



# A conceptual framework for using social innovation as an approach to local economic development



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**Background:** Approaches such as social innovation were visible during many of the responses that public-sector organisations, civil society, communities, and the private sector collaboratively implemented to address the issues of unemployment and the impact of economic challenges during the global COVID-19 pandemic. The use of social innovation as an approach to local economic development by South African municipalities, however, reveals a research gap in terms of a conceptual framework for enabling such use.

**Aim:** This article explores a conceptual framework for using social innovation as an approach to local economic development by South African municipalities.

**Setting:** Conventional top-down local economic development approaches by South African municipalities have become inadequate for dealing with contemporary local economic development challenges. Such inadequacy calls for municipalities to rethink and adapt their approach to dealing with economic challenges and to developing and implementing their local economic development strategies.

**Methods:** Through an interpretivist paradigm, the adopted methodology is underpinned by a qualitative research approach. Content analysis was performed of relevant research documents concerning social innovation and local economic development. From this content analysis, a conceptual framework was developed through an inductive approach.

**Results:** The findings illustrate that the praxis for using this conceptual framework is vested in the interconnected nature of its attributes, antecedents, and consequences, which will contribute to the achievement of certain local economic development outcomes.

**Conclusion:** This article suggests that a conceptual framework could contribute to stimulating future research concerning the phenomenon and can serve as an impetus and direction for research inquiry.

**Keywords:** local economic development; social innovation; local government; pro-market approach; conceptual framework.

## Introduction

The local economic development (LED) programmes of local governments have in recent years evolved to include strategies for promoting the survival and growth of existing businesses, encouraging the development of new businesses, organising training for small, medium and micro enterprises (SMEs), and taking action to ensure that disadvantaged community members have access to decent livelihoods (United Cities and Local Government [UCLG] 2014:4).

For this shift, it is fundamental for local government to move from top-down to bottom-up LED approaches, as the latter facilitate community and stakeholder participation in LED to resolve challenges unique to their local economies whilst encouraging integrated development projects across multiple sectors of the economy (Department of Cooperative and Traditional Affairs [COGTA] 2019; Raco 2000:574; UCLG 2014:4). However, in practice, conventional top-down approaches to LED by some South African municipalities still dictate stakeholder and community participation in LED, with local government informing and requesting cooperation and participation in LED matters (Nel & Rogerson 2015).

Global challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated that it is important for governments, public-sector organisations, and local government to adopt an inclusive approach to deal with societal challenges and their impact. During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, there will not only be a need for the South African government to rethink its approach to dealing with economic challenges, but also for local governments to adapt their approaches to developing and

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implementing their LED strategies. Therefore, approaches – for example, social innovation (SI) – that would facilitate such an inclusive approach are gaining global recognition and are deemed viable alternatives for solving societal problems, including those of an economic nature. Thus, the use of SI was visible during many of the responses that civil society, communities, and the private sector collaboratively implemented to deal with issues such as unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic. There seems, however, to be a gap in research regarding a conceptual framework for using SI as an approach to LED by South African municipalities.

In light of this fact, this article explores a conceptual framework for using SI as an approach to LED by South African municipalities. The research question posed is as follows: What could a conceptual framework for using SI as an approach to LED by South African municipalities look like? Through a qualitative research approach, a content analysis was done of relevant research documents concerning SI and LED to address this gap. This entailed using a range of electronic search engines in which the concepts of SI and LED in local government were respectively applied as search terms and adapted as required to identify research that could be included in a narrative literature review.

Subsequently, a content analysis was done of relevant research documents concerning SI and LED. From this analysis of documents such as peer-reviewed journal articles, published research, as well as government documents, a conceptual framework was developed through an inductive approach (Braun & Clarke 2006:83).

Against this background, the first section of this article reflects on LED's evolution and policy approaches. This is followed by a conceptualisation of SI and the rationalisation of its use as an approach to LED. Afterwards, a concept analysis of SI as an approach to LED is presented. The article concludes by proposing a conceptual framework for South African municipalities to use SI as an approach to LED.

## Local economic development's evolution and policy approaches

Globally LED has been practised in many developed countries from the 1960s. Before 1994, LED has been used in different forms in South African municipalities as a response to the social and economic problems caused by globalisation, an example being the rise in poverty and inequality (Patterson 2008:3; Sekhampu 2010:39; South African Cities Network (SACN) 2019:13). The evolution of LED internationally from the 1960s is reflected in the evolution of LED in South Africa, especially on the formal side of businesses. In its early stages, there were three different waves of LED globally that also affected South Africa (Sekhampu 2010:40).

The first wave of LED in the 1960s, with its pro-market approach, focused on pro-market strategies or place marketing to external investors (Patterson 2008:3;

Tessema 2020:28). Pro-market strategies focused on creating a supportive and favourable environment for competitive businesses, maintaining and implementing new businesses in the local area, encouraging foreign investments and grants, promoting entrepreneurship, reducing unemployment, and increasing economic growth (Lukhele & Madzivhandila 2018:878; Tessema 2020:28). These strategies were often linked to a variety of incentives such as tax breaks, reduced costs of public services in the form of water and electricity, and infrastructure improvement (Patterson 2008:3).

Through these strategies, LED intended to attract companies to a locality to stimulate development within that area.

During this first wave, both internationally and in South Africa, the nature of LED was a top-down approach with governments taking the responsibility of simultaneously being policymakers and entrepreneurs, whilst communities were left with smaller projects to create their own employment (Patterson 2008:3). Although this top-down pro-market approach to LED by the government included a focus on economic growth, it proved to be unsuccessful, especially in South Africa, at reducing poverty and unemployment because of its focus on supply-side sectoral development and economic policies are mainly aimed at making markets and industries more efficient and contributing to faster growth of real national output, an example of which is the reduction of taxes to businesses. Whilst product innovation was inherent to this first wave, development was to a certain extent seen as a by-product of economic growth (Patterson 2008:4).

The second wave of LED, which started in the 1980s and lasted until the mid-1990s, still followed a pro-market approach with governments maintaining their focus on economic growth (Tessema 2020:28). The pro-market strategies of this approach focused on endogenous economic opportunities, attempting to support internal competitiveness of existing firms against international competition, encouraging entrepreneurship development and business start-ups, entrepreneurship training programmes, business incubation, financial support, skills development and sectoral development, as well as business expansion and retention (Patterson 2008:3; Sekhampu 2010:40; Tessema 2020:28). Although this approach offered entrepreneurs the opportunity to innovate, it was still a top-down approach where major decisions were taken by central government planners and developers, with little or minor involvement of local actors (Nel & Rogerson 2016:4).

The third LED wave, which started in the late 1990s, also adopted a pro-market approach that included pro-market strategies (Tessema 2020:28). However, it had a more holistic approach to LED as it increased individual business support and sectoral development approaches, thus emphasising the creation of conducive economic environments for economic growth (Patterson 2008:3;

Sekhampu 2010:40). Furthermore, competition amongst local businesses was encouraged, and support was provided for networking, participation, and collaboration between businesses, the private sector, the public sector, and community partnerships, with the sole purpose of facilitating labour development and education, supporting entrepreneurial activity, supporting inward investment, and supporting an increased quality of life (Patterson 2008:3; SACN 2019:13; Sekhampu 2010:40). Hence, the pro-market strategies during this wave sought to allow local economies to adjust more easily to macroeconomic reforms. Macroeconomic reforms refer to reforms such as changes in inflation policies, examples of which are inflation targeting, changes to price levels, policies targeting economic growth, national income, tax collection, and changes to policies targeting unemployment (Investopedia 2020). Although the pro-market strategies adopted in the third wave still took a top-down approach, this approach now incorporated participation and networks to attain LED goals. This focus on participation and networks is consistent with the use of SI, which is grounded in the use of networks and partnerships to address societal challenges (Edwards-Schachter & Wallace 2017:70,72). Apart from this focus of both SI and LED on participation and networks, literature highlights several linkages between LED and SI. These linkages are amongst other constructs such as capacity building, community change and participation which is inherent to the praxis of both SI and LED (Castro-Arce & Vanclay 2020; Marchesi & Tweed

2021:10; Sirovatka & Greve 2014:81). In light of this fact, this article explores SI, as conceptualised in the next section, as part of the evolving perspectives to implementing LED.

## Conceptualising social innovation

Globally policymakers, politicians, researchers, foundations, and academic institutions are increasingly taking cognisance of the benefits of using SI as a viable and sustainable alternative for social problem solving (Majumdar, Guha & Marakkath 2015:7; Tucker 2014:5; Young Foundation 2012:4). Despite the interest in SI globally, there are no shared common definitions for its conceptualisation (Anderson, Curtis & Wittig 2014:3; TEPSIE 2014:10; Young Foundation 2012:4). The reason for this is that SI is a practice-led field that has advanced differently across disciplines and in its application (Copus et al. 2017:11; Majumdar et al. 2015:8; Young Foundation 2012:4). According to TEPSIE (2014:10) and Cajasanta (2014:49), SI is used to refer to a broad range of activities that contribute to social change. These social changes include a focus on social demands or challenges, the reconfiguration of social relations and power structures, institutional or labour innovations, new models of LED, the development of new products, services and programmes, social entrepreneurship, social enterprises, non-profit management, and enterprise-led sustainable development (Bock 2016; Lubelcová 2012:292; Tucker 2014:6; Young Foundation 2012:6). Against this background, there are several broad conceptualisations for SI, as outlined in Table 1.

**TABLE 1:** Conceptualising social innovation.

Field	Authors	Definition	Example
Sociology	Hämäläinen and Heiskala (eds. 2007)	SIs are changes within the social, regulating, or regulative structures of society that upgrade its collective assets and improve its financial and social execution.	Participative democracy
Sociology	Howaldt and Shwarz (2010)	An SI is a new arrangement and/or new formation of social practices in definite areas of action or social context, deliberated by certain participants with the objective of better satisfying or answering needs and problems than is likely of established practices.	New services, new business models, and network-based social networking
Creative research	Mumford and Moertl (2003)	They define SI as the generation and application of new thoughts about people and their intuitiveness inside a social system.	Logical administration of standardised tests for university admissions
Entrepreneurship	Swedberg (2009)	SI is the carrying out of new arrangements that produce social change.	A mixture of microfinance and social groups
Entrepreneurship	Ziegler (2017)	Social innovation is the carrying out of modern combinations of competencies.	Efforts to build capabilities of involvement, health and association
Welfare economics	Pol and Ville (2009)	A new idea that has the potential to progress through quality or amount of life.	Internet, globalisation and the Clean Up the World initiative
Practice-led field	Mulgan (2007)	New ideas that work within the fulfilment of social objectives, innovative exercises, and administrations that are persuaded by the objective of fulfilling social needs and that are transcendently created and dispersed through associations whose reason for existing are social.	Natural food, open-source computer programmes, educational models of childcare, and micro-credit
Practice-led field	Murray, Caulier-Grice and Mulgan (2010)	SI involves new thoughts (products, services, and models) that at the same time meet social needs and make modern social connections and associations. They are therefore developments that are both good for society and that improve society's capacity to perform.	Inventive, instructive educational model for disadvantaged children, farming naturally by cultivating at school
Territorial development	Moulaert et al. (2005)	Those changes in plans, office, and educational institutions that lead to a much better inclusion of excluded individuals and groups on various spatial scales. It is intensely a matter of prepared advancement, i.e. changes within the elements of social relations, including power relations.	Urban advancement programmes against social exclusion
Practice-led field and territorial development	Centre for Social Innovation (2016)	New ideas that resolve current social, financial, national, economic, and ecological challenges to give value to all people and the environment or planet.	Urban development and environmental sustainability
Research- and practice-led field	Young Foundation (2012)	Social innovations are new methods (products, services, models, markets, processes, etc.) that address social needs more effectively than existing solutions, and lean towards innovative or strengthened capacities and relationships as well as improved use of assets and resources.	Community development

Source: Adapted from Anderson et al. 2014; Centre for Social Innovation 2016; eds. Hämäläinen and Heiskala 2007; Howaldt and Shwarz 2010; Moulaert et al. 2005; Mulgan 2007; Mumford and Moertl 2003; Murray et al. 2010; Pol and Ville 2009; Swedberg 2009; Young Foundation 2012; Ziegler 2017

Note: Please see the full reference list of the article, Chomane, P. & Biljohn, M.I., 2021, 'A conceptual framework for using social innovation as an approach to local economic development', *Africa's Public Service Delivery and Performance Review* 9(1), a565. <https://doi.org/10.4102/apsdpr.v9i1.565>, for more information.

SI, social innovation.

Table 1 outlines different conceptualisations of SI as well as its application in different fields, accompanied by examples. Most of these conceptualisations emphasise three commonalities that cut across many of them: new ways of satisfying human needs, changing social associations, and transforming social relations (Bock 2016; Howaldt & Shwarz 2010; Moulaert et al. 2005; Mulgan 2007; Murray et al. 2010; Pol & Ville 2009; Tucker 2014:10; Young Foundation 2012:15). The first emphasis relates to new ways of satisfying human needs that are not currently satisfied and are sometimes perceived as unimportant to the market (Centre for Social Innovation 2016; Howaldt & Shwarz 2010; Edwards-Schachter & Wallace 2017:67; Mulgan 2007; Murray et al. 2010; Nicholls, Simon & Gabriel 2015:2; Pol & Ville 2009). This is also linked to the basic needs of communities, although they may vary according to different communities (Young Foundation 2012:14). The second emphasis has to do with changing social associations (Bock 2016:10–11; Boelman et al. 2014:14). Changing social associations relates to the internal process of governance in communities that assists with the satisfaction of human needs and also increases the level of involvement of the community, especially the vulnerable groups, in order to improve their quality of life (eds. Hämäläinen & Heiskala 2007; OECD 2011:13; Young Foundation 2012:140). The social changes lead to a shift from top-down to bottom-up approaches where communities have a bigger say and greater involvement, rather than being merely consulted. The third emphasis of these definitions, which also facilitates a shift from top-down to bottom-up approaches, has to do with transforming social relations, which increases access to information and resources for communities (Bock 2016:10–11; Boelman et al. 2014:14; eds. Hämäläinen & Heiskala 2007; Moulaert et al. 2005; TEPSIE 2014:14). Changing social relations increases access to information and resources communities (TEPSIE 2014:14)

Based on these conceptualisations of SI (Table 1), the following definition is adopted in this article: SI applies new and innovative approaches (new products, services, markets, or processes) to address societal challenges more effectively than existing solutions. This definition of SI supports collaboration and partnership formation amongst local people and stakeholders through improved associations, social entrepreneurship, and networks to find new solutions to existing challenges, which is consistent with bottom-up approaches to development or LED.

The formation of successful collaborations and partnerships seems to have been achieved to a lesser extent in conventional top-down LED approaches in South Africa. This has been exacerbated by several institutional and capacity challenges. A first challenge includes the presumption that sufficient capacity exists in local government to initiate and direct economic activities, which is not the case (Malele 2018:38). A second challenge includes some South African municipalities still dictating stakeholder and community participation in LED, with local government informing and requesting cooperation and participation in LED matters (Nel & Rogerson 2015). Amongst others, these challenges negate the

agency of communities to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes about LED.

Significantly, although SIs are social in their means and their ends, they could also be applied to achieve economic and other outcomes for a particular community. The bottom-up approach in which the application of SI is embedded could thus be applied to address LED challenges and achieve inclusive economic growth and development. The outcome of this could be, amongst other things, creating social value through improved quality of life, especially for the marginalised members of the community in a local area. Moreover, it allows marginalised community members to act on their challenges to satisfy their own needs. Therefore, SI contributes to augmenting their capacity to act in solving societal or development challenges, including LED challenges (Marchesi & Tweed 2021:10; Sirovatka & Greve 2014:81).

## Rationalising social innovation's use in local economic development policy approaches

This section rationalises SI as an approach to LED by considering its use when a pro-market approach to LED is adopted. Whilst this article does not disregard the usefulness of SI for pro-poor policy approaches, its focus on the pro-market approach is premised on the latter's incorporation of participation and networks to attain LED goals since the 1990s. Against the background of the three waves discussed earlier, evidence suggests that after 1994, LED in South Africa had characteristics of both a pro-poor and a pro-market approach as a policy response. However, only in large municipal cities are both pro-poor and pro-market approaches applied in a dual economic system through the use of partnerships and the available resources of these municipalities (Nel & Rogerson 2015:4; SACN 2019:13). In contrast, LED strategies of smaller municipalities are characterised by the dominance of pro-poor interventions (Koma 2012:11; Nel & Rogerson 2015:8). Consequently, an over-focus on pro-poor LED has come at the expense of simultaneously working with the private or business sector on pro-market interventions (Nel & Rogerson 2015:1).

According to Lukhele and Madzivhandila (2018:878), the focus of pro-market strategies in a pro-market LED approach is on creating a supportive and conducive environment for competitive business sectors, the retention and introduction of new businesses in the local area, promoting entrepreneurship, reducing unemployment, and promoting economic growth. The success of this focus thus depends on the formation of partnerships between the public sector or local government and other stakeholders. Therefore, the partners in this strategy are the business sector, local government, and communities. In this regard, the role of the business sector is to take risks in creating new businesses and create jobs in their businesses, whilst they earn a profit and pay taxes to the government for financial services and investment (Avis 2016:16). The role of local government is to

build leadership and coordination in the planning and implementation of LED initiatives, either directly or through delegation to community-based agencies (UCLG 2014:7). Through LED policies and by-laws, local government thus creates a conducive environment for businesses to thrive and build social capital, connects local government with their communities through the supply of social services, and encourages innovative solutions to local needs (UCLG 2014:7). The role of communities, meanwhile, is to identify and initiate their own solutions to economic, social, and environmental issues so that they can build healthy and economically viable communities (Phillips & Pittman 2009:5)

This pro-market LED approach thus contains elements of SI such as its encouragement of community participation, social entrepreneurship, and partnership formation, which is consistent with the use of SI (Edwards-Schachter & Wallace 2017:70; Findik 2018:8; Ngcobo 2016:31; Srinivas 2015). Community participation is recognised as being important in both LED and SI.

The reason is that it ensures that the views of communities and local people are considered when societal challenges are addressed and when strategies and solutions are devised in response to such challenges, and assists in pooling resources to address societal challenges (Sibanda 2011:23). Consequently, community participation results in collaboration to find innovative solutions to community and societal challenges, which is characteristic of using SI as an approach to LED (Copus et al. 2017:12; Tucker 2014:10). Another outcome of community participation could be social entrepreneurship or its encouragement, which is inherent in both LED and SI (Gregoire 2016:57). Social entrepreneurs are guided by solving societal problems, which are the reasons why communities participate not only in LED, but also in SI. These societal problems are the driving force behind the social entrepreneurs who shape and create innovative social solutions for the community (Swanson & Zhang 2014:173).

Partnership formation in the pro-market approach to LED is also consistent with the use of SI as an approach to LED (Patterson 2008:3). In this regard, partnership formation during LED is important because it increases cooperation amongst partners. Consequently, the outcome could be the pooling of extra resources, introducing new and more effective and efficient ways of doing things, and sharing decision-making powers as well as risks (Ngcobo 2016:31; Srinivas 2015). This is also consistent with the use of SI to address societal challenges. Using SI as an approach to LED will thus allow local governments to solve societal challenges by learning about and deliberating on new approaches and methods with partners, communities, and stakeholders, and through this developing their internal local capacity (Castro-Arce & Vanclay 2020). Moreover, through SI, local governments can keep in touch with LED challenges that need urgent attention in their cities, towns, and communities. Against this background, it is apparent that SI can be applied during a pro-market approach to LED, but through a bottom-up approach that will facilitate community participation, partnership

formation, and social entrepreneurship. Conventional top-down approaches during the implementation of pro-market strategies have thus proven to be outdated.

## Concept analysis of social innovation as an approach to local economic development

This section presents a concept analysis for using SI as an approach to LED. According to Walker and Avant (1988, 2011), a concept analysis comprises attributes, antecedents, and consequences of a concept. Using Walker and Avant's framework of a concept analysis, this section considers distinguishing attributes, antecedents, and consequences underpinning SI's use as an approach to LED. Attributes are described as those characteristics that delineate a concept (Garnett et al. 2018:5; Walker & Avant 2011). For this study, the attribute of using SI during LED is defined as the qualities or characteristics that are ascribed to SI. The attributes include: collaboration, a bottom-up approach, participants' co-producing of goods and services, a common goal, and the construction of new roles in communities (Biljohn 2018:iv; Bovaird & Löffler 2016; Chalmers 2012:19; Herrera 2015; Huddart 2012:7; Rao-Nicholson, Vorley & Khan 2017:229; OECD 2011:13; Ziegler 2017:2). Collaboration, the first attribute, is defined as bringing together a wide variety of disciplines and skills as well as communities, local government, civil society, and the private sector (Biljohn 2018:38; Bovaird & Löffler 2016; Chalmers 2012:19; Huddart 2012:7; Ziegler 2017:2). Collaboration thus results in producing ideas, creativity, and innovations through the use of expertise and experience at all levels within an organisation or amongst actors in a project (Bozik 2020:5; Social Business Manifesto 2020). During SI, these actors focus on finding solutions – such as new services, models, or innovations – to a societal problem through the application of bottom-up approaches (Bozik 2020:5; OECD 2011:13).

The second attribute is a bottom-up approach, which simply relates to how communities' own creativity, innovations, and ideas that are infused and supported rather than undermined (Biljohn 2018:107; Gregoire 2016:51). The third attribute relates to participants' co-producing of goods and services (Biljohn 2018:47; Edwards-Schachter & Wallace 2017:72). At the heart of the SI concept lies the active participation of people in the co-production as well as the provision of public and private goods, and services (OECD 2011:21). This implies that individuals and communities are involved in the co-creation and co-production of goods and services during SI as an approach to LED. In co-production, communities participate in the planning, design, delivery, and evaluation that take place during social value creation or service delivery (OECD 2011:22; Voorberg, Bekkers & Tummers 2014:2). The fourth attribute emphasises a common goal. A common goal in SI is meeting the community's social needs by improving its members' standard of living (Edwards-Schachter & Wallace 2017:67). This implies that satisfying human needs

that have not been met by the market empowers individuals and groups as they participate in the SI process (Anderson et al. 2014:7; Centre for Social Innovation 2016; Howaldt & Shwarz 2010; Mulgan 2007; Murray et al. 2010; Nicholls et al. 2015:2; Pol & Ville 2009). The common goal is an inclusive process in the sense that the benefits of satisfying social needs are enjoyed even by the most vulnerable and marginalised members of communities (Edwards-Schachter & Wallace 2017:67). Thus, SI benefits, strengthens, and improves the wellbeing of the most marginalised members of communities and, as a result of improved wellbeing, it contributes to changes in social relations (Anderson et al. 2014:7; Boelman et al. 2014:14; eds. Hämäläinen & Heiskala 2007; OECD 2021; Young Foundation 2012:140).

The fifth attribute is the construction of new roles in communities. Social innovation creates new roles for users and beneficiaries thus empowering them and enabling them to better satisfy their needs in the long run (Avelino et al. 2019; Boelman et al. 2014:14; eds. Hämäläinen & Heiskala 2007; Moolaert et al. 2005; OECD 2011:13; Young Foundation 2012:22; TEPSIE 2014:14). The overall implication of using SI during LED is to build community leadership that will be able to collaborate, elicit participation from all the sectors, and co-produce as it also increases the capacity of the community to address local social problems, thus increasing their standard of living.

The following conclusions can be drawn concerning these attributes. The attributes of collaboration, a bottom-up approach, participants' co-producing of goods, a common goal, and the construction of new roles in communities are distinguishing qualities or characteristics that are not only ascribed to SI's use as an approach to LED. These attributes could also be considered outcomes of the collaborations and partnerships that are undertaken between local government and stakeholders through SI to implement an LED strategy and deliverables. This implies that these collaborations and partnerships between local government and stakeholders should be underpinned by these attributes. It could be argued that these collaborations and partnerships are embedded in partnership formation, building networks, encouraging social entrepreneurship, and facilitating stakeholder participation. It therefore becomes essential for local governments to consider to what extent these attributes are integral to their use of SI as an approach to LED. They should also consider the extent to which they ensure that these attributes are present when SI is used as an approach to LED. In this regard, the antecedents of cooperation, participation, a continuous process, divergent thinking, a learning approach, and a coaching approach – which are preconditions to SI as an approach to LED – are deemed important.

An antecedent is defined as something that needs to happen before a phenomenon can take place (Cambridge Dictionary 2020; Garnett et al. 2018:3; Walker & Avant 1988, 2011). Thus, antecedents have to occur before local government can use SI as an approach to LED. These antecedents are: cooperation, participation, a continuous process, divergent thinking, a

learning approach, and a coaching approach (Dawson & Daniel 2010, quoted in Biljohn 2019:4; Davies & Simon 2013:5; Edwards-Schachter & Wallace 2017:67,73; Neumeier 2017:35; Pulford 2018:1; Rao-Nicholson et al. 2017:231). The first antecedent, cooperation, is described as the process of organising people or groups to collaboratively work towards achieving a social benefit or social change (Merriam-Webster 2020). Cooperation is key during multi-stakeholder engagement as it seeks solutions that enable the generation of SI ideas (Cajaiba-Santana 2014:45; Davies & Simon 2013:5; Gros-Balthazard & Talandier 2020:2). Cooperation allows for all the views of the stakeholders to be listened to as they generate better ideas and offer mutual support and confidence to stakeholders (Davies & Simon 2013:5). The second antecedent is participation, which can be described as the act of willingness to engage, to get involved, and to share in the activities of a group (Davies & Simon 2013:5; Edwards-Schachter & Wallace 2017:67; Neumeier 2017:35,36).

Participation in SI means that those community members who are most affected by a problem should be able to participate and have a say regarding the issue (Biljohn 2019:4). Participation increases the legitimacy of projects and decisions taken (Cajaiba-Santana 2014:47; Davies & Simon 2013:9).

The third antecedent is a continuous process, which, during SI by definition relates to the act of implementing improvements to a final social product (Oeij et al. 2018:20). These changes can either be incremental throughout the process and over time, or they can be a breakthrough after the process of divergent thinking. The intention is to have a product or service that is of social value, together with an improvement in the wellbeing of communities (OECD 2011:8; Edwards-Schachter & Wallace 2017:67; Popescu 2015:78). The fourth antecedent is divergent thinking during SI, and relates to how individuals, groups of individuals, or communities like to solve their problems and how they react to a problem in different contexts. Divergent thinking allows for new ideas to be generated, sorted, and narrowed down to the best implementable idea that has a greater chance of satisfying a societal need (OECD 2011:13; Davies & Simon 2013:5). The fifth antecedent is a learning and coaching approach (Dawson & Daniel 2010, quoted in Edwards 2017:73; Pulford 2018:1; Rao-Nicholson et al. 2017:231). The participants involved in the SI process are encouraged to share their knowledge, expertise, and experiences (Neumeier 2017:35; Young Foundation 2018). The interaction amongst participants and the facilitators is directed at learning to attain the goals and outcomes of the process (Young Foundation 2018). The stakeholders' learning is enabled by creating the space and facilitating the dynamics to obtaining new knowledge (Neumeier 2017:35; Young Foundation 2018). A learning approach coincides with a coaching approach to SI, where facilitators within the SI process prepare and give advice and direction based on their encounters with SI tools and strategies (Young Foundation 2018).

It can be argued that these antecedents should be harnessed institutionally by local government for partnership formation, building networks, encouraging social entrepreneurship, and facilitating stakeholder participation to occur and to be driven from an institutional perspective. For these antecedents to be inherent to the four aforementioned processes, the antecedents could be regarded not only as preconditions to SI's use as an approach to LED, but also for the processes of partnership formation, building networks, encouraging social entrepreneurship, and facilitating stakeholder participation. These antecedents (cooperation, participation, a continuous process, divergent thinking, a learning approach, coaching approach), which are consistent with adopting a bottom-up approach, could therefore affect the extent to which local government can address LED challenges and implement its LED strategy successfully. Likewise, if these antecedents are not enhanced at an institutional level by local governments, it could have implications for achieving the results associated with using SI as an approach to LED, such as social value, satisfying needs, participation, and social change. From this, it is apparent that these antecedents are not only fundamental preconditions that must be in place before using SI as an approach to LED, but could also influence the consequences of SI as an approach to LED.

When SI is used as an approach to LED, it will result in certain consequences or outcomes for its beneficiaries and local government. Consequences of a concept or phenomenon thus refer to an outcome or a result of something that has occurred at an earlier stage (Cambridge Dictionary 2020; Garnett et al. 2018:3). In this case, the phenomenon is the use of SI as an approach to LED and the consequences are the creation of social value, satisfying needs, participation, and social change (OECD 2011:21). The first consequence, the creation of social value, is defined as quantifying the relative importance that people attach to the changes to their lives that they experience (Social Value UK 2020). Social value creates empowering environments for its participants by ensuring that the participants' socio-economic needs are met (Edwards-Schachter & Wallace 2017:67; Popescu 2015:78). The second consequence of satisfying needs relates to the satisfaction of needs that are not currently satisfied by either the market or the government (Gregoire 2016:55; OECD 2011:21). The third consequence of participation strengthens the problem-solving capacity of communities in matters that affect their lives and increases the legitimacy and transparency of the SI process, thus constituting social change (Biljohn 2019:15; Cajaiba-Santana 2014:47; Edwards-Schachter & Wallace 2017:67). The latter, the fourth consequence, improves the well-being of individuals and communities by providing or creating social goods and services, employment, consumption of social goods and services, and participation in the creation of those goods and services, which are the sole purpose of providing solutions to individuals (Boelman et al. 2014:19).

In conclusion, it can be observed that these consequences underpin outcomes that will have an impact on LED for a municipality, its stakeholders, and communities. Therefore,

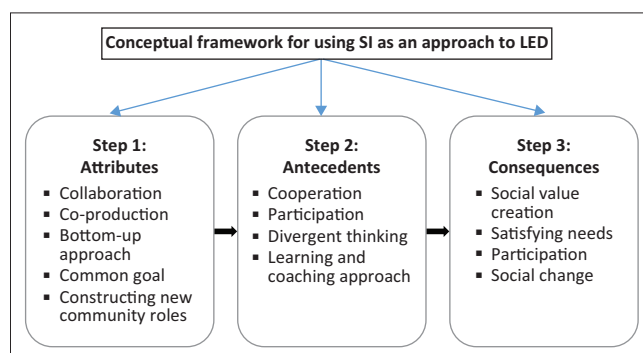
these consequences of social value, satisfying needs, participation, and social change are considered consequences of both SI and of LED. Of significance regarding these consequences is that although they will be measured as outcomes of SI's application as an approach to LED, they should be determined before SI is used. This implies that a municipality will determine in advance what is required from an institutional perspective to produce these consequences. Moreover, what type of enabling framework will harness the achievement of the mentioned consequences should also be determined. The antecedents to SI's use as an approach to LED are deemed important in creating this enabling framework.

## A conceptual framework for using social innovation as an approach to local economic development

Against the background of a concept analysis for using SI as an approach to LED, a conceptual framework is presented in this section (see Figure 1). Variables are proposed that are considered fundamental in a conceptual framework for using SI as an approach to LED. This framework also outlines the steps that form the praxis for using SI as an approach to LED.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the first step to a municipality's use of SI as an approach to LED is ensuring that the necessary attributes are fostered. For these attributes to be present during SI, they should be harnessed from an institutional level by a municipality. This means that collaboration, applying bottom-up approaches, using co-production, having a common goal with LED partners and stakeholders, and constructing new roles for communities in LED should be inherent to how LED is undertaken by a municipality. A starting point for a municipality would be to assess to what extent these attributes are visible at an LED programme or project level.

This enables the municipality to assess its use of SI, determine where some attributes are lacking, and consider the steps it is going to take to start integrating these attributes in LED programmes or projects. The next step would be to consider the extent to which these attributes are inherent overall to the policy approach adopted in the implementation of its LED.



**FIGURE 1:** Conceptual framework for using social innovation as an approach to local economic development.

As much as these attributes are characteristic of SI's use as an approach to LED, they are also indicators thereof that could be established before and after SI. These attributes are therefore used by a municipality as a measure that distinguishes its use of SI as an approach to LED.

The second step in this framework is the variable of antecedents. These antecedents that should be in place for SI to be used as an approach to LED include: cooperation, participation, a continuous process, divergent thinking, a learning approach, and a coaching approach. Similar to the attributes discussed above, SI's antecedents as a variable are also driven from an institutional perspective.

Whilst a municipality's role concerning this variable starts at an institutional level (internal environment), it requires stakeholders and partnerships from its external environment to succeed. In its internal environment, openness to cooperation and partnerships with stakeholders, partners, and communities in its external environment should become part of its LED *modus operandi*. Openness to cooperation and partnerships could in turn contribute to harnessing divergent thinking as well as adopting learning and coaching approaches to LED. A municipality is, however, still required to adopt and drive a culture of learning from its partners, stakeholders, and communities, as well as to be open to and implementing divergent thinking regarding LED. The only way this can be achieved is if attributes such as divergent views from the external environment are not only considered but also regarded as valuable in overcoming LED challenges and implementing its LED policy approach. This requires collaborating with communities, stakeholders, and partners, and co-planning, co-producing, and co-delivering LED solutions with them.

Whilst a municipality strengthens its institutional capacity to use SI as an approach to LED, it should likewise create awareness in its external environment regarding SI as a solution and approach to LED. Hence, the stakeholders, partners, and communities in its external municipal environment should be made aware of the municipality's commitment to collaborate, and co-produce LED solutions with it. In other words, the attributes of co-production, collectively developing a common goal with partners, stakeholders, and communities, as well as constructing a new role for communities through SI, are fundamental in this regard. Consequently, the external environment should be informed of the opportunities to co-produce LED solutions with the municipalities. Likewise, the municipality should scan its external environment for opportunities to collaborate on and co-produce LED solutions through SI. It is noteworthy that the variable of antecedents has an interconnected relationship with the attributes. Sustaining the attributes to SI's use as an approach to LED depends on the extent to which the mentioned antecedents are harnessed institutionally. It could be argued that these antecedents are the enabling framework to sustaining SI's attributes as well as achieving the consequences of SI.

The third step in this framework is the variable of the consequences the use of SI as an approach to LED will have for its beneficiaries and local government. They are the creation of social value, satisfying needs, participation, and social change. These consequences, which can have a social and/or economic impact, become a municipality's measure of the extent to which it is using SI as an approach to LED. Thus, in as much as these are consequences of SI's use as an approach to LED, they are simultaneously important outcomes thereof. A municipality should therefore use them as a measure to review its use of SI as an approach to LED when concluding an LED programme or project. Moreover, it should be used as a measure to evaluate the extent to which its policy approach, adopted in the municipality's LED strategy, was underpinned by SI.

For a municipality to ultimately use these consequences as a measure, it should be proactive in putting steps in place to bring about these consequences. These steps should be embedded in the praxis for steps 1 and 2 of this conceptual framework. Thus, if the antecedents of SI's use as an approach to LED are institutionally engendered by a municipality and externally harnessed during step 2, it could contribute to the culmination of the mentioned consequences. However, if these consequences are not visible from SI's use as an approach to LED, a municipality will have to revisit the praxis of steps 1 and 2. Resultantly, if step 2 of the framework, that is the antecedents, falls short, it will have implications for successfully achieving the consequences in step 3. What is more, achieving these consequences to SI's use as an approach to LED is not only reliant on the municipality's internal environment but also on its external environment. Consistent with SI's use, achieving these consequences is to a great extent embedded in how a municipality facilitates a role for its external environment through the attributes of using SI (bottom-up approach, co-production, common goal, constructing new community roles) as well as its antecedents (cooperation, participation, divergent thinking, and learning and coaching approaches). This role can be facilitated during step 2 of this framework when a municipality would agree with role players from its external environment on how they can contribute to the achievement of these consequences.

## Conclusion

This article explored how SI could be used as an approach to LED by South African municipalities. The research question posed by this article was as follows: What could a conceptual framework for using SI as an approach to LED by South African municipalities look like? The aim was achieved and the research question answered by reflecting on LED's evolution and policy approaches, rationalising SI's use as an approach to LED, performing a concept analysis of SI's use as an approach to LED, and proposing a conceptual framework for using SI as an approach to LED. This article thus argued that distinguishing attributes, antecedents, and consequences can be linked to SI's use as an approach to LED, and that these are fundamental variables to local governments' use thereof. What is noteworthy



concerning the variables underpinning this framework is how they are interconnected and influence one another. For example, attributes not only have the ability to influence antecedents but are also embedded in the antecedents to SI's use as an approach to LED. Furthermore, the interconnectedness between the attributes and antecedents demonstrates that attributes are not only characteristic of SI's use as an approach to LED, but also influence the antecedents thereof. Concerning the interconnectedness between antecedents and consequences, these antecedents could have a direct influence on the extent to which the consequences are achieved.

This article concluded that the attributes of collaboration, a bottom-up approach, participants' co-producing of goods, a common goal, and the construction of new roles in communities are qualities or characteristics of SI's use as an approach to LED. This means that these characteristics should be noticeable when SI is used by local government as an approach to LED. Hence, the process that is undertaken by local government in collaborations and partnerships with stakeholders should be underpinned by these characteristics. The characteristics can also be present in the LED programmes or project outcomes that are derived through the use of SI. Furthermore, this article argued that the antecedents such as cooperation, participation, a continuous process, divergent thinking, and a learning and coaching approach are preconditions to using SI as an approach to LED. These antecedents should be fostered institutionally by local government for partnership formation, building networks, encouraging social entrepreneurship, and facilitating stakeholder participation to occur, and to be driven from an institutional perspective. What can be deduced is that as much as partnership formation, building networks, and encouraging social entrepreneurship could influence the use of SI differently, antecedents remain fundamental to the extent to which communities and stakeholders would be willing to form partnerships and networks with local government in the latter's quest to address LED challenges.

Based on the aim and research question, this article concluded that although SI could be used as an approach to LED in a pro-market LED approach, the aforementioned antecedents could generally influence such an application of SI. In this regard, local government plays a central role in ensuring that these antecedents are in place and are enhanced institutionally before it can use SI as an approach to LED. It is therefore apparent that successfully implementing a municipality's LED strategy, regardless of the adopted policy approach, depends in part on partnerships, networks, stakeholders, and communities. This success could, however, in turn be affected by local government's institutional and external promotion of the variables underpinning this conceptual framework. Given SI's nascence as an approach to LED in the South African local government context, empirical research that could enhance its future application for LED by local government will be beneficial.

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### Competing interests

The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

### Authors' contributions

P.C. and M.I.B. both contributed equally to this work.

### Ethical considerations

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### Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

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