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Valuation in Rural Social Innovation Processes—Analysing Micro-Impact of a Collaborative Community in Southern Italy

Federica Ammaturo [1,2] and Suntje Schmidt [1,2,*]

[1] Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space, 15537 Erkner, Germany; federica.ammaturo@leibniz-irs.de
[2] Department of Geography, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 10099 Berlin, Germany
* Correspondence: suntje.schmidt@leibniz-irs.de

Abstract: Social innovation has been associated with contributing to 'valuable' rural development; however, usually, the impact of social innovation has been identified in the aftermath of its development or implementation. This might be too narrow an approach, as an ongoing social innovation process in itself may already lead to effects that contribute to regional and social changes in a local community and beyond. This paper argues that collaborative valuation processes are embedded in social innovation processes, generating effects that contribute to rural development. Focusing on a case study that exemplifies social innovation processes in agriculture and food production carried out by a rural collaborative community in southern Italy, we demonstrate how three valuation phases, such as contestations and negotiations of norms, symbolic capital accumulation and recognition of actions, as well as re-definitions of values, impact community development through joint sense-making, empowerment and societal change. Our empirical results suggest the close intertwining of both social innovation and valuation processes. The empirical results demonstrate how collective valuation processes have micro-effects on the agro-economic system, on local socio-cultural processes, and on place-making activities. Methodologically, this paper builds on ethnographic methods, including participatory observations, semi-structured interviews, oral histories, and socio-spatial analysis investigating moments of valuation embedded in daily collaborative practices.

Keywords: valuation processes; rural community development; social innovation; collaborative valuation

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1. Introduction

Social innovation can be understood as novel practices that break or distinguish themselves from existing ones. 'Novel' and 'new', however, do not necessarily refer to fundamentally new practices or ways of doing things (compare also Christmann et al. in this special issue) [1,2] but may also relate to novel and sometimes unique combinations of existing knowledge or new ways of making use of technologies, software, platforms, or organisational solutions in rural contexts. This implies, too, that social innovation may comprise the local adaptation and adjustment of existing knowledge and solutions to regional and local contexts [3]. Taking these perspectives seriously, such processes necessarily imply practices of valuation, because changing, establishing, replacing, or adjusting established practices requires interpretations, collective judgement, and sense-making. While a number of contributions demonstrate time–spatial dynamics of rural-based social innovation processes [1,4,5], highlighting their collaborative character [6–8], less attention has been paid to how novelty and newness, as well as their potential impact, are collectively discussed, negotiated, made sense of, interpreted, and eventually applied or rejected.

This paper aims to underscore collaborative valuation practices that are frequently integrated in social innovation processes in local agricultural food production [9]. As such, valuation is deeply embedded in social innovation processes and hence contributes to

establishing and having an impact on rural community development [10,11]. For instance, solidary-based agriculture in itself might not necessarily be regarded as a ground-breaking contemporary social innovation per se [12]. To become a rural social innovation, it requires practices of sharing and caring that a local community regards as valuable for re-developing an abundant farm and farmland instead of leaving it fallow, empty, and prone to decay. This requires collective discussions and negotiations to recognise or to collectively ascribe value to solidary-based agriculture to not only take care of abundant farmland but also to understand its social, cultural, and/or symbolic value (e.g., for local community building) and potential local transitions towards more ecological solutions for micro-scale agricultural production. Such valuation processes are often concealed in socially innovative initiatives related to local food systems that eventually contribute to rural development. Such impact might, for instance, be seen in empowering rural communities [9], by promoting mutual support, solidarity, and a new producer–consumer relationship [13].

A valuation perspective in this context might contribute to a better understanding of the impact of social innovation on rural social, cultural, and spatial development. By impact, we refer to mid- and long-term micro-effects and benefits as well as changes in societies prompted by collaborative valuation in socially innovative processes. We explicitly aim to go beyond classical impact assessments that seek to outline the (measurable, often quantified) effects and changes induced by social innovation. Instead, we argue that valuation processes may generate an impact while being implemented and co-produced [14,15]. Local and regional social and cultural dynamics in rural areas might change as a result of collective moments [16] and processes [17] of valuation in which local communities engage with interpretations, perspectives, negotiations, contestations, and judgments of what is of worth. Against this backdrop, this paper addresses two main research questions. *1. How are collective valuation processes embedded in social innovation? 2. What kinds of impacts are generated by these valuation processes?* This paper seeks to better understand the processes of shaping, internalising, and externalising valuation by a rural collaborative community. We define the rural collaborative community as a trans-local collaborative relational network of individuals, cooperatives, entrepreneurs, and innovation hubs that is collaboratively involved in processes of social innovation. Valuation practices may contribute to forms of institutionalisation, empowerment, and improvements in the development of a rural community, as Guerrero et al. [13] demonstrate in the example of Community Supported Agriculture: collectively negotiating values enables the community to define a shared and common identity, not without challenges given by the size and heterogeneity of the network. Though embedded in economic processes of agricultural food production, this perspective also helps us to understand rural development not as a merely economic process but instead as one that involves the collective development of social and cultural value, which considers economic activities as embedded in social relations. Furthermore, this perspective also allows for a better understanding of how collective valuation practices may contribute to community empowerment, which can eventually foster rural development beyond economic means but nevertheless may partially feed back into economic activities.

Empirically, we present a southern Italian case study that investigates place-based collaborative, socially innovative practices of a rural collaborative community, tying in with ongoing social innovation processes that evolve around the more sustainable agricultural food production, distribution, and consumption and the learning and diffusion of regenerative agricultural practices that are strongly connected to practices of care and consolidation of rural places and communities. We seek to reconstruct the multiple and deeply entangled moments [16] (such as events or staged activities) and processes [17] (e.g., the generation of new and intricate social relations) of collaborative valuation.

In the following sections, this paper is organised as follows. We first briefly revisit social innovation from a time–spatial perspective in rural regions. We continue by discussing a theoretical yet operational definition of valuation and how processes of valuation might be embedded in social innovation. After presenting our research design and introducing the Italian case study, we continue to present our empirical findings. We seek to demon-

strate how collaborative valuation practices are staged in particular moments, as well as through certain mechanisms and how valuation is integrated in ongoing socio-spatial rural development.

2. Valuation in Social Innovation Processes

2.1. Social Innovation as Collaborative Processes

Social innovation addresses a research phenomenon that is still very broadly defined. In this paper, we follow the argumentation of Christmann et al. [18] in this special issue, who refer to social innovation as processes in which social actors collaboratively create novel solutions to collectively perceived problems. As such, social innovation is associated with novel practices that break with previous ones [2,19]. In the context of rural regions, social innovation may comprise, for instance, new ideas, processes, services, novel or improved actions, routines, and practices that may lead to ecologically, socially, and economically sustainable societies [20]. Most frequently, it is the character of social innovation to achieve goals by new forms of organising, regulating, or lifestyles [18].

Within social innovation studies, some authors underline that social innovation may address social and societal challenges and is thus characterised by creating, renewing, or transforming social relations at local and trans-local scales [10]. Frequently, social innovations are therefore expected to contribute to cultural, social, and spatial development with quite positive effects, of which three main forms of impact may be distinguished [11]:

1. *Impact as changing social relations*: Social innovation processes are inherently of an interactive and collaborative nature [21] and therefore are shaped by social relations, interactions, practices, and social as well as cultural norms and values. At the same time, social innovation processes affect exactly these forms of social interactions and collaborations and may eventually lead to enhanced local and regional social well-being, improved and adjusted ways of doing or organising, and potentially to changing local conditions too. In other words, the necessary mechanisms to develop, implement, adjust, or diffuse social innovation are also prone to be changed and transformed during processes of social innovation [4,22]. However, because of their social nature, social innovation processes might be beneficial to some, while they might lead to disadvantages to others or exclude some social actors from the process.
2. *Impact as transforming social conditions*: Social innovations are frequently expected to be socially accepted, relevant, and appropriate—at least by those involved in and engaged with the related processes. Hence, the impact of social innovation may be understood as processes of spatial and social renewal and change by addressing societal challenges and unmet social needs and by empowering social actors to foster such processes of change [18,23,24]. Following the above definition of social innovation, 'society' stakeholders [11] are engaged in processes of social innovation for fostering, for example, social learning in order to increase the local communities' self-reliance and sustainability [20]. Such studies underline the social responsibility associated with social innovation processes [11]. Nevertheless, the recognition of social innovation based on certain value systems can marginalise or act unresponsively for certain groups or communities that promote or stand for other values.
3. *Impact as societal change towards an innovation society*: Some debates on (social) innovation underline that the ability to implement changes and govern transformation processes depends on a societal capacity to generate novelty, which finds its importance in the term innovation society [25]. This notion is frequently taken up by policy makers seeking to foster new forms of innovation towards an innovation society (e.g., [26]). Here, an innovation society is regarded as a societal form that is able to create a better, more equal, just, and inclusive society. For rural communities, this may imply creating and increasing adaptation and adaptability capacities [27,28] in the context of greater societal transformation [10,11,29,30]. However, as discussed in both previous points, the criteria under which a rural society can become innovative may be disputable or contested.

Against the backdrop of the above outlined potential forms of impact, we regard impact as micro-effects [31] that social innovation processes may generate. We do not expect social innovation to lead to positive forms of change per se but are open towards its valuations. Instead, we argue that a valuation perspective enables us to identify and exemplify valuation processes embedded in social innovation processes. Analysing valuation processes may lead to identifying frequently intangible [32] forms of change (rather than 'improvement' or 'added value' as framed in some impact debates). Therefore, impact represents more general, potentially transformative effects leading to (e.g., social or regional) changes (see also Hussels et al. in this special issue). We argue that for changing and adjusting social relations and conditions [33,34], moments or phases of collective sense-making, interpretation, negotiation about what should be changed/adjusted, and how the associated processes should be organised are integral ingredients in social innovation processes.

This means that to better understand how social innovations contribute to transformation and change, it is necessary to have a better understanding of collective forms of valuation in social innovation processes. Through this collective approach, it is possible to go beyond subjective interpretations of innovation and focus on the set of values, motivations, and intentions of involved actors and how they learn while actively shaping innovation processes [35]. Hence, social innovation processes are deeply intertwined with valuation processes due to the collaborative nature of such processes. Social relations are connected to forms of agreement and disagreement as well as different forms of communication and interaction to negotiate shared visions and perspectives on the changes targeted by social innovation.

2.2. Valuation as a Collaborative Socio-Spatial Practice

Valuable novelty in a particular context (in our case, rural regions) is a key dimension of social innovation. To recognise novelty, though, social practices of recognising, attributing, and comprehending novelty are required. Likewise, it takes judgement and sense-making of contributions in collective social innovation processes to agree or disagree on what to pursue further [36]. Collective negotiations and contestations, incremental discussions, and decision-making are therefore not only practices found in social innovation processes but also constitute practices of valuation. Valuation can thus be regarded as being performed in particular phases and moments in social innovation processes by interaction and engagements with the process itself [37].

Valuation may be defined as a social, interactive form by which *'values are ascribed to actors or things based on peoples' views (preferences) [. . .] Valuation is a result of mutual adjustment in a process in which many actors take part'* [38] (p. 141). Valuation, hence, is a form of judgement and justification, as well as of giving worth to something [38]. For instance, a group of inhabitants in a village might recognise that a recently abandoned farm with its farmland is worth saving from decay. This group might share an interest in caring for their village, its buildings, and land. This shared interest and motivation then justifies further collective actions, such as founding a cooperative that sets up a solidary form of agriculture to further use both farm and farmland [12]. Valuation can thus be understood as an ongoing process of collective practises that include relating, negotiating, and contesting worth [39,40] that eventually also leads to organising and institutionalising further activities (such as founding a cooperative). Especially in social, collaborative contexts, actors need to mobilise and coordinate (scarce) resources, such as time for social engagement. As such, valuation practices are inherently relational in terms of positioning actors and objects [41].

Valuation can also be considered a dialectic practice of associating and dissociating worth and value to or from something [42,43]. Returning to the abovementioned hypothetical example with the solidary form of agriculture, the newly founded cooperative values responsible forms of agricultural production and consumptions [42] by taking up the idea of solidary agriculture in the form of ecologically sustainable local production of agricultural products. This implies the organising of new forms of social relations among members of the cooperative, as well as between members and their social environment

outside of it (e.g., families). The variation in respective individual availabilities due to work or family commitments and the necessary voluntary work on the farm are set in relation to each other, negotiated, and planned. Similarly, the forms of work that contribute to a cooperative must be evaluated in such a way that all members feel equal and valued. Hence, members of the cooperative continuously, consciously, and unconsciously ascribe value [38] to their contributions as well as those of members and set-up processes and adjust collective activities accordingly. This example provides some idea of how both social relations and social conditions are affected by valuation processes embedded in wider social innovation processes and underscores that change processes (as a form of impact) may unfold in an ongoing process. Eventually, such valuation processes may move towards forming conventions by legitimising and institutionalising the positions and relations of actors and objects [41,44].

While valuation may be embedded in ongoing processes of mutual engagement (e.g., when bands compose music [45]), it might likewise be staged in particular situations (e.g., wine tastings, start-up pitches) [16,46,47]. However, focusing on isolated events or single processes might be too narrow an approach for understanding the complex web of social relations that contribute to valuation processes in the social innovation contexts. Therefore, Waibel et al. argue for investigating broader valuation constellations in which valuation practices are inscribed [17]. By that, they also suggest paying attention to actors, processes, and relations that may not be apparent in the very moment of valuation but instead link valuation across multiple situations and locations [17]. This might be of particular importance in social innovation processes in rural environments investigated in this paper. A visible form of such a trans-local dynamic that affects local value-based justifications of activities might be found, for example, in mission statements or agendas created outside the immediate local environment. For instance, reflecting on the example used in this section, the German network of solidary agriculture formulates a vision as well as basic principles as a shared common ground across diverse local initiatives[1] for (a) visualising and externalising shared norms and values and (b) for legitimising future activities.

Valuation processes are not necessarily seamless or conflict-free, because frequently different social or subjective value systems and understandings of worth come together and may even collide [40], leading to heterarchies of approaches to valuations [44]. Activities, governance mechanisms steering a social innovation process, modes of interaction, and contributions to an initiative are perceived and consequently valuated differently in different social or spatial contexts and among diverse social groups, as the act of valuation is also emotional and an affective attitude [48]. Returning to above example, a rural cooperative of solidary agriculture may bring together members that have been living in the very same village their whole life, while other members have just moved into the village, or even just own a house there that they only use during their holidays or weekends. Each of those members may carry different expectations in terms of the future development of the farm or how to organise routines and duties on the farm. This means that valuation practices include intersubjective agreement or disagreement on institutionalising procedures, routines, and objects for legitimising future activities. Likewise, valuation requires negotiation about criteria for how objects and activities are judged or justified [44]. These considerations underline that valuation practices are the result of mutual adjustments within ongoing processes.

Valuation processes are inherently spatial as well. In digital spaces such as social media environments, for instance, valuation becomes visible in the form of clicks, likes, dislikes, shares, or comments. Live events are also prominent examples of simultaneously localised production and consumption (e.g., in music or theatre performances or conference talks) as well as valuation (e.g., in the form of applause or booing). Experimentation labs, real-life laboratories, projects or consortium meetings, and retreats provide arenas for collectively valuating early ideas or (early) creative problem solutions. However, valuation practices are of a multi-local nature [49]. For instance, while solidary agriculture is set up and organised in a particular village, at a particular farm, allowing for immediate exchanges,

discussions, interactions, valuation processes happen beyond this socio-spatial context. Online communities also provide multi-local digital spaces where community members exchange, share experiences, and jointly make sense of contemporary developments or set future agendas (a form of justifying and legitimising future activities). Likewise, multiple initiatives of solidary agriculture may establish national or even international networks (see note 1) for '*co-developing, co-defining, negotiating, and legitimising future societal values*' [50] (p. 10).

Against this backdrop, we investigate collaborative practices, paying particular attention to social relations and conditions. In doing so, we tie in ongoing social innovation dynamics, paying particular attention to **moments and processes** of valuation. As discussed above, valuation takes place in particular situations that are spatially and temporarily localised. These particular **moments** thus provide sites for forming and fostering social relations. In our case, such sites might be farms where social contexts, as well as materials and technologies, are provided for collaborative farming. However, sites where valuation moments take place might likewise be temporary gatherings, such as local markets that are arranged and equipped with tools and materials that foster experimentation and exchange. Social media platforms may also be regarded as virtual sites for valuation. In some instances, moments of valuation are specifically set up, in other words, 'staged', underlining the performative character of collaborative valuation. Typically, moments of valuation can be experienced by individuals and groups and, therefore, become recognisable for researchers, which is why moments of valuation are particularly important objects of investigation in the research presented here [46] (p. 3).

Taking inspiration from Dewey [51], Hutter and Stark [46] stress that valuation takes place in the **process** of practicing certain tasks. This has two consequences for our research. First, we need to engage with the collaborative practices of social innovation processes to be able to identify and reconstruct valuation practices. In our particular case, we need to use participatory approaches that allow us to interact with and observe actors, material settings, and the time–spatial constellation in which valuation takes place. Second, valuation takes place in specific fields of practice, which is why we focus on social innovation in sustainable agricultural food production. Engaging with social innovative processes then also allows us to identify and connect valuation moments across situations and social fields [17] (p. 34) and to be able to observe convergent decision making [37] as sequential and iterative interactions within the local community. By focusing on processes, rather than singled-out moments, we seek to better understand how collaborative valuation eventually may lead to forming conventions and to legitimising and institutionalising further activities of a local community. We thus acknowledge a broader valuation constellation by relating different moments and sites of valuation processes, which will allow us to better understand how different judgment devices and orders of worth are negotiated and shape said processes and eventually lead to changes in social relations and conditions [52].

With our particular focus on moments and processes, we wish to demonstrate how a valuation perspective may contribute to better understanding the socio-cultural and spatial impact of social innovation processes on rural development. By reconstructing valuation processes embedded in ongoing social innovation dynamics, we seek to carve out how novelty, perspectives, and (dis)agreements are negotiated and tested to further govern and steer the development, diffusion, and adaptation of ideas and innovative approaches to problem solutions.

3. Research Design

As Kaiser [53] points out, values may '*be more or less hidden from our consciousness and come to live only in specific conflict situations or dilemmas*' (p. 6). Since values are neither universal nor fixed in meaning, social actors may utilise and implement different values or may emphasise value differently in different situations: '*The context makes it also easier for participants to evoke the values they deem relevant*' [53] (p. 7). Furthermore, although values may exhibit a certain inertia before being changed or adjusted, they can eventually develop

over time, in particular, by interacting against a background of different value systems, beliefs, or registers of worth. In other words, investigating valuation processes is complex, as a given value term may not uniquely relate to a specific meaning. Its meaning may become understandable only if embedded in a particular context. Therefore, reconstructing valuation processes necessarily requires methodological pluralism [53], an approach on which we draw in our research design.

3.1. Case Study Selection

In order to be able to handle this complexity, we follow Kaiser's [53] suggestion to focus on a single context—in our case, a southern Italian rural region. Implementing a single case study design [54], we focus on ongoing social innovation dynamics in this selected rural region to identify and reconstruct valuation moments and processes [46] and their contribution to socio-cultural community development. The case study was selected using the network World-Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (*WWOOF*). WWOOF represents strong values in terms of sustainable rural development based on organic and ecological farming [55]. This network brings together organic farmers with the aim to support, foster, and establish values of organic farming as an alternative to the dominant agricultural economies. One core activity of this network consists of enabling interested individuals (WWOOFers) to temporarily collaborate with organic farmers, while, at the same time, encouraging mutual learning among farmers and WWOOFers. Though being an international network, at the national level, WWOOF operates in the form of associations, in case of Italy as the non-profit APS—Associazione di Promozione Sociale. By online and offline ethnographic observation of activities of the WWOOF network, we identified our case study region that best exemplified the multiple and intertwined activities contributing to and spinning off from the ongoing processes of collaborative farming. As such, the WWOOF network acted as the entry point to the empirical field and enabled us to contextualise valuation processes that, on a more general level, negotiate and contest established, most often conventional forms of agricultural economies to which the network strives to offer a sustainable alternative. In addition, the online observation allowed us to understand collaborative agricultural projects across Italy and to identify an active collaborative community based in the province of Salerno. Through the platform, we were then able to identify local key actors (e.g., farmers and actors organising further local initiatives) for pursuing the ethnographic field phase. This approach allowed us to focus on a particular social innovation context in which collaborative agricultural practices are regarded as potentially beneficial for marginal or left-behind rural areas by fostering alternative and collaborative welfare economies [56]. The focus on a particular region, as well as a specific ongoing innovation context, enabled us to better shed light on the effects and potential economic and socio-cultural impact of valuation processes on this particular Italian community.

3.2. Data Collection and Data Analysis

For investigating our research questions, we implemented a combination of qualitative ethnographic research methods [57]. This comprises, for instance, ethnographic interviews and participatory observations, as well as active involvement in collaborative agricultural practices. This methodological approach allowed us to reconstruct the multiple ways in which valuation practices are embedded in moments and processes of social innovation and, therefore, how value is not just discovered but jointly created and transformed through the reciprocal interaction between objects, places, and people [46]. This methodological approach also allowed us to grasp trans-local spatial dynamics of valuation processes. One author became an active member of the Italian WWOOF association before, during, and after the on-site fieldwork in Southern Italy: She engaged in online observation at the WWOOF platform, followed by participatory observations in an annual national assembly. This enabled us to closely observe the network and its discourses and publication as well as to identify a WWOOF farm that best exemplified collaborative agriculture and a

deep involvement in local social innovation processes. In addition, the same author also became an active WWOOFer by volunteering and living at a farm, deeply engaging with the practice of collaborative agriculture on site. This enabled her to better understand how valuation processes are integrated in daily exchanges and discourses, as well as to conduct ethnographic interviews while working on the farm. This data collection extended over about a year of online observations complemented by three phases of about two-week-long onsite fieldwork: The first phase consisted of approaching the case study by getting to know the WWOOF national community and the local farm. The second phase was characterised by actively WWOOFing at the farm and participation in community events. In the third phase, additional data were collected at regional events to complement the first two phases. The observations were then complemented by semi-structured interviews with members of the local community (farmers and their families, members of the social cooperative Terra di Resilienza, temporary WWOOFers), representatives of local institutions (one mayor), or organisations (WWOOF, Rete Semi Rurali, Rural Hack), as well as long talks and oral histories (e.g., one interview took place during a long car trip with four members of the community). The ten semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, while additional ethnographic interviews and exchanges were conducted by active participation in local and national initiatives. These encounters were documented by extensive fieldnotes. Finally, a document analysis helped to contextualise the community's activities across websites, publications (such as the Manifesto of the Rural Social Innovation [58], academic contributions by the director of Rural Hack [59,60], WWOOF annual report [61]), and posts on social media platforms.

Becoming a WWOOF member was an important strategy for accessing the research field and investigating the internal dynamics of the community. The membership was rather passive and did not include becoming a fully engaged insider. Instead, this strategic membership created a contact zone between the field of investigation and the researcher. This strategy also encouraged conscious reflection on the researcher's role in the field as well as her own feelings and experiences [62]. For instance, throughout the research process, the researchers had to disentangle their own positions with their respective possibly convergent, dissonant, or questionable value systems with regard to the emerging valuation practices in the field. We tried to minimise the possible subjectivation of this personal involvement by collaboratively interpreting the case study's findings [63]. While one author was actively engaged in the fieldwork, the other was more distanced from the field, which enabled us to apply an insider and outsider perspective on datasets, thus assuring a balance between possible dilemmas generated from the (cultural and social) familiarisation [64] with the research subject.

Data were collected by audio recordings, a field diary, and audio notes between March and August 2024. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim through *Sonix.ai*. All participants gave consent for non-anonymised recordings. The transcripts were analysed according to qualitative content analysis [65], including two inductive coding phases. The first coding phase looked at the collaborative community which was addressed differently across the interviews, for example, as 'territorial network', 'community', or other local (dialect) expressions to strengthen the nature of the relationship, such as '*cumparaggio*', a term that indicates a strong relation, like the one with a godfather. This coding phase also focused on identifying and understanding social innovation processes by analysing, for example, what participants viewed as 'new' or regarded as processes of change and how these processes were achieved. The second coding phase focused on identifying instances of valuation and detecting valuation sub-processes relatable to relevant anecdotes, stories, and event experienced in the fieldwork [44].

3.3. Case Study Description

The collaborative community in the province of Salerno (Italian: Provincia di Salerno, located in the Campania region) became visible through the WWOOF analysis as a very active community with a vibrant social environment for initiatives addressing regional

value creation with organic farming and ecological agriculture. The WWOOF network provides added value for some members of this community, as one interviewee underlined: '*WWOOF for me is part of a context of change, innovation and social innovation that I encountered through people who had already started a path, a life choice, in these rural contexts*.' (Michele, referring to returnees to the region starting innovative projects).

The collaborative community located in the region and beyond consists of individuals of different ages, personal histories, and backgrounds. They share motivations for living and working in rural local contexts while, at the same time, being embedded in broader networks (such as WWOOF). As such, the collaborative community represents a complexity of relations that organises and fosters individual as well as social projects and localised activities, for example, in the fields of regenerative agriculture, social activities, media and communication, rural and agricultural technologies, and innovations. With their manyfold collaborative activities, the network represents as well as re-signifies local identities and products that, taken together, may eventually lead to the establishing of communities of practice [66]. The community was pioneered by a group of four men who moved to the centre and north of Italy in their earlier professional biographies. Inspired (around 2010–2013) by a movement of returners, they eventually did return to their region of origin, striving to apply their knowledge in rural initiatives of caring and innovation. Though embedded in agricultural activities, they (and eventually a wider trans-local network) aimed to generate further added value to the region by social initiatives and a return to an ecological form of agriculture.

The case study region mainly comprises five small or medium-sized towns. Michele's farm '*Residenza Rurale Incartata*' in Calvanico, for instance, stems from the publicly funded project '*Rural Hub*' [67]. Rural Hub was a first ground-breaking experience in Italy of a hub oriented to rural social innovation. Today, the farm, with its rural kitchen and event venue, is registered with WWOOF and is open to WWOOFers who may spend some weeks learning, coworking, and living at the farm. Michele is also an active member of a social cooperative, '*Monte Frumentario Terra di Resilienza*' (Monte Frumentario Land of Resilience), located about 130 km away in Caselle in Pittari. Here, Antonio coordinates the activities around a local community mill and promotes and (literally) seeds the "*Biblioteca del Grano*" (Grains' Library). Located a few kilometres away, Ivan cultivates grains for the cooperative's mill while having a family-run agro-tourism enterprise in Atena Lucana. While each of them (as well as other members of the community) works on their own farms, they are also active in the cooperative and in social events. Among other activities, they support Vincenzo in Eboli in opening his social oven '*Il forno di Vincenzo*' (Vincenzo's oven). Here, a young adult with special needs and a special love for baking is supported by the community to pursue his work and passion. These activities attract others to gather support, identify community aims, and organise gatherings combining work and vision-making.

Within this network of people, projects, and places, we were able to identify a number of moments and processes of valuation. These were important for the community to grow, build ties and relations with other groups, become more stable, and create a stronger outreach. These moments and processes range from everyday moments initiated across daily farming activities to temporary as well as long-term collaborations in the region as well as to trans-local, oftentimes symbolically laden events addressing the larger community. While this collaborative community of farms, social entrepreneurs, cooperatives, and initiatives in the Salerno province provides a breeding ground for social innovation within the framework of collaborative and social organic/ecological farming, we further investigated the daily processes of valuation in collaborative farming.

4. Results

Our results contribute to identifying valuation phases that exemplify the collaborative nature of valuation. One first result underlines an overarching valuation context [53] in which different valuation phases take place. These phases address, in fact, a continuous reflection, debate and negotiation about the dominant rural development paradigm: This

context provides motivation to search for (valuable) alternative models to established routines and practices behind the development of rural marginal places, beyond those related to agricultural food production and consumption.

Our results point towards three phases of valuation that exemplify how the rural development paradigm is affected and impacted by:

- moments and processes of contestation and negotiation of norms within the socially innovative context of collaborative organic farming,
- processes of legitimising and recognising actions and assigning symbolic value to activities,
- processes that show how certain values are collectively institutionalised and consolidated, thus clearly fostering cultural development in the case study region [44].

These three key phases, however, do not relate on a 1:1 basis to phases of social innovation processes, but are embedded in those phases. Each of these valuation processes is interactive and relational, thereby inducing changes in the routines and practices of local communities. Most prominently, we interpret the observed forms of change as micro-impact on the agro-economic system, socio-cultural development, and the spatial development of the rural case study region.

4.1. Re-Signification of the Dominant Rural Development Paradigm as Valuation Context

Italy represents an interesting national context for investigating social innovation processes in the context of collaborative farming. In the past years, social agriculture projects have operated in left-behind places, especially those with fragile social groups (e.g., people with disabilities, migration backgrounds, or facing poverty and unemployment) [68]. These often bottom-up social innovations have actively reached out to urban and rural societies, for instance, supported by digital technologies [60] that connect traditional knowledge and novel approaches. These dynamics have also allowed for involving more heterogeneous groups interested in agriculture as a form of (collaborative) social practice, in particular striving for sustainable social innovation. Specifically, small-scale organic farming became a strong driver for new rural (sometimes temporary) dwellers to promote and experience sustainable lifestyles [69].

Our case study region is characterised by a number of socially innovative activities and initiatives that are being planned, implemented, and adjusted under the umbrella of organic farming and sustainable ecological agriculture. Our research uncovered collaborative valuation processes deeply embedded in these innovative processes. The local collaborative community is driven by valuing of organic farming that also promotes cultural and educational exchange as well as public awareness raising on topics of conscious food production and consumption. Collaborative practices that evolve around sustainable living and organic agriculture also act beyond this focus by addressing socio-cultural issues and place-making necessities in the rural region. Our regional case thus represents a community able to activate citizens and returnees by self-organising valuable activities that shape its own missions at the regional scale while at the same time linking these with trans-local initiatives. Hence, the case more broadly tackles the dominant rural development paradigm.

Against this backdrop, three areas of impact on rural development stand out in this context: First, valuation processes evolve around topics that critically scrutinise the dominant agricultural economic system. Motivated by providing alternatives to this system, social innovation emerges around organic, collaborative, and regenerative faming. A second builds on social and cultural processes dealing with rural communities. The third relates to the dimension of place-making and identity in rural towns and communities. The first area of impact provides a point of reference to adopt or establish novel practices in the wider context of organic farming to support social (e.g., by organising more inclusive forms of entrepreneurial activities) or cultural development (e.g., by setting up events around organic farming and food addressing the wider regional population).

4.2. Valuation Phases

4.2.1. Contestations and Negotiations of Norms

Collaborative valuation processes frequently address the collective rejection of established agricultural production methods and their global value chains. This rejection forms the basis for regional initiatives and projects to develop and establish alternatives to conventional agriculture while at the same time pursuing ecological and social sustainability goals. Through contesting the dominant rural development paradigm by individual and collaborative practices, the community commonly promotes the active negotiation of existing norms and practices and social innovation that embrace their values while still being rooted in and not averse to contemporary society. This can be seen in particular moments of interaction between the collaborative community and the society in which it operates. Criticising and contesting rural development lead the community to focus on generating new meaning and sense of rurality.

This form of valuation becomes visible by **disputing and critically engaging with conventional agrarian economic models**. While valuing '*agriculture based on quality over quantity*'(interview Michele), profit is not directly related to monetary revenues. In line with this, Antonio explains that wheat, the most valuable resource for the cooperative, is the least profitable one and, at the same time, the one that most affects the environment and its biodiversity in conventional agriculture. Hence, around grain, further socially valuable ideas evolve: clearly, value is associated with baking and eating bread baked with indigenous seeds and promoting responsible producer–consumer relationships as a political act (interview Michele; car conversation with Antonio et al.). This further extends to practices of responsible agricultural production including, for example, hand sowing, no-tilling farming, or no-fertilizer farming. Though clearly dissociating from conventional agricultural production, farmers and entrepreneurs of the community still embed themselves into the market, seen as an instrument of encounter and progress, as Antonio reflects. As entrepreneurs, they have to secure an income for themselves and their employees as well as for further investments. However, their positioning in the market is driven by the values they represent and is therefore accompanied by activities that brand and visualise these values: '*It sounds like a paradox, but our idea of sustainability in these countries is shaped by our ability to keep alive economic realities that, whether small or large, have the possibility of being autonomous, sustainable and not merely dependent on contributions or funds*' (interview Michele). The exchanges with dominant market players, for instance, via the rural hackerspace 'Rural Hack', a university lab for digital social innovation, go in this direction by offering training programs and promoting experiences and dialogue between multiple actors willing to innovate the food system. Another example of associating value with alternative forms of revenue can be seen in novel local forms of exchanges, as Michele and his family demonstrate. They value the time spent with WWOOFers not for their practical contribution to the farm but instead for being part of a reciprocal relationship that consists of spontaneous learning and exchanges that contribute in the context of WWOOF to rural development based more on collaboration and reciprocity than productivity (interview Michele; interview WWOOFers).

We also observed how the community **contests certain policy discourses** like place branding that often misuse language and symbolic expressions to promote vague rural rhetoric. The community emphasises the need for reframing certain words that have lost their meaning. The terms 'borghi' and 'ancient grains' exemplify this. Borghi (a term describing medieval small villages in Italy, often placed on hills or mountains with beautiful landscapes) has been recently adopted and reinterpreted for promoting tourism of seemingly romantic, historical, and culinary forms. Discourses around the value of 'ancient grains' were also picked up by industries to promote conventional production and trade of bread, pasta, and other wheat products. In one public presentation, the participants debated and reflected on how their own cooperative's name, the hackneyed 'Resilience', has been abused and has lost sense throughout the years. Being attentive to the social construction of terms is therefore fully part of valuation processes, through which the community chooses

its cultural references and continuously contests and negotiates norms. We were also able to observe instances of challenging and negotiating social norms through the combination of philosophical ideas and dialectical expressions as forms of knowledge sharing in interviews as well as public events. Returning to local memories related to rural symbols, or idioms, helped in the re-construction of value and the adoption of local ancestral and traditional meanings. The community, for instance, collected 12 local expressions for referring to the soil, a richness often omitted by mainstream policy orientations (car conversation with Antonio, Ivan, Rosangela, and Valentina) but which they now want to restore to avoid trivialisations and generalisations of rurality.

Considering the spatial dimension of contestation and negotiation also enables us to identify the material manifestations and effects of the community values in the way they produce a sense of place. This is strongly linked with **re-framing rural lifestyles.** The physical presence in the region enables the collaborative community to experience ambivalent feelings of detachment and attachment to these places. These contrasts are visible in the dialectic interaction between the inside and the outside of the community, which are made of contrasts in visions and values, especially with the geographically closest social groups. The community members try to re-value living in these rural, often marginal places by being fully committed to their innovative entrepreneurial and personal projects, often being critical of and differing from some common local practices. This attitude to change is, however, balanced by the choice of being rooted in the local context, hence negotiating the state of things with personal and community beliefs. The valuation practice involved in this process can be summarised as 'adopting a place' (as Antonio and Ivan define), where adopting means accepting a place and its people and participating with an individual and collective responsibility for the place's future and development by acting in it. It means becoming part of its identity and contributing to the collaborative re-discovery and modification of this identity. Hence, place-making acts through the re-valuation of spaces, traditions, and natural and symbolic places (car conversation with Antonio, Ivan, Rosangela and Valentina). For example, community members strive to collect information about traditional cultivation practices and territorial and geographical knowledge from elderly dwellers of the rural villages and then try to translate this traditional knowledge into new practices and stories. Such contestation and negotiation processes address the rural communities' disaggregation, which is increased by a consumer society, individualism, lack of common commitment from the institutional to the domestic realms (interview Michele), and the denunciation of the loss of the town's material and immaterial memory. This is underlined by Alex's (director of Rural Hack) claim of a lack of collectivism: '*Many innovation experiences in rural areas in Italy start from individual instances or interests disguised as social instances, so that they assert themselves only as a narrative, without creating any real impact*'. Creating a collective subject through collaborative organisations and projects forms an important localised basis not only for mutual reassurance about shared value systems but also for decisions on follow-up activities, next steps, and joint activities that embed themselves in social innovation processes that appreciate and engage with both endogenous and exogenous human and social resources.

Contestations and negotiations of norms can be regarded as valuation processes that unfold an impact on the local and regional community, especially in relation to the modalities through which values, missions, and visions are collectively constructed. By actively and critically analysing and contesting established norms and standards, involved actors discuss perspectives, choose directions and plan initiatives, and overall shape individual and, most importantly, collective thoughts, opinions, and understandings about agricultural systems, public policies, and place-based development. Above examples demonstrate that such forms of valuations can be regarded as continuous and ongoing processes that are inscribed to daily routines, exchanges, and reassurances of shared vision. The agro-economic system acts here as a critical element of reflection, from which the community distances itself on the one hand but on the other uses it to establish alternative, value-driven practices and routines.

4.2.2. Symbolic Capital Accumulation and Recognition of Actions

This valuation phase supports the legitimisation of activities related to diverse social innovations [44] and comprises moments and processes of symbolic capital accumulation and recognition of the actions that frequently stem from the phase of contesting and negotiating norms. From our perspective, this phase is particularly important for creating acceptance and openness towards what might become a novel practice or routine in the form of a social innovation, for example, based on moments of sharing community growth and re-interpretation of the work performed within the community and through public events and communication activities for a broader audience.

One approach to legitimise the community's work lies in **creating a new narrative** around food production and consumption. These narratives unfold around entrepreneurial activities of the community members who are able to steer public funding schemes around their alternative principles and visions and by creating an integration between conventional forms of organisations and new agricultural and economic practices. Michele's farm, for instance, builds on a publicly funded project but at the same time seeded further economic and social activities that today operate independently, without public support (interview Michele) and with a cultural and social potential that goes far beyond the 'business as usual' of similar entrepreneurs in the same region. For instance, the farm promotes environmental education through the work of its restaurant, that offers seasonal food and promotes the Slow Food movement principles of 'buono, pulito e giusto' (translated as 'good, clean, and fair'). Additionally, the community has been able to attract the interest and collaboration of individuals who work with communication and who create opportunities for the public recognition of the community work. Gepis, a community member and movie maker who calls himself 'a craftsmen of stories', gave a TEDx-talk organised in Sala Consilina. Ted stands for Technology, Entertainment, and Design and aims at providing an environment for communicating change, thereby addressing a global audience. Gepis' talk '*I padroni dell'aria*' (literally translated to 'the masters of air') focuses on people living in marginal communities who are able to make a difference by daily acting as creators of meaning. He uses this figure to better describe, understand, and re-create the sense of these places through their inhabitants. People who master the air, thanks to their ability to be multipliers of opportunities, are able to master a particular place without materially owning it.[2] He demonstrates how past and present valuable assets within a community are embedded in future-making that generates shared identities.[3] Similar to Gepis, Sara also contributes to creating novel narratives on rural development. She is a journalist who recently co-directed the documentary '*La terra mi tiene*' (translated as 'The earth holds me') and co-authored a graphic article [70] that illustrates and visualises the values behind the cooperative. The graphic article describes how the values of the cooperative were constructed and re-constructed through collaboration in the local network and the daily life of its the members. The outreach of these narratives clearly extends the recognition beyond the local scale, contributing to the diffusion of values and practices among different territories and raising symbolic capital around the contested resource of grain. The documentary's premiere was very strategically organised in Tuscany, at the '*72 ore di Biodiversità*' (translated to '72 h of Biodiversity') organised by *'Rete Semi Rurali'* (Rural Seeds Network), a network founded in 2000 aiming to secure seeds biodiversity.

Another approach to increase the recognition of actions lies in **strategic networking** with structured, effective, and old organisations that also share similar values and missions. One of them is *Rete Semi Rurali*. Such partnerships and public engagements secure the community more institutional support and promote positive lobbying activities and a broader territorial impact. WWOOF plays a similar role: Vincenzo and his father Vito presented '*Il forno di Vincenzo*' (Vincenzo's Oven) at the WWOOF national annual event in 2023 to demonstrate how the social oven project, also supported by WWOOF Italy, was moving forward. WWOOF, Rete Semi Rurali, as well as renowned movements like Slow Food, support some of these community activities, especially because of the trust built in Michele. He often acts as a broker between these organisations. What is meaningful in

these relations is the social bonding built on trust and collaboration, which is strengthened by common values and their genuine application in everyday projects. It is a commonly shared practice by regional actors to support each other by participation in events and communication and by learning from each other's practices and approaches. These moments are an environment for sharing initiatives and knowledge and creating solid connections able to mobilise as well as mutually develop values from place to place, from community to community.

How these valuation processes translate into spaces goes beyond concrete projects and is visible in **milestones, metaphors, habits and routines**. Creating value is intended as creating a place for which it is worth it to work, to struggle, to fail, to try. In this continuous experience, the creation of common identity is performed through moments of proofreading/approving of what has been performed and achieved as well as what is going on, but also through moments of re-connection to the initial motivations of the regional network and movement. For instance, members of the cooperative and Michele's coworkers met in Calvanico for a workshop designed by Gepis. The aim of the workshop was to create and work on the '*Vandera*' (a big apron), whose design contains symbolic keywords representing Michele's farm. The creator calls these pieces 'Narrative Artifacts' and explains that such products from the workshops serve to create some sense and narratives of the local organisations and communities visualising their histories, identities, values, talents, and visions. Accumulating symbolic capital in a place is meant to construct meaning through the care and custody of the place's stories. This passes through moments of ritualisation of traditions like the '*Catuozzo*' (i.e., charcoal pile, a rustic means of turning wood into charcoal), which is practiced at Michele's farm, or the annual event *La terra mi tiene*. Each year, on April 25th, all domestic ovens of the old houses in the historical village of Atena Lucana are opened symbolically (while being unused in the remainder of the year). By now, this event has become a ritual that symbolises both the liberation from global value chains of grains as well as the regional value behind the bread and bread making (including a festive symbolic yeast collection, collective dough kneading, and bread baking). This event has come to be a social event strictly integrated in the annual rhythm of the region, bringing together inhabitants and visitors across social and ethnographic groups. Gratuity and union are the drivers of an accumulation of social and symbolic capital that directly or indirectly influence the variety of people participating. It calls for a collective change to ways of producing resources and community and of consuming products and relations.

The valuation processes described here primarily consist of interconnected and intertwined moments of valuation. Some of these moments are frequently and deliberately staged (such as TedX, documentary premiere). Furthermore, creating new visual artefacts such as a graphic article or a collaboratively created apron helps to mobilise ideas from a concrete local context for creating a wider outreach and recognition. The impact of these valuation processes might be described as overcoming lock-ins in small rural and peripheral areas. Faced with limited public and institutional support, groups and individuals seize the chance to create a shared vision that can form the basis for further activities and to appreciate added values already achieved. Simultaneously, involved actors are also able to tie in their activities in trans-local discourses, establishing a wider audience and visibility and creating public recognition and social strength. This adds cultural value to their efforts and strengthens their legitimacy for further action. As in the above-described processes, agro-economic and socio-cultural effects are closely intertwined with spatial dynamics, in this case, clearly reaching way beyond regional boundaries while promoting empowerment in the community.

4.2.3. Re-Definition of Value(s) and Their Consolidation in Society

While the first two valuation phases provide instances where different perspectives, individual value systems, and interpretations may come together, processes of re-defining values comprise activities that lead to a formulation and, eventually, institutionalisation of new, adjusted, or re-defined values. These processes reach beyond the collaborative

community. The re-definition of value(s) pertains to the modalities by which the community disentangles its value to society: concrete action in the form of civic participation in debates and processes. Here, valuation is determinant for the consolidation of its values [44]. Albeit determinant, the re-definition of values is not requested to the society but rather practiced by the community. Working with the community's own capacities to generate value-making processes is an essential practice to transmit and promote the acquisition of these values by others.

In our empirical material, we observed, for instance, the **implementation of 'new' agroecological practices**. The cooperative's stone mill '*Monte Frumentario*' symbolises novel practices of organising, at both local and regional level, the collection of grains to make flour for the cooperative's members. For a region characterised by highly fragmented land ownership, land abandonment, and demographic shrinking, this pooling of resources comprises a social innovation. The cooperative invests massive work in discovering and studying the grains that are worth cultivating in times of unaccountable globalisation processes (car conversation with Antonio, Ivan, Rosangela, and Valentina) and climate change. Michele, Ivan, Antonio, and others cultivate what they call the 'grains of the future' by not only safeguarding old indigenous varieties but studying alternatives to become self-sufficient and prevent big losses due to climate changes. They promote seed mixtures or evolutionary populations that create compensation mechanisms that cope with the stresses faced by the plants while preserving biodiversity. In this innovation context, the '*Biblioteca del grano*' has been developed to collect this variety in a living library that each year is sown and used as a research and educational space. Similar effort in re-defining agri-food values can be found in the network '*Slow Grains*' (part of the International Slow Food movement), which recognises the value of working with local grain varieties and brings together farmers and entrepreneurs from different geographical contexts to share knowledge and experiences around their production methods. Another example for new practices stemming from collaborative valuation can be seen in the 'Mercati della Terra' (Earth's markets). Here, the local group of the Slow Food movement reaches out to broader society and demonstrates that it is possible to produce and consume food differently. Michele and Vincenzo often meet other producers and clients in this market. Valuing the unique price of this food means '*considering it as a good, not a commodity* ' (interview Michele). Food is associated with symbolic value, and by engaging with producers in the market, local and frequently not well-known regional products can be found at fair prices. At the same time, handwork, craft, and environmental effects are made visible, influencing consumers' decisions and eventually their value systems. The re-definition of values can also be seen in the example of hazelnuts. The hazelnuts' market in the Picentini Mountains area is dominated by global industrial players who shape the price and determine the market exchange terms with no consideration of the places, people involved, or the environmental externalities of conventional agricultural production. The Earth's markets function as instruments to re-define values beyond market prices, emphasising the responsibilities of farmers for the environment.

The community's work generates impacts in terms of the socio-cultural processes in the involved towns by **building educating communities**. This can be observed on a daily basis at Michele's farm. Here, a collaborative attitude is shared among the working family members and other coworkers, who are employed through a cooperation with a reception centre for people with immigration backgrounds. This collaboration aims to train these young adults while providing them with financial independence and, more generally, life opportunities. Sharing meals during working hours with WWOOFers, when they are present, is a further sign of a process that aims at social inclusion beyond mere economic opportunities. WWOOFing itself plays a role in the promotion of different social and cultural experiences in the farm. The national and international volunteers learn, provide help, and share their passion for their own national or regional food cultures. They also share their interests with the farmers who themselves appreciate this foreign input and source of inspiration (interview Michele). This may involve conflicts or misunderstandings

(such as WWOOFers' expectations of farming in relation to real-life engagement in farming), but each experience is largely perceived as valuable by both farmers and WWOOFers. Likewise, at Ivan's farm in Atena Lucana, the summer camp for children '*Ciucci liberi*' (Free Donkeys) attempts to promote innovative processes at the socio-cultural level. A daily program with workshops, games, and adventures lets younger generations discover nature and rural sustainable traditions. A variety of experts, from farmers to researchers, teach and experience the science and practices behind wood works, bread making, wild plants, and other topics with the kids. '*At the end of the camp we break even, not with any real profit, but for us the real profit is in creating a better environment where our children can grow up according to the principles and values, we hold dear*' (car conversation with Antonio, Ivan, Rosangela, and Valentina).

Some interviewees reported that the first effect of these processes can be sensed in a **feeling of deep belonging to the place** where one was born. This feeling was strong enough to keep farmers and other actors in these often-neglected places. This observation exemplifies how values are consolidated, at least for those locally involved, motivating them to further invest in these places by not only engaging with social innovations but adapting innovations to localities and places through a process of valuation. Consolidation arises from the result of individual, familial, or communal choices that have been perpetuated and sedimented over time and across different geographies, rather than from single moments. Although many of the community's actions may be considered innovative or groundbreaking in some respects, none of the interviewees claimed to have 'invented' anything. Rather, they said they had built new stories on the foundation of existing ones. The community, for example, assumes the posture of the hacker as described by Giordano (2023): '*hacker (. . .) is a generative figure, an "Artisan" innovator, who shares an ethic of exchange and continuous improvement that comes from collective work*' [60]. The innovative process related to consolidating values revolves around **human relations** rather than ideas, projects, objectives, or business plans. This is demonstrated by the community oven '*Il forno di Vincenzo*' opened in late 2023 after receiving years of support from the community. The social community oven is a prime example of how often-forgotten members of society can thrive thanks to the commitment of a community that values human relations over profit, mass approval, and individualism. Here, Vincenzo learned how to make bread with Michele and Carmelo, the owners of a restaurant in his hometown. This experience was crucial for his personal growth as a young adult with a syndrome that often leads to constant dependence on others. The effort of re-defining values through concrete projects enabled Vincenzo to take control of his future in a meaningful way by being part of a collective story that is capable of re-defining value, bringing a town together, and building a place of common identity.

Re-defining values and transferring values to a broader society comprise crucial processes for mobilising the acceptance of novel ideas and practices. These valuation processes purposefully engage with actors beyond immediate boundaries of the community. Here, the often small, localised, and temporary activities take on the shape of more established social innovation and develop towards structured movements, associations, institutionalised partnerships, and educational and social projects with higher public relevance that are embedded in broader global public issues, community building, and development beyond the outreach of the circumscribed collaborative community. Above examples demonstrate how collective valuation takes place in the processes of practicing alternative pathways of agricultural food production and consumption. Though sparked with reoccurring moments of valuation (such as the Earth's markets), valuation needs to be regarded as a continuous ongoing process that eventually leads to impact in the form of changing ways of doing. Only through the process of participating in novel practices will innovative ideas and initiatives become institutionalised over time.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

This paper aimed to understand collaborative moments and processes of valuation embedded in social innovation processes of agricultural food production and consumption. We argue that these valuation processes already have some impact on rural development that can be overlooked when focusing on the effects and outcomes of social innovation after it has been introduced into a field of application. The valuation perspective enabled us to better understand how collaborative valuation processes unfold impact by discussing, negotiating, making sense of, interpreting, and eventually applying novelty (Table 1).

Table 1. Micro-impacts, moments, and processes of valuation within the valuation phases (source: own).

Valuation Phases	Agro-Economic System	Socio-Cultural Processes	Place Making	Valuation Moment and Processes
Contestations and negotiations of norms	• disputing and critical engaging with conventional agrarian economic models	• contesting policy discourses	• re-framing rural lifestyle	• critical reflection, but embedded in the economy • ascribing new value to alternative forms of revenues
Symbolic capital accumulation and recognition of actions	• creating of a new narrative	• strategic networking	• establishing new habits and routines	• staged moments (e.g., TEDx) • new visual and creative forms (graphic article, apron) • spin-outs of funded projects with added cultural value
Re-definition of value(s) and their consolidation in society	• implementing new/alternative agro-ecological practices	• building educating communities	• creating a sense of belonging by fostering novel human relationships	• emphasis on process rather than moments • adapting innovations to localities and places

Our methodological approach allowed us to deeply engage with a rural collaborative community. We were able to better understand and reconstruct the actors' roots, motivations, and mind-sets behind their collaborative work. One first key finding underscores how distancing from the conventional modes of agricultural production provides an important basis for collectively discussing, contesting, negotiating, and searching for alternative solutions to this dominant agrarian economic system. This active and collaborative confrontation with the dominant economic system leads to a joint search for alternative approaches to agrarian practices that take into account the shared values orientated towards organic, collaborative, and ecologically sustainable farming.

Considering this broader valuation context, we identified three valuation phases that are embedded in social innovation processes. In the phase of *contesting and negotiating norms*, we identified moments and processes of joint thinking, sense making, and critical reflection. These allowed for creating shared ideologies and principles that lay the foundation for decision-making or for developing future projects. This phase is characterised by an open approach of actors towards building a shared notion of a social innovation's roots and foundations. In moments and processes of exchange, communication, and joint activities, a joint positioning is set in favour of or against existing (perceived) norms and value

systems. At the same time, positioning defines where to stand in the existing system by being open to new, evolving phases rather than constructing a rigid (alternative) system. Departing from such a shared value foundation, we further identified a valuation phase that leads to *recognising joint activities and accumulating symbolic capital*. This phase consists primarily of consciously set-up moments that depict the authentic practicing of sharing values, for example, by presenting at key events, or by finding new visual forms for piloting ideas as well as testing and demonstrating how to implement alternative approaches to rural development. Symbolic capital is accumulated through (ritualised) events, visible daily activities as entrepreneurs, or presence at local markets. By being present in the community and by making values transparent to others, members of the community tend not to contemplate a clear logic or plan but try to make the best out of different, spontaneous forms of encounters and collaborations. These activities strengthen and enlarge the community, as well as address interested members of the regional population. The third valuation phase then involves the actors in the consolidation of their innovative approaches by *re-defining values* at the societal level. Sharing, diffusing, and adapting perspectives and value perceptions thus helps to change established practices (e.g., in production and consumption of agricultural goods) and adjust and adapt community values to integrate them into society. The dimension of the consolidation of value through organisational, institutional, social, or geographical diffusion does not focus much on replicability, often foreseen in innovation processes, but on practices of adaptability of valued objects, intentions, and ideas to each context, each community, and each place.

The process perspective suggested in this paper helped us to better identify and understand the impact of valuation processes on ongoing dynamics of rural development. Most prominently, we observed an impact on the existing *agro-economic system*, on *socio-cultural development*, and on *place-making dynamics*. Here, the impact of valuation in ongoing social innovation processes stresses two points: First, processes of change and adjustment can be observed already in ongoing innovative initiatives. That means regional impact unfolds already way before the implementation and diffusion of a socially innovative project or initiative. Second, our results indicate, though departing from an economic context—namely agricultural food production and consumption—that rural development can be affected way beyond the immediate economic realms. Instead, precisely because of the interactive, relational, and thus collaborative nature of valuation processes, rural development clearly includes socio-cultural dimensions and practices of place-making.

The impact of social innovation processes does not only unfold in the form of outputs of the innovation itself but on the value created, de-constructed, and re-constructed throughout the different phases. Critically analysing the dominant agricultural system, for example, does not lead to the development of alternatives that are detached from it. Rather, the active and ongoing confrontation with conventional agriculture leads to the creation of solutions that are embedded in the existing system and at the same time attempt to change it, for example, by making the rationalities behind one's own actions and decisions visible. This involves adjustments in socio-cultural practices, too, by empowering the role of individuals and communities in broader society. This form of impact can be observed in the collective work of symbolic capital accumulation in discussion tables, advocacy actions, and individuals being referred to as a contact point or inspiration for a targeted topic. The improvement of socio-cultural conditions is also visible in the opportunities emerging in these rural towns for different generations and target groups (the possibility to aspire for alternative and better educational activities, crafting of new job opportunities, fostering inclusivity, and strengthening social ties in an often-fragmented rural society). Further impact of valuation processes relates to how places are used, utilised, constructed, and associated with meaning. We saw examples of how rituals, events, interaction, and collaborative practise evolve and are organised around key landmarks or symbols (such as ovens and mills). Again, these changes are generated in the processes of valuation that are inscribed in social innovation processes and cause effects, even impact, during the processes themselves.

Conceptually, we departed from moments and processes of valuation. Against this backdrop, we understand moments as situations that are spatially and temporarily locatable. We do find quite numerous events across the three valuation phases uncovered by our research. Some moments even became routinised as regularly reoccurring events pointing towards establishing rituals where interactions (such as in the annual open oven events) contribute to building up cultural capital that also creates a sense of belonging to a particular community and place [71].

Even though some of the literature stresses the importance of valuation moments in innovative and creative processes [15,16,46,72–74], our empirical investigation suggests a rather procedural perspective. This is amplified particularly in the valuation phase of 'symbolic capital accumulation and recognition of actions'. Here, despite staged moments of valuation (e.g., TedX talk, documentary premiere), collective valuation is generated across a complex web of valuation processes. This, on the one hand, confirms Waible et al.'s [17] claim to be sensible for valuation moments across social fields, but, on the other hand, also stresses to take into account the numerous micro-impacts that originate from collective valuation. These can only be reconstructed by deeply engaging with the practice fields under investigation. Therefore, we applied research methods able to highlight often hidden but crucial aspects behind the intentions, applications, and development of social innovations by looking at different moments and processes of valuation and by questioning how these moments affect elements of the larger system through joint learning and sense-making, collaboration, and future-making. Though the long-term effects are yet uncertain, larger and smaller sparks of change are diffused beyond the local community, not least because of its embeddedness in different local and trans-local networks and its openness to different social and economic constellations. From our perspective, valuation processes achieve 'small wins' [29] that might play a role in the economic, socio-cultural, and spatial development of rural regions. The investigated community is fully integrated in broader social innovation dynamics related to socio-spatial and cultural processes that have involved rural and peripheral areas in recent years, such as that of collaborative and multi-local work [55,67]. Most of the activities we observed could be related to care economy practices too and be seen to highlight the collaborative and unifying nature of social innovation processes that include a holistic vision towards economic, environmental, and social sustainability. However, belonging to such global phenomena related to the civic sphere does not alienate the community from its capacity to be localised and rooted in a place-based, authentic story.

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Notes

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