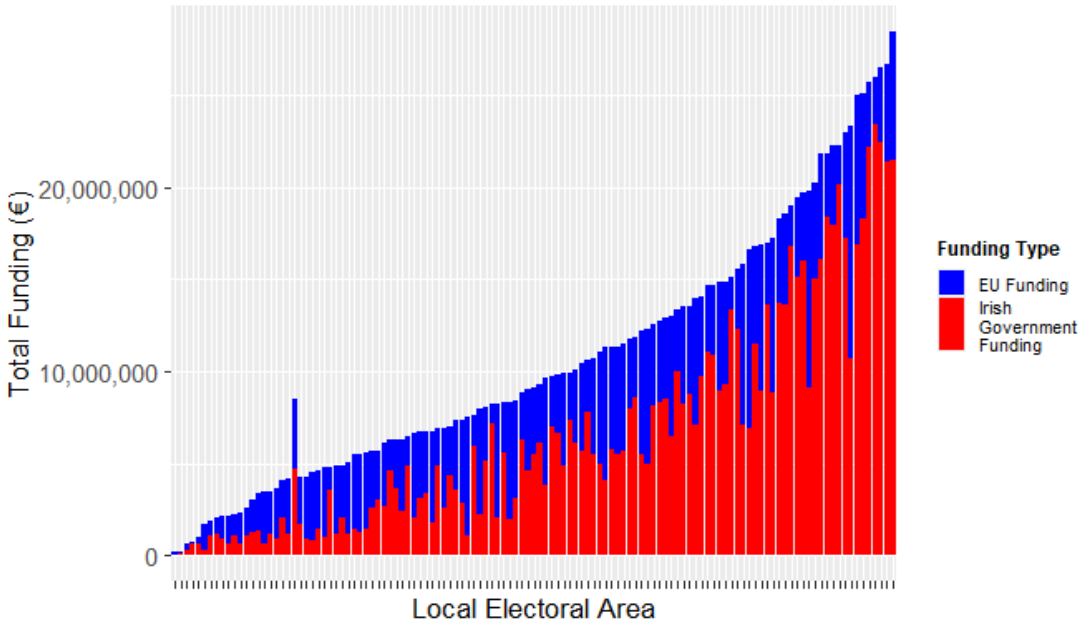


Figure 3: Per Capita Funding by Local Electoral Area 2007–2024 (Stacked)

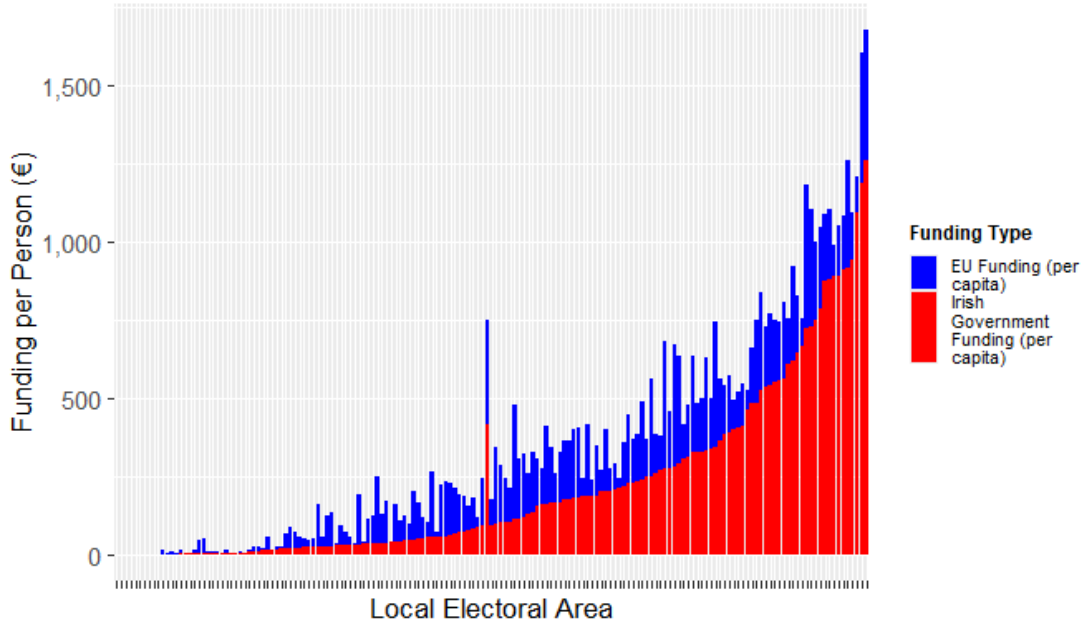
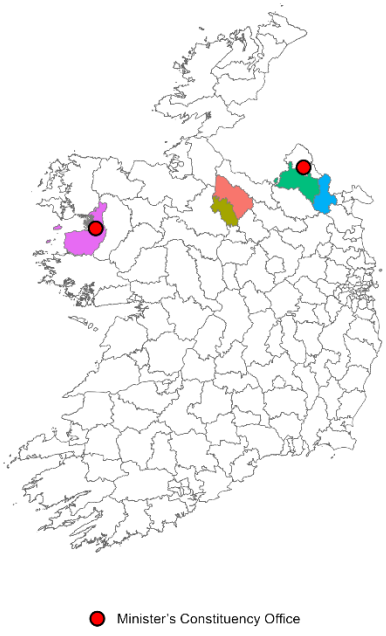


Figure 4 maps the highest ranking Local Electoral Areas in terms of funding per capita. It also shows the location of the Department of Rural and Community Affair's Minister's Constituency office for both terms of government. Again, it is immediately clear that areas within and **surrounding the Minister's immediate political hinterland benefit strongly in both total rural development funding and also per capita funding.** The other two areas both are within Ireland's smallest and least populated county of Leitrim, which is often associated with a greater than average allocations of national government funding regardless of source. This isn't the case for the other areas within or closely neighbouring the Minister's Local Electoral Area. Local Electoral Areas are sub-units of the larger multi-seat constituency for general elections which Ministers/TD's draw votes from.

Figure 4: Areas with highest levels of funding per capita



Results

The descriptive statistics outlined in the previous section indicate some potential level of political influence on government rural development funding, particularly at Ministerial level. This result is, if newly demonstrated, not unexpected. 'Pork Barrel'

politics, where politicians allocate funding into their own areas in return for an expected political payoff is an entirely predictable outcome and rational strategy with numerous examples already in the Irish and international context (Evans, 2004; Considine *et al.*, 2008). I am more interested in how this compares to previous EU schemes and whether this is observable at the level of the political party on a national scale. Table 1 investigates associations between EU and Irish Government funding between 2016 and 2020 using election data from members of parliament elected in 2016 and the 2019 Local Election from within the same term of Government led by Fine Gael. It delineates by party for the four main groupings for both of these measures. I find that the number of local election seats obtained by Fine Gael in the 2019 Local Election predicts the allocation of domestic rural development funding, but not EU funding. This equates to approximately a 14.45% increase in funding per capita for every seat obtained. There is no association with Fine Gaels TD's presence for either domestic or EU sources. The association between funding and the main opposition party (Fianna Fail) TD's presence is not statistically significantly different for either EU or domestic sources. For EU funding, independent TD's are associated with a 45.52% increase in levels of funding from EU sources, a substantial effect size. Other influences include the number of previous EU projects in an area, the presence of a town or village in an electoral division as well as deprivation score, unemployment, peripherality, and the age dependency ratio. For the purposes of this analysis, it finds that political association with the allocation of rural development funding does differ between domestic and EU sources, and importantly, is positively associated with the local election outcome of the ruling political party towards the end of the first term of government.

Table 1: Comparison of Domestic and EU CLLD Rural Development Funding

Political Determinants of Government and CLLD Funding (2016-2020)

	Dependent variable:	
	Govt Funding Per Capita (log)	CLLD funding Per Capita (log)
	(1)	(2)
Age Dependency Ratio	0.029**	0.003
	(0.012)	(0.014)
Higher Education Rate	-0.008	-0.016
	(0.012)	(0.014)
Male Unemployment Rate	0.042***	0.045***
	(0.013)	(0.015)
Female Unemployment Rate	0.033***	0.010
	(0.010)	(0.012)
Town/Village	1.809***	1.417***
	(0.085)	(0.099)
Rurality (Distance to urban centre)	0.003**	0.003*
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Deprivation Index (2016)	0.032	0.066**
	(0.028)	(0.032)
CLLD Office	-1.160***	0.293
	(0.359)	(0.421)
Number of CLLD Projects (2007-2013)	0.044***	0.035***
	(0.004)	(0.005)
Fine Gael TD (Term 1)	-0.088	-0.106
	(0.145)	(0.167)
Sinn Féin TD (Term 1)	0.030	-0.253
	(0.162)	(0.185)
Fianna Fáil TD (Term 1)	-0.190**	-0.245**
	(0.097)	(0.111)
Independent TD (Term 1)	0.059	0.382**
	(0.137)	(0.157)
Dept Minister TD (Term 1)	0.314	-0.342
	(0.327)	(0.373)
Minister TD (Term 1)	0.215	0.263
	(0.179)	(0.205)
Junior Minister TD (Term 1)	-0.104	0.022
	(0.163)	(0.187)
Local Election FG Seats (2019)	0.135**	-0.004
	(0.064)	(0.069)
Local Election FF Seats (2019)	-0.064	0.045
	(0.068)	(0.073)
Local Election SF Seats (2019)	-0.068	-0.067
	(0.087)	(0.094)
Local Election IND Seats (2019)	0.047	-0.031
	(0.059)	(0.064)
Constant	-1.373**	1.022

	(0.541)	(0.622)
Random Effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	2,876	2,876
Note:		*p**p***p<0.01

Table 2 expands on the extent of the political association between rural development funding and domestic government programs. Domestic schemes were in early stages as the new Department of Rural and Community Development became established in 2016/2017, the level of funding only began to be awarded on a sizeable scale later in 2018-2020, which has continued to the present day. The main dependent variable is therefore the log of Government funding per capita at the end of 2024, with electoral outcomes in each of the terms of government controlled for. It finds a number of statistically significant associations between the ruling political party, Fine Gael and rural funding. Firstly, the descriptive mapping indicated in Figure 4 of Ministerial allocations to their own constituencies is supported for both of the two Ministers who held the position. It equates to an increase of 42.62% for areas within the Minister's immediate 10km office radius for 2016-2020, and an increase of 178% for the same area of the second Minister between 2020-2024. Following the previous results, I don't find an association between FG TD's and rural funding for Term 1. However, I do find that the results of the 2019 Local Elections predict rural development allocations. This is compounded by statistically significant associations for a Fine Gael TD's office's radius for those who sat in the second term of Government (2020-2024), equating to a 41.19% increase in funding. The association with local election results also strengthens over time when the results of the 2024 local election are factored in, equating to a 19.6% increase in funding for every seat obtained by a Fine Gael candidate. There are no statistically significant associations with any of the other parties using either general or local election results.

Table 2: Determinants of Domestic Rural Development Funding

Determinants of Government Funding (2016-2024)

	Dependent variable:	
	Govt Funding Per Capita (log)	
	(Term 1)	(Term 2)
Age Dependency Ratio	0.030**	0.031**
	(0.012)	(0.012)
Higher Education Rate	0.016*	0.019**
	(0.009)	(0.009)
Long-term Unemployment Rate	0.143***	0.145***
	(0.046)	(0.045)
Short-term Unemployment Rate	0.180***	0.176***
	(0.056)	(0.056)
Rurality (Distance to urban centre)	2.407***	2.403***
	(0.099)	(0.099)
Volunteer Ratio (2022)	0.001	0.002
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Deprivation Index (2016)	-0.062***	-0.065***
	(0.015)	(0.015)
CLLD Office	0.074***	0.075***
	(0.012)	(0.012)
Number of CLLD Projects (2007-2013)	-1.036**	-1.056**
	(0.425)	(0.425)
Town/Village	0.054***	0.055***
	(0.005)	(0.005)
Fine Gael TD	0.085	0.345**
	(0.164)	(0.164)
Sinn Féin TD	0.122	0.079
	(0.182)	(0.126)
Fianna Fáil TD	-0.147	-0.001
	(0.109)	(0.120)
Independent TD	0.089	0.219
	(0.155)	(0.151)
Dept Minister TD	0.355*	1.025***
	(0.202)	(0.313)
Minister TD	-0.346*	-0.210
	(0.183)	(0.186)
Junior Minister TD	1.123***	-0.303**
	(0.362)	(0.138)
Local Election FG Seats	0.113*	0.179**
	(0.063)	(0.072)
Local Election FF Seats	-0.008	-0.064
	(0.067)	(0.068)
Local Election SF Seats	0.031	0.098
	(0.087)	(0.077)
Local Election IND Seats	0.065	0.040

	(0.058)	(0.054)
Constant	-2.804***	-3.080***
	(0.643)	(0.642)
Random Effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	2,876	2,876
Note:		*p**p***p<0.01

Spatial data is subject to a number of additional concerns, two major problems being the modifiable area unit problem (MAUP) and spatial autocorrelation. The MAUP is the idea that in theory, an association between variables will change depending on the area size or boundaries chosen. This could be apparent with the selection of a 10km radius for the assumed influence of a TD. In practice, a TD may have the ability and interest in influencing funding decision outside of this assumed area of influence. Secondly, the size of the radius is relatively arbitrary, and in practice likely differs depending on a number of factors including local geography, the particular TD in question and their seniority/status. These factors would be difficult to quantify and objectively assess for all of the 201 TD's in the data, and a circular radius, based on the simple idea of a gravity model common in economics was selected as a simplified way to assess their area of local influence. The selection of 10km chosen based on the relative size of Irish rural towns and their hinterland where most TD's have their constituency office. Re-running the analysis on different sized radius's only marginally effects the coefficients and does not change the substantive interpretation of the model findings. Secondly, spatial correlation is the concern that areas near or neighbouring each other may have values that are similar. This would indicate clustering within the data and would not be thought of as independent observations. Therefore, results may be incorrect as they simply are picking up the effect of this clustering, and not the outcome variable of interest. Following guidance from Conley & Kelly (2025) which identifies a number of persistence studies that do not account for this, I calculate a Moran statistic for the outcome variables of interest within the data, rural funding per capita for both EU and domestic sources. This finds Moran statistics of

2.48 and 3.35 respectively, both at the lower end of the cut-off suggested by the authors. In both cases, the Moran's I statistic have a value of -0.04 and 0.02 indicating very weak spatial autocorrelation .

Discussion

This paper had two objectives, firstly to outline an extended theoretical argument relating to the centralisation of Irish rural development using the understanding of Ferguson's Anti-Politics critique of development and secondly, to provide empirical evidence that supported this assertion using high quality electoral data. It had three main hypotheses that were tested, 1) an association will exist between rural development funding and the local political presence of the main government party, Fine Gael; 2) that this association strengthens over time as central government schemes grow in importance in comparison to EU funding; and 3) that we will not observe this relationship with regards to EU CLLD funding In testing these hypotheses, the theoretical argument of Ferguson – that the rural development sector in Ireland has been subject to the same processes of centralisation and bureaucratisation for the purposes of extending political control and influence in rural areas – is also tested. In the case of all three hypotheses, I find supporting evidence measured at the local, national and ministerial level. The total sum of rural development funding at the end of 2020 is predicted by the number of local election seats obtained by the ruling political party (Fine Gael) in the first term of government between 2016 and 2020. Secondly, the total sum of rural development funding at the end of 2024 is predicted by both the number of local elections seats obtained by Fine Gael in 2019 and 2024, the area immediately surrounding the Department of Rural and Community Development's Minister in both terms of government and in the second term, the area surrounding a Fine Gaels' member of parliament's constituency office. The size of these associations are stronger for the second period under consideration. For the other major

political parties and groupings of Fianna Fail, Sinn Fein and Independent's, I find no association related to their office constituency areas or local election seats. Finally, for rural development funding stemming from EU CLLD sources, the association with Fine Gael political presence is not found.

Ferguson's core argument relates to how development programs that failed, if judged on their original stated intentions and goals, still have relevant side effects that both expand bureaucratic state power and depoliticalize a chosen point of entry, such as poverty reduction, social capital, or rural development. The continued perceived failure of these development programs, and continued repetition of these development programs begs the question - what is served by this? Instead of focusing on why they fail, Ferguson reformulates the principle intention of the development program in Lesotho away from the stated goal of poverty reduction so that its principal effect is understood to be expansion of bureaucratic state power (the first instrumental effect). Secondly, by visibly reducing interventions to only include those technical, neutral solutions, development programs can depoliticalize highly political interventions (the second instrumental effect). In the context of the first instrumental effect of expanded state bureaucratic power, the background section shows how this was overtly achieved in the centralisation of the CIDA Thaba-Tseka program into the government of Lesotho. Similarly, I develop the argument that a highly comparable process took, and is still taking place in the context of the Irish rural development sector, as it has become centralised over the previous ten years. In the context of the second instrumental effect of depoliticalisation, Ferguson outlines how the ruling political party in Lesotho repeatedly used the Thaba-Tseka development program to further their political interests under the cover of development such as by use of associated publicity, local level control by their own election committees re-named as Village Development Committees, preferential allocation of program perks such as healthcare to party members and most impactfully, the creation and militarisation of a new

administration district thanks in part to the agricultural hubs and roads constructed by the development project. I develop the argument that the ruling political party in Ireland also used the rural development sector to advance their own political interests through preferential of funding allocations at local, national and ministerial level and have successfully absorbed the majority of rural development funding under their direct political control. Crucially, they managed to do so apolitically, under the guise of neutral, technocratic rural development interventions.

There are limitations to the approach taken in this paper which relate mainly to the extent by which the associational evidence can be understood as evidence of the *Anti-Politics* argument developed in the theoretical background. This could be strengthened in future with further research that exploits the fact that this is a live issue and increasing levels of data are constantly being created. There are now a small number of rural development bodies that have reclaimed some of their former local autonomy for the most recent EU budgeting period of 2023-2027 as well as the Department of Rural and Community Development is now led by a non-Fine Gael Minister for the first time in its existence. These developments create sources of variation and reforms that can be exploited through a more causally informed approach. However, this still remains possibly the most comprehensive dataset on rural development in Ireland from which much can be learned through associational findings alone. The theoretical argument developed could also benefit from an expanded discussion. Ferguson first explored the idea of whether his argument relating to Lesotho were generalisable to other contexts and separately, whether the instrument effects identified were also. This paper has focused on the premise of *governmentality* and the relationship to political power but detailed examination of the other premises of Ferguson's development apparatus would further support the argument. These include premises such as *aboriginal,* or not yet economically incorporated into the modern world through markets and exports, and *agricultural.* Ferguson argues that these

are used to justified interventions in rural areas of less developed countries despite evidence in opposition to this. Similarly rural areas in developed countries could arguably be said to have a similar construction placed upon them, especially in relation to agriculture which continues to play a strong role in rural development discourse despite the tiny minority of the rural population that own or work on a farm. Constructions of rural areas as backward and requiring modernisation, or the 'rural idyll', also dominate perceptions of US and European rural areas, influencing policy responses despite weak evidence (Shucksmith, 2018). Finally, Ireland is not the only country where rural development initiatives developed by the EU have become more centralised over time and future research could explore this relationship using similar methods in other member states.

Conclusion

This chapter contributes to the literature on rural development polices of the EU, and how these relate to domestic policy and political responses. This is an area of research that has seen extensive qualitative findings in multiple member states of the EU but little quantitative evidence of a direct link between centralisation of rural development and political outcomes. Using high quality, granular data for both rural development projects in Ireland and the localised election results, it finds clear evidence of an association between both. Secondly, it contributes to the wider theoretical rationale of why this might happen by developing an extended argument based on the findings of the *Anti-Politics Machine*, directly comparing centralisation reforms in Lesotho and Ireland. In doing so, it links literatures in the international development field with that of the EU, arguing that findings are applicable to both and can better inform our understandings of how EU rural development policy relates to domestic interpretations. The final section that follows is an extended discussion of how these results relate to the findings of Chapters 1 and 2, and how these relate to the political challenges facing rural areas.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to critically assess the claimed and unintended effects of participatory rural development schemes, with a particular focus on Ireland as both a case study and a lens through which to understand broader European policy. Drawing on Ferguson's *Anti-Politics Machine*, I examined how the framing of development as a technical, neutral, and apolitical process conceals the political realities that underpin funding decisions and how communities participate.

The analysis was centred around three main outcomes: elite capture, social capital, and the relationship between development funding and electoral results. While there is evidence of elite capture in Irish rural development organisations, the effect is not unique to this sector and mirrors broader patterns across other civil society organisations more generally. The analysis also shows that elite capture does not significantly distort funding outcomes, challenging one of the core critiques often levelled at participatory development. With respect to social capital, I find evidence that EU-led schemes are associated with increases in volunteerism while Irish domestic schemes are not. This suggests that the institutional design and funding mechanisms of EU programs are more effective at fostering community engagement and increased social capital. Finally, I demonstrate that domestic rural development funding in Ireland is politically patterned, with allocations favouring the party in control of the responsible ministry and their locally elected representatives. EU funding, by contrast, appears to be insulated from these political dynamics due to more structured and decentralised mechanisms of allocation. Taken together, these findings suggest that while EU rural development programs are not without fault, they are less vulnerable to the instrumental political uses that characterise domestic initiatives.

The broader argument advanced in this thesis is that rural development in Ireland reflects many of the characteristics Ferguson identified in his analysis of Lesotho; the use of technocratic rationales for centralising initiatives, as well as the quiet expansion of state and political influence under the guise of rural development programs, resulting in depoliticalisation. That which is presented as non-political is in fact deeply shaped by political considerations. The A*nti-Politics Machine*, in this case, is not operating in a Global South context, but within the institutions of the European Union and the Irish state. This challenges the assumption that critiques of development should be confined to the international development perspective by suggesting that similar dynamics unfold within rural areas of advanced economies.

This thesis makes three primary contributions to the literature. First, it applies a classic development critique to a new context, linking the literature on international development with European rural development policy. Second, it proposes and demonstrates the value of using geospatial, project-level, and causally informed quantitative methods to assess European rural development outcomes more rigorously. Third, it provides empirical evidence on three key aspects of participatory development—elite capture, social capital, and electoral politics—offering a more grounded understanding of how these programs operate in practice. In the case of social capital, it also contributes to the ongoing evaluation shortcoming at EU level by identifying empirically the relationship between rural development spending and volunteerism in Ireland.

It is also worth discussing the relevance of these results from the perspective of Irish rural society. Despite one of the most prominent domestically led rural development policies in Europe, the evidence on the ground does not regard these initiatives fondly.

"Ironically, at a time when there was never as much funding available to local communities, there was never less effective leadership to use these resources in a transformative way. In the absence of any local authority motivation for creative and ambitious plans to sustain and regenerate rural communities (which they actually once aspired to), there is no other officially recognised mechanism to do so." (Heffron, 2025b)

Fatalistic viewpoints abound at a grassroots level and in local newspapers as rising cynicism of initiatives ostensibly designed to save rural areas from the age-old problems of depopulation, brain drain and weak economic growth inevitably fail to do so.

Can the new government help rural Ireland? (Western People, 2025)

The heart of another rural community has stopped beating (Heffron, 2025b)

Our economic model has failed rural Ireland (Heffron, 2025a)

Rural planning obstacles are an 'attack on communities' (Maguire, 2018)

'Inability to build is stalling rural growth' (Mullaney, 2020)

Public meeting in Donegal to discuss regional imbalance and rural decline in north west region (Ryan, 2023)

Public meeting in Clifden to discuss rural housing crisis and population decline (Connacht Tribune, 2024)

Young people leaving rural Leitrim due to building rules (Corrigan, 2023)

Donegal is a prime example of Government's rural Ireland neglect (Donaghy, 2024)

Death of rural Ireland down to 'active discrimination' by State (Wilson, 2025)

Rural decline: Government action badly needed (Irish Examiner, 2019)

Tackling rural depopulation requires 'disruptive policy' (O'Brien, 2023)

Yet this is a narrative scarcely heard at a higher level or when those working in rural development praise the high level policy goals of complicated, technical, jargon-filled policy plans. The opinions of those at local level are supported by evidence that shows that the most rural areas of Ireland were downgraded from a 'region in transition' to a 'lagging region' by EU standards (Duggan, 2022) based on GDP per capita estimates. In 2015-2017, it was 82% of the EU average, falling to 71% in 2022. It must seriously be asked what exactly is a comprehensive rural development program and Department of Rural and Community development established in 2017 actually achieving? It must also seriously be asked what the political decision making about which areas benefit going to achieve if this continues unabated. Votes are concentrated in larger urban centres, if funding for rural areas is associated with government vote share, it only makes sense that increasingly the larger urban centres with more voters will obtain a greater and greater proportion of this funding, leading to rural decline in the less populated and rural peripheral areas without the population or political capital to take advantage of this fact. This was formerly mediated by the territorial approach that EU rural development funds took where budgets are allocated to smaller geographical units, ensuring that smaller communities had some chance of investment. However, as it has been shown, the relevance of the funding available through these has declined significantly in comparison to domestic funds. Previous critics of Irish rural policy foresaw a new era of European regional funds that overcame this domestic short-sighted parochial political decision making in the 1990's (Healy, 1988). However, the state of funds available for rural development today are arguably returning to that pre-1988 era where little attention is given to the long term impacts that centralised decision-making may have.

This disconnect between what is the intended objective and evidential output has a wider European relevance given the unclear effects of EU cohesion and place-based

policy (Berkowitz, Storper and Herbertson, 2025). Investment in regions through funds such as these remains one of the original founding principles of the EU as a means of ensuring economic convergence between all areas of the EU. It is also a principle that has significant difficulty in evidencing its impact. At the same time, other research from EU bodies continues to find that remote rural regions are expected to depopulate further and sustain continued challenges to improving economic productivity (Diemer *et al.*, 2022; Curtale *et al.*, 2025). All of these concerns are increasingly being linked to the political outcomes of disruptive political movements in remote and outlying regions (Rodríguez-Pose, Dijkstra and Poelman, 2023). It is not just the case that the lack of impact of funding projects such as those within this dataset may lead to waste or white elephants. It is the risk of these potential resources fail to combat political currents that will take advantage of growing inequality between rural and urban areas of Europe. There is important wider societal value in ensuring that any funds that are aimed at supporting areas less advantaged by traditional economic fundamentals acknowledge the more conflictual, controversial or politically contested elements of that must be overcome instead of sidelining these as unhelpful analysis outside of the 'discourse of development'.

There is ample potential for future research based on these findings towards a more comprehensive research agenda in European rural development based on causal quantitative methods, and a critical approach to claimed and unintended effects. This thesis has relied on Irish data, but the processes identified — particularly centralisation, returns to social capital and an effect on electoral outcomes — have also been identified qualitatively in other EU member states and comparable settings. Extending this analysis to a cross-national framework would allow for stronger generalisations and greater insight into how understanding institutional design of rural development programs is crucial for their positive effects to be witnessed. The chapter relating to geospatial techniques and project-level data has outlined how the methods applied are generalisable at low cost and

could be achieved. Secondly, more attention should be given to the long-term effects of these schemes—not just in terms of claimed and unintended effects such as volunteerism or funding distribution, but their role in mediating wider rural political behaviour and democratic trust. It is telling that programs such as LEADER have been in operation for over 30 years but we know almost nothing about what type of projects are most impactful, or what the relationship of their beneficiaries is to basic outcomes such as trust in government, the EU, or wider voting behaviour (Slee, 2021). In the most recent EU programming period, a fourth aim, '*A Europe closer to its citizens'*, of rural development programs such as LEADER was suggested beyond the usual trio of improved local governance, improved social capital and enhanced project results. This is arguably a tacit acceptance of the role that rural areas play in electing far-right, Eurosceptic and similarly disruptive politicians to European and domestic parliaments. If we know so little about how rural development programs tangibly benefit areas, we also don't know how or if they are perceived positively by the citizens within them. Finally, future research should not shy away from politically sensitive questions in rural development. As recently highlighted by Michael Storper, there is an active, well-resourced and powerful subsector of consultants and evaluators that support the maintenance of the existing systems and institutions in rural development policy at European and national level (Berkowitz, Storper and Herbertson, 2025). These are not unlike the 'interlocked network of experts' identified by Ferguson (Ferguson, 1994,p.258). Such an industry, required to fulfil the legalistic and evaluative requirements set out by funding schemes risks capturing the intended goals of the policy through rent-seeking behaviour and lobbying for continuation of the existing policy cycles, regardless of impact. Additionally, academic contributions have also shied away from genuinely critical approaches to rural development studies. This is likely due to a myriad of reasons such as the lack of high quality data, informational complexity, and increasingly, a need for research funding through those same European programs as

evaluation partners due to dwindling higher education budgets. Issues such as access to rural housing, economic stagnation, planning restrictions, rural poverty, transport infrastructure, youth outmigration, educational and labour market inequalities are rarely addressed within rural development programs, yet they are central to the lives of rural citizens and likely related to the emergence of rural discontent with mainstream political parties and an embrace of more radical political ideologies. If rural development continues to avoid politically sensitive areas, then the cycle of repetitive, under-evidenced interventions that Ferguson identified is likely to continue, and the sector risks falling into disrepute, or irrelevance.

Appendices – Chapter 1

Appendix A1: Probability of Local Surname matched to Charity Board by Charity Type

Probability of Local Surname matched to Charity Board by Charity Type

	Dependent variable:					
	Surname Match Dummy					
	Education	Arts	Religious	Advice	Community	Health
Town/Village Dummy	0.755***	0.732***	0.629***	0.603***	0.701***	0.585***
	(0.026)	(0.038)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.037)	(0.041)
Median Hiscam of Surname	-0.023***	-0.020***	-0.026***	-0.014*	-0.016**	-0.019**
	(0.005)	(0.008)	(0.006)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Local Frequency of Surname	24.251***	21.400***	20.319***	20.610***	22.355***	20.822***
	(0.521)	(0.670)	(0.705)	(0.698)	(0.644)	(0.704)
Rurality (Distance to nearest city)	0.001***	0.0004	0.002***	0.001	0.001**	0.00002
	(0.0003)	(0.0004)	(0.0004)	(0.0004)	(0.0004)	(0.0005)
Local Population (1911)	-0.00000	0.00002	-0.00005	0.0001*	0.00002	0.0001***
	(0.00002)	(0.00003)	(0.00004)	(0.00003)	(0.00003)	(0.00003)
Number of Charities (2022)	0.052***	0.049***	0.050***	0.052***	0.048***	0.051***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Proportion Catholic	-0.354	-0.154	-1.136***	0.240	0.174	0.076
	(0.279)	(0.420)	(0.325)	(0.436)	(0.433)	(0.452)
Proportion Catholic x Median Hiscam	0.030***	0.027***	0.031***	0.020**	0.023***	0.023***
	(0.005)	(0.008)	(0.006)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.009)
Constant	-4.563***	-5.449***	-4.539***	-5.843***	-5.747***	-5.653***
	(0.271)	(0.409)	(0.309)	(0.425)	(0.423)	(0.441)
Observations	288,801	283,784	283,334	283,471	283,938	283,252
Log Likelihood	-35,102.910	-18,956.920	-17,457.000	-17,657.460	-19,598.600	-16,850.080
Akaike Inf. Crit.	70,223.810	37,931.840	34,932.010	35,332.920	39,215.190	33,718.160
Note:						*p**p***p<0.01

Appendix A2: Probability of Local Surname matched to Charity Board by Charity Size

Probability of Local Surname matched to Charity Board by Charity Size

	Dependent variable:			
	Surname Match Dummy			
	School	Small	Medium	Large
Town/Village Dummy	0.779***	0.686***	0.806***	0.651***
	(0.027)	(0.036)	(0.033)	(0.030)
Median Hiscam of Surname	-0.020***	-0.016**	-0.023***	-0.024***
	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.005)	(0.006)
Local Frequency of Surname	24.222***	22.143***	23.076***	21.382***
	(0.533)	(0.639)	(0.597)	(0.586)
Rurality(Distance to nearest city)	0.001***	0.001**	0.002***	0.002***
	(0.0003)	(0.0004)	(0.0003)	(0.0003)
Local Population (1911)	-0.00000	-0.00005	-0.00002	0.0001***
	(0.00003)	(0.00003)	(0.00003)	(0.00002)
Number of Charities (2022)	0.051***	0.051***	0.048***	0.053***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Proportion Catholic	-0.181	0.124	-0.734**	-0.331
	(0.294)	(0.394)	(0.299)	(0.310)
Proportion Catholic x Median Hiscam	0.027***	0.021***	0.029***	0.029***
	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Constant	-4.844***	-5.514***	-4.631***	-4.846***
	(0.286)	(0.383)	(0.288)	(0.300)
Observations	287,982	284,312	285,285	286,522
Log Likelihood	-32,746.170	-20,905.550	-24,486.380	-27,792.820
Akaike Inf. Crit.	65,510.340	41,829.100	48,990.750	55,603.640
Note:				*p**p***p<0.01

Appendix A3: Probability of Local Surname Matched to Charity Board in Counties with sizeable (>20%) Non-Catholic Minorities in 1911

Probability of Local Surname Matched to Charity Board in Counties with sizeable (>20%) Non-Catholic Minorities in 1911

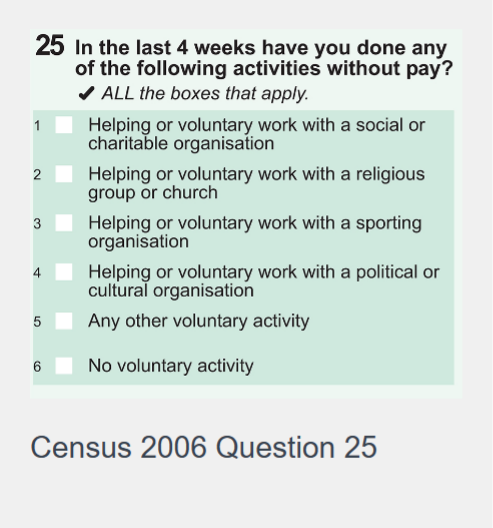
	Dependent variable:	
	Surname Match Dummy	
	Counties >20% Non-Catholic (1)	Counties > 20% Non-Catholic excluding Donegal (2)
Town/Village Dummy	0.797***	0.586***
	(0.053)	(0.066)
Median Hiscam of Surname	-0.014**	-0.007
	(0.006)	(0.008)
Local Frequency of Surname	30.698***	33.392***
	(1.026)	(1.436)
Rurality (Distance to nearest city)	0.002***	0.006***
	(0.0003)	(0.001)
Local Population	0.001***	0.00004
	(0.0001)	(0.0001)
Number of Charities	0.051***	0.077***
	(0.002)	(0.004)
Proportion Catholic	-0.522	0.171
	(0.342)	(0.452)
Median Hiscam X Proportion Catholic	0.020***	0.010
	(0.007)	(0.009)
Surname Match Dummy	-4.081***	-4.777***
	(0.306)	(0.417)
Observations	42,456	28,237
Log Likelihood	-8,259.689	-5,082.259

Akaike Inf. Crit.	16,537.380	10,182.520	

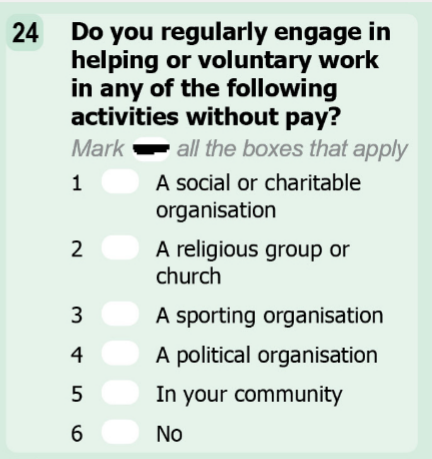
Note: $^{*}p$$^{**}p$$^{***}p<0.01$

Appendices – Chapter 2

Appendix A1: Volunteering Question Comparability



Census 2006 Question 25



Census 2022 Question 24

Appendix A2: Determinants of the Local Volunteering Rate in 2022

Determinants of the Local Volunteering Rate in 2022

	Dependent variable:		
	Local Volunteering Rate 2022		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Population('00)	-0.029***	-0.027***	-0.030***
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Age Dependency Ratio	0.085***	0.078***	0.078***
	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.025)
Higher Education	0.127***	0.126***	0.124***
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Religious	0.001	0.001	0.001
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Same Address one year previous	-0.053	-0.042	-0.045
	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.032)
Ethnicity other than majority	-0.052***	-0.054***	-0.052***
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Long Term Unemployed	-0.158**	-0.180***	-0.178***
	(0.067)	(0.067)	(0.067)
Short Term Unemployed	0.187**	0.177**	0.179**
	(0.086)	(0.085)	(0.085)
Town/village	0.103	-0.322*	-0.263
	(0.155)	(0.166)	(0.169)
Rurality(Distance to nearest city)	0.028***	0.026***	0.027***
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Number of Registered Charities(log)	0.085***	0.018	0.029
	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.027)
FS:Retired	0.085***	0.090***	0.087***
	(0.031)	(0.030)	(0.031)
FS:Preschool	-0.076**	-0.073**	-0.077**
	(0.037)	(0.036)	(0.036)
FS:Early School	-0.071**	-0.066*	-0.069**
	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.034)
FS:Pre-Adolescent	-0.050	-0.047	-0.049
	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.032)
FS:Adolescent	0.042	0.045	0.042
	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)
FS:Adult	0.051*	0.059**	0.055**
	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.026)
FS:Empty Nest	0.068**	0.069**	0.066**
	(0.030)	(0.030)	(0.030)
SRH:Very Good	0.206***	0.207***	0.206***
	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.024)
SRH:Good	0.230***	0.229***	0.229***

	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.027)
SRH:Fair	0.057	0.062	0.062
	(0.041)	(0.040)	(0.041)
SRH:Bad	-0.153	-0.172*	-0.162
	(0.103)	(0.102)	(0.102)
SRH:Very Bad	0.130	0.126	0.111
	(0.215)	(0.213)	(0.214)
CLLD group office		-0.105	0.081
		(0.573)	(0.575)
CLLD funding per capita(log)		0.193***	
		(0.027)	
Non-CLLD funding per-capita(log)		0.058*	
		(0.032)	
CLLD funding only			0.846***
			(0.147)
Non-CLLD Funding only			0.537
			(0.376)
Both CLLD and Non-CLLD Funding			1.163***
			(0.204)
Observations	2,860	2,860	2,860
R^2	0.267	0.283	0.278
Adjusted R^2	0.253	0.269	0.263
F Statistic	44.375*** (df = 23; 2807)	42.502*** (df = 26; 2804)	39.954*** (df = 27; 2803)
Note:			*p**p***p<0.01

Appendix A3: Change in the Local Volunteering Rate 2006-2022(Post 2015 Funding only)

	Dependent variable:	
	Change in Local Volunteering Rate	
	(1)	(2)
Volunteering Rate 2006	-0.490*** (0.018)	-0.486*** (0.018)
Population(Δ)	-0.013*** (0.003)	-0.013*** (0.003)
Age Dependency Ratio(Δ)	-0.112*** (0.017)	-0.113*** (0.017)
Higher Education Rate(Δ)	0.062*** (0.008)	0.062*** (0.008)
Religious Rate(Δ)	0.151*** (0.013)	0.151*** (0.013)
Same Address Rate(Δ)	-0.092*** (0.018)	-0.093*** (0.018)
Ethnicity other than Majority(Δ)	-0.097*** (0.016)	-0.096*** (0.016)
Unemployment Rate(Δ)	0.007 (0.009)	0.007 (0.009)
Town/village	-0.393*** (0.148)	-0.339** (0.153)
Rurality(Distance to nearest city)	0.019*** (0.004)	0.019*** (0.004)
FS:Retired(Δ)	0.041* (0.021)	0.039* (0.021)
FS:Preschool(Δ)	-0.041* (0.022)	-0.041* (0.022)
FS:Early School(Δ)	-0.018 (0.020)	-0.019 (0.020)
FS:Pre-Adolescent(Δ)	0.006 (0.019)	0.006 (0.019)
FS:Adult(Δ)	0.023 (0.017)	0.022 (0.017)
FS:Emptynest(Δ)	-0.028* (0.016)	-0.029* (0.016)
FS:Pre Family(Δ)	-0.027 (0.018)	-0.029 (0.018)
CLLD Group Office	-0.921* (0.516)	-0.796 (0.516)
CLLD funding per capita(log)	0.116*** (0.026)	
Non-CLLD funding per capita(log)	0.028 (0.029)	
CLLD funding only		0.433*** (0.141)
Non-CLLD Funding only		0.113 (0.351)
Both CLLD and Non-CLLD Funding		0.445*** (0.169)
Observations	2,886	2,886
R^2	0.292	0.289
Adjusted R^2	0.280	0.277
F Statistic	58.449*** (df = 20; 2837)	54.870*** (df = 21; 2836)
Note:		*p**p***p<0.01

Appendix A4: Change in the Local Volunteering Rate 2006-2022 (Robust Standard Errors)

Change in the Local Volunteering Rate 2006-2022

	Dependent variable:		
	Change in Local Volunteering Rate		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Volunteering Rate 2006	-0.483***	-0.494***	-0.490***
	(0.022)	(0.021)	(0.021)
Population(Δ)	-0.013***	-0.013***	-0.013***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Age Dependency Ratio(Δ)	-0.110***	-0.113***	-0.113***
	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Higher Education Rate(Δ)	0.063***	0.063***	0.061***
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Religous Rate(Δ)	0.149***	0.153***	0.152***
	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.018)
Same Address Rate(Δ)	-0.093***	-0.094***	-0.095***
	(0.018)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Ethnicity other than Majority(Δ)	-0.092***	-0.099***	-0.097***
	(0.022)	(0.023)	(0.022)
Unemployment Rate(Δ)	0.008	0.008	0.007
	(0.011)	(0.010)	(0.011)
Town/village	-0.152	-0.486**	-0.407*
	(0.150)	(0.200)	(0.212)
Rurality(Distance to nearest city)	0.020**	0.019**	0.019**
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
FS:Retired(Δ)	0.037	0.041	0.039
	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.031)
FS:Preschool(Δ)	-0.040*	-0.042*	-0.043**
	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)
FS:Early School(Δ)	-0.019	-0.017	-0.018
	(0.033)	(0.034)	(0.034)
FS:Pre-Adolescent(Δ)	0.004	0.005	0.005
	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.025)
FS:Adult(Δ)	0.023	0.022	0.021
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
FS:Emptynest(Δ)	-0.029	-0.028	-0.030
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.021)
FS:Pre Family(Δ)	-0.030	-0.029	-0.030
	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)
CLLD Group Office		-0.940***	-0.817***
		(0.311)	(0.308)

CLLD funding per capita(log)	0.137***	
	(0.024)	
Non-CLLD funding per capita(log)	0.010	
	(0.039)	
CLLD funding only		0.609***
		(0.107)
Non-CLLD Funding only		0.240
		(0.300)
Both CLLD and Non-CLLD Funding		0.624***
		(0.183)
Note:		*p**p***p<0.01

Appendix A5: Change in the Local Volunteering Rate 2006-2022 (Additional variables)

Change in the Local Volunteering Rate 2006-2022

	Dependent variable:		
	Change in the Local Volunteering Rate		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Volunteering Rate 2006	-0.500***	-0.511***	-0.507***
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Population(Δ)	-0.017***	-0.017***	-0.017***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Age Dependency Ratio(Δ)	-0.107***	-0.111***	-0.111***
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Higher Education Rate(Δ)	0.076***	0.076***	0.074***
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Religious Rate(Δ)	0.133***	0.137***	0.136***
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Same Address Rate(Δ)	-0.074***	-0.076***	-0.077***
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Ethnicity other than Majority(Δ)	-0.051***	-0.059***	-0.058***
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Unemployment Rate(Δ)	0.007	0.007	0.007
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Town/village	-0.187	-0.528***	-0.475***
	(0.130)	(0.149)	(0.153)
Rurality(Distance to nearest city)	0.046***	0.044***	0.045***
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
$Rurality^2$	-0.0002***	-0.0002***	-0.0002***
	(0.00004)	(0.00004)	(0.00004)
FS:Retired(Δ)	0.032	0.035*	0.034
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.021)
FS:Preschool(Δ)	-0.039*	-0.042**	-0.042**
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.021)
FS:Early School(Δ)	-0.018	-0.017	-0.017
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)
FS:Pre-Adolescent(Δ)	0.012	0.013	0.013
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)
FS:Adult(Δ)	0.025	0.025	0.024
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)
FS:Emptynest(Δ)	-0.026	-0.026	-0.027*
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
FS:Pre Family(Δ)	-0.031*	-0.030*	-0.031*
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
2014 Water Protest Location	-2.086***	-2.133***	-2.153***
	(0.281)	(0.284)	(0.285)
CLLD Group Office		-0.353	-0.227
		(0.516)	(0.516)

CLLD funding per capita(log)		0.143***	
		(0.025)	
Non-CLLD funding per capita(log)		0.003	
		(0.029)	
CLLD funding only			0.640***
			(0.132)
Non-CLLD funding only			0.229
			(0.348)
Both CLLD and Non-CLLD Funding			0.676***
			(0.175)
Observations	2,886	2,886	2,886
R^2	0.304	0.313	0.310
Adjusted R^2	0.292	0.301	0.298
F Statistic	65.139*** (df = 19; 2838)	58.636*** (df = 22; 2835)	55.431*** (df = 23; 2834)
Note:			*p**p***p<0.01

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