

Fritsch, Matti (Ed.); Kahila, Petri (Ed.); Németh, Sarolta (Ed.); Scott, James W. (Ed.)

**Book**

## Spatial Justice and Cohesion: The Role of Place-Based Action in Community Development

Regions and Cities

**Provided in Cooperation with:**

Taylor & Francis Group

*Suggested Citation:* Fritsch, Matti (Ed.); Kahila, Petri (Ed.); Németh, Sarolta (Ed.); Scott, James W. (Ed.) (2024) : Spatial Justice and Cohesion: The Role of Place-Based Action in Community Development, Regions and Cities, ISBN 978-1-000-96851-4, Routledge, London, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003229681>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/290608>

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# SPATIAL JUSTICE AND COHESION

THE ROLE OF PLACE-BASED ACTION  
IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



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REGIONS AND CITIES

EDITED BY MATTI FRITSCH,  
PETRI KAHILA, SAROLTA NÉMETH,  
AND JAMES W. SCOTT





# Spatial Justice and Cohesion

Place-based strategies are widely discussed as powerful instruments of economic and community development. In terms of the European debate, the local level – cities, towns and neighbourhoods – has recently come under increased scrutiny as a potentially decisive actor in Cohesion Policy. As understandings of socio-spatial and economic cohesion evolve, the idea that spatial justice requires a concerted policy response has gained currency.

Given the political, social and economic salience of locale, this book explores the potential contribution of place-based initiative to more balanced and equitable socio-economic development, as well as growth in a more general sense. The overall architecture of the book and the individual chapters address place-based perspectives from a number of vantage points, including the potential of achieving greater effectiveness in EU and national level development policies, through a greater local level and citizens' role and concrete actions for achieving this; enhancing decision-making autonomy by pooling local capacities for action; linking relative local autonomy to development outcomes and viewing spatial justice as a concept and policy goal. The book highlights, through the use of case studies, how practicable and actionable knowledge can be gained from local development experiences.

This book targets researchers, practitioners and students who seek to learn more about place-based development and its potentials. Its cross-cutting focus on spatial justice and place will ensure that the book is of wider international interest.

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# **Spatial Justice and Cohesion**

The Role of Place-Based Action in  
Community Development

Edited by

**Matti Fritsch, Petri Kahila, Sarolta Németh  
and James W. Scott**



**Routledge**

Taylor & Francis Group

LONDON AND NEW YORK



Designed cover image: Bim/Getty Images

First published 2024

by Routledge

4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge

605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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*British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Names: Fritsch, Matti, editor. | Kahila, Petri, editor. | Németh, Sarolta, editor. | Scott, James Wesley, 1956– editor.

Title: Spatial justice and cohesion : the role of place-based action in community development / edited by Matti Fritsch, Petri Kahila, Sarolta Németh and James W. Scott.

Description: Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2024. | Series:

Regions and cities | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Summary:

“Place-based strategies are widely discussed as powerful instruments of economic and community development. In terms of European debate, the local level – cities, towns, neighbourhoods – has recently come under increased scrutiny as a potentially decisive actor in Cohesion Policy. As understandings of socio-spatial and economic cohesion evolve, the idea that spatial justice requires a concerted policy response has gained currency. Given the political, social and economic salience of locale, this book explores the potential contribution of place-based initiative to more balanced and equitable socio-economic development, as well as growth in a more general sense. The overall architecture of the book and the individual chapters address place-based perspectives from a number of vantage points, including the potential of achieving greater effectiveness in EU and national level development policies, through a greater local level and citizens role and concrete actions for achieving this; enhancing decision-making autonomy by pooling local capacities for action; linking relative local autonomy to development outcomes and viewing spatial justice as a concept and policy goal. The book highlights, though the use of case studies, how practicable and actionable knowledge can be gained from local development experiences. This book targets researchers, practitioners and students who seek to learn more about place-based based development and its potentials. Its cross-cutting focus on spatial justice and place will ensure the book is of wider international interest” — Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2023020090 (print) | LCCN 2023020091 (ebook) |

ISBN 9781032135236 (hardback) | ISBN 9781032135243 (paperback) |

ISBN 9781003229681 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Community development—Social aspects. | Distributive justice.

Classification: LCC HN49.C6 \$6944 2024 (print) | LCC HN49.C6 (ebook) |

DDC 307.1/4—dc23/eng/20230712

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023020090>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023020091>

ISBN: 978-1-032-13523-6 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-13524-3 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-22968-1 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003229681

Typeset in Sabon

by Apex CoVantage, LLC



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people living in rural places band together to provide themselves with services, typically those that the public and private sectors are unable or unwilling to provide to sparsely populated areas.

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# Acknowledgements

The editors of this volume would like to express their gratitude to all our contributors and those who helped us in putting this book together. We furthermore would like to thank all the consortium partners, who provided valuable feedback for the development and refinement of our research.

We acknowledge the generous support of the European Commission and the Horizons 2020 Research and Innovation Programme (Grant Agreement No. 727097) which enabled us to implement the project “Resituating the Local in Cohesion and Territorial Development” (RELOCAL). As part of RELOCAL, the contributors to this book were actively engaged in studying local actions targeting place-based development and social justice in several EU member states and in a total of 33 case studies from different urban and regional contexts. In addition, we acknowledge the effort and time invested by many stakeholders and local actors involved in the RELOCAL case studies; it was their openness and willingness to interact with the research teams that made our fieldwork and comparative approach possible.

Thanks are also due to our colleagues at the Karelian Institute and to our copy editor Rupert Moreton for his tireless efforts. Last but certainly not least, we would also like to acknowledge the support of the Routledge Regions and Cities Series editor and the staff at Routledge who provided encouragement along the way.

Matti Fritsch, Petri Kahila, Sarolta Németh  
and James W. Scott Joensuu





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# 1 Introduction to the book

## The role of place-based action in improving spatial justice and cohesion

*Matti Fritsch, Petri Kahila, Sarolta Németh  
and James W. Scott*

### Spatial justice, place-based action and cohesion

This book is essentially about the consequences of taking place seriously as a locus of economic and social development. In the most ‘radically democratic’ understanding, place-based development involves locally owned and inclusive strategies that employ available resources in novel ways in order to create social and economic opportunities and growth for all members of a given community. Place-based strategies have been discussed as powerful policy tools worldwide and their appeal is grounded in a more holistic and socially aware appreciation of development processes (Pugalis and Bentley, 2014). Moreover, while the place-based paradigm is relatively new, it is clearly linked to more long-standing approaches associated with community development and citizen participation. In terms of European debate, European Union-centred debate more specifically, the local level (cities, towns, neighbourhoods) has recently come under increased scrutiny as a decisive actor in strengthening political and socio-economic cohesion. At the same time, and as understandings of cohesion evolve, place-based approaches directly and indirectly support the achievement of *spatial justice*. According to Edward Soja (2009: 2), ‘spatial (in)justice refers to an intentional and focused emphasis on the spatial or geographical aspects of justice and injustice. As a starting point, this involves the fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them.’

The achievement of the European Social Model, based, among others, upon social protections, inclusion and a commitment to full employment is an important vision that guides many EU policies. Furthermore, as part of addressing the challenge of uneven spatial development, territorial cohesion, along with social and economic cohesion, has come to be a major goal of European Union policy. This important concept, deriving from debates on spatial planning and policy coordination, ‘reinforces the importance of the territorial dimension of access to services, sustainable development, “functional geographies” and territorial cooperation, and territorial analysis or the question how the territorial impact of policies can be measured’ (European Commission, 2010: 24). In particular, and in line with the arguments



developed in this book, it emphasizes the role of place and territory, and their specific assets (territorial capital) in EU cohesion policy.

### Challenges to cohesion

The vision of social and territorial cohesion, spatial justice and the European Social Model is clearly being challenged by a range of unfavourable processes (see Figure 1.1). First, the clustering of productivity and migration processes, coupled with the insecurity that economic crisis and austerity have generated, have resulted in the persistence and exacerbation of territorial disparities in the European Union. In national as well as European contexts, the aim of fairness with regard, for example, to access to opportunities, the availability of services of general interest and basic infrastructure, independently of location, has become increasingly difficult and expensive to achieve, specifically in sparsely populated or economically declining areas affected by massive out-migration.

Second, the popular perception of continuing and exacerbating inequalities and the EU's inability to effectively promote and foster solidarity, coupled with European crises impacting the cohesion and viability of the EU, is increasingly posing a threat to the EU's legitimacy and its role as a community of states. Contemporary debate regarding the EU's cohesion challenges has

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#### 1. Continuing disparities

*Despite European Cohesion Policy, we see continuing territorial disparities and clustering of productivity.*

#### 2. Legitimacy crisis

*Popular perceptions of inequality and a failure to promote solidarity lead to EU's legitimacy crisis.*

#### 3. Welfare vs growth

*All levels struggle while trying to advance welfare aims of redistributive and procedural justice under pressures for growth and competitive advantage.*

#### 4. Higher-level public interventions are not always place-based friendly

*How to align public policy with local needs that can be addressed through place-based action?*

#### 5. Weak local capacities for action

*Spatially unjust positions are most often structurally embedded and result in weak local capacities to combat them.*

#### 6. Conditionality versus innovation

*Rigidity of Cohesion Policy in terms of requirements, funding criteria, impact measurement versus the need to experiment (change courses of action according to learning), and eventually, innovate. Reconciling a long-term focus with the need for actions to demonstrate progress and partial goal achievement along the way (impact).*

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*Figure 1.1* Challenges to European cohesion



acquired a heightened sense of urgency, reflecting numerous crises and the more recent impacts of the COVID pandemic. Much of the debate focuses on the ‘economic centrality’ of the EU’s problems (see Hadjimichalis, 2021) which is evidenced by the consequences of neo-liberal policies aimed at competitiveness that have unravelled solidarity, increased socio-economic disparities and weakened social protections. Other recent work has highlighted the socio-spatial quandary of regional divisions within the EU, partly as a result of long-term path dependencies but also as a product of policy decisions that have privileged major economic centres at the expense of less dynamic areas. These factors have contributed to generating ‘geographies of discontent’ (Dijkstra et al., 2020) and the perception that many places and their inhabitants within the EU ‘don’t count’ (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). Within this backdrop of EU crisis, the burgeoning of populism and illiberal political ideas has raised an alarm that the EU’s decline and lack of unity might be difficult to reverse.

Third, the above is a wider reflection of the constant struggle at all levels of government/governance, but particularly at the local level, to balance between welfare aims of redistributive and procedural justice under pressures for growth and competitive advantage. Authorities and governments all over the world are increasingly looking for novel and innovative ways to balance and create synergies between the two. Social innovations and the facilitation of local participation and deliberation in order to make use of local/place-based knowledge are some of the approaches that have been used at the local level.

A fourth aspect, which represents a local perspective, is the issue of a power vertical remaining in EU policy delivery and the challenges it poses to spatial justice and cohesion. Higher-level and top-down public interventions are not always place-based friendly, often ignoring local needs and capacities that could be addressed and utilized through place-based action. Moreover, as a fifth challenge, even in a national context supportive of place-based action, weak local capacities for action can hamper the struggle for development via procedural and distributive spatial justice strategies. Weak local capacities to properly respond to spatial injustices, leading to the feeling of being disempowered, are often structurally embedded and frequently the result of long-term socio-economic decline, for example, as a consequence of out-migration and/or territorial disadvantage. Particularly peripheral and rural territories often exhibit deficits in a range of territorial capitals and a lack of ‘critical mass’ for local development. As a result, innovation and experimentation with the purpose of responding to spatial injustices is often stifled by conditionalities and rigidities imposed by higher-level decision-making and funding structures. In terms of EU Cohesion Policy, experimentation and innovation run the risk of being suffocated by technical requirements, funding criteria and impact measurement. In addition, a long-term focus on local development is often hampered by project cycles and the need for actions to demonstrate progress and partial goal achievement along the way.



All of the issues mentioned earlier highlight a need for reforming cohesion policies in order to develop more adequate responses to social and territorial challenges. One important consequence of this situation is a greater need to connect European Cohesion, as both policy framework and principle, more directly to local needs and local scale. Place-based and endogenous regional development as well as the more effective use of territorial capital and assets are some of the approaches that have been invoked to facilitate a greater local orientation of cohesion, territorial development and other EU policies. And yet, the challenge of situating urban scale and other local development settings within these highly complex policy contexts needs greater attention.

### **Critical assumptions and questions in framing place-based policies**

What will be developed in the following chapters of this book is a result of the RELOCAL project (Resituating the Local in Cohesion and Territorial Development) which was funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation funding programme (grant agreement No. 727097) from 2016 to 2021. RELOCAL responded to a specific Horizon Call targeted at 'spatial justice, social cohesion and territorial inequalities' (REV-INEQUAL-07-2016). In the Horizon 2020 Call there was an explicit underlining of the significance of location and spatial justice in improving prospects for European cohesion. Consequently, our consortium elaborated a comparative research design that revisited and developed the concept of place. The 'localities approach' that was adopted (see Chapter 3) departed from the assumption that place is not something abstract or given but that is something is constantly created through different forms of social interaction. Place, moreover, is heterogeneous in terms of local identities and, as a locality, is embedded in vertical and horizontal governance structures, flows and networks. Without doubt, it is at the level of community and locale where the benefits of belonging and place are most closely experienced, but it is also the level where social problems, discrimination and injustice are most directly felt. Many localities, be they situated in metropolitan or rural regions, are seeking ways to improve their overall economic situation, quality of life and social sustainability. Frequently, however, the challenges are considerable as support for public services dwindles and economic opportunities in the form of employment and entrepreneurship gravitate towards prosperous areas. Moreover, development policies have often tended to exacerbate spatial inequalities, often in unintended ways; top-down redistribution without consideration of local needs has been a classic recipe for policy failure (see Asso, 2021). Similarly, the 'labelling' of places as underdeveloped and/or disadvantaged carries the danger of reinforcing negative perceptions despite positive discrimination, contributing to stigmatization processes and stereotyping that at the level of policy can (re)produce disadvantages and inequalities.

Given the political, social and economic salience of locale, this book explores the potential contribution of place-based initiative to more



balanced and equitable socio-economic development as well as growth in a more general sense. International discussion reflects the rapid evolution of place-based development as a concept and policy instrument as well as the pitfalls of comparative analysis of place-based strategies. Moreover, the debate regarding Cohesion Policy, and European cohesion more generally, takes place within the background of a profound crisis of European identity and challenges not only the economic integrity of the Union but its democratic values.

Fears of the EU's unravelling due to spatial inequalities and a lack of cohesion are a salutary reminder that much needs to be done in order to counteract technocratic, paternalistic and re-nationalizing impulses at the level of European Cohesion Policy (see Maksimov, 2020). We thus argue that place (i.e., locale) is essential for a sense of social cohesion and well-being which is expressed, among others, in rootedness, familiarity and through supporting a sense of being in the world. At the same time, it is vital to understand how place-based approaches actually do or can possibly work and what is actually place-specific in terms of conditioning factors. We assume, moreover, that local capacities for action coupled with enhanced access to services, opportunities and multilevel support are a necessary foundation for development practices that serves both economic growth, stabilization and territorial equity objectives. This formula is perhaps easier conceptualized than achieved, but evidence from RELOCAL research project has revealed how strategic action at the local level combined with multilevel conditioning factors have contributed to spatial justice outcomes.

As the contributions to the volume indicate, place itself is a context for broader social development and the achievement of spatial justice. Therefore, we assume that through policies that are more place-based, higher levels of spatial justice, inclusion and well-being can be achieved, and the aforementioned negative trends reversed. We suggest that there is a need to resist the seductive urge to mainstream policy and to think merely in terms of reproducible best practices and a priori-defined development aims. However, how can economic modernization, institutional renewal and local needs be reconciled within the scope of local strategies? Are we after all again faced with seemingly inevitable efficiency-equality trade-offs? These and other issues that RELOCAL grappled with are elaborated on at length in this book. In the chapters that follow, the contributors inform debate on place-based development through theoretical, empirical and policy-relevant insights that provide some answers to seemingly intractable questions and development dilemmas. Questions that this book addresses include the following:

- The practicable and actionable knowledge that can be gained from local experiences.
- Framing place-based policies in terms of multilevel partnership and the interaction of localities with EU and national policies.



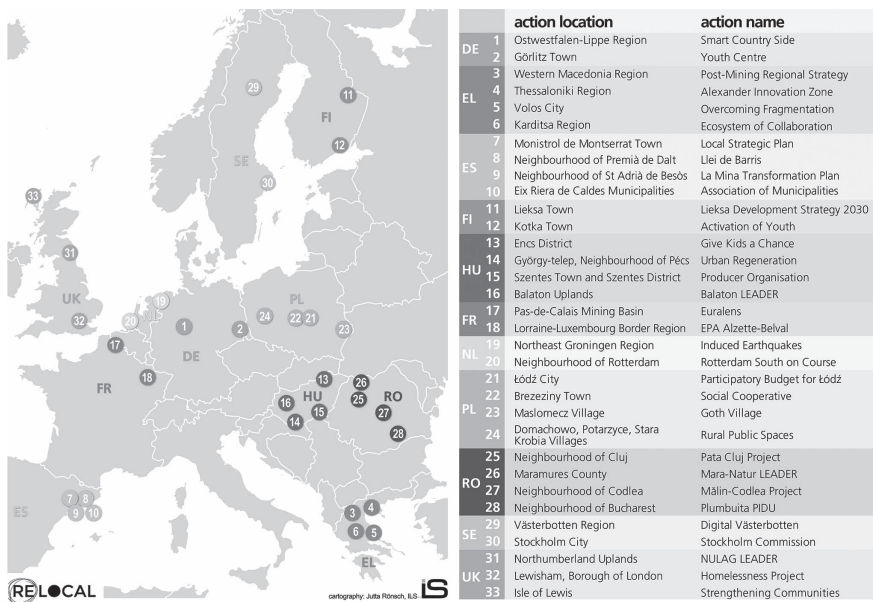


Figure 1.2 Case study areas and contexts

Source: ILS – Research Institute for Regional and Urban Development, Dortmund

- Understanding spatial justice as a concept and policy goal, which includes exploring the extent to which local strategies successfully target distributive and procedural justice.
- Indicating ways in which places and communities can strengthen their involvement in the design, delivery and deployment of European cohesion policies. At the same time investigating the potentials for higher effectiveness in EU and national level cohesion policies through offering a greater role to the local level and citizens.
- Enhancing and expanding decision-making autonomy, for example, by pooling local capacities for action.
- In comparative terms, understanding how different degrees of autonomy affect development outcomes.

In the following chapters, frequent reference will be made to the 33 case studies that were at the heart of the RELOCAL project. Figure 1.2 provides an overview of the concrete locations involved as well as the individual development actions that were studied.

### Structure of the book

The overall architecture of the book and the individual chapters address place-based perspectives and spatial justice from a number of vantage points.



Policy debate and theoretical and conceptual aspects are in focus in the first sections. This prepares the reader for different thematic elaborations of spatial justice, including stigmatization and then urban and rural case studies of place-based development initiatives. This opening chapter provides an overview of the questions that will be developed, the research and policy-related background as well as the research perspective elaborated as part of the RELOCAL project. It also provides short summaries of the individual chapters that follow. Following the introduction, Part 1 provides conceptual depth regarding the assumptions that guided RELOCAL's research agenda. Ali Madanipour, Elizabeth Brooks, Mark Shucksmith and Hilary Talbot begin this section with a presentation of the RELOCAL project's research design. Their chapter outlines the conceptual framework of RELOCAL by introducing the two key concepts of spatial justice and locality, the relationship between them, and the research methodology that was used in the RELOCAL project (see also Weck et al., 2022). The authors then proceed to explain how this conceptual framework was applied during the course of the research, and how it was used in 'work packages.'

Following this chapter, James W. Scott revisits the significance of place as a development locus and resource and discusses the localities approach that was developed by the RELOCAL project. The chapter thus links together elements of the existing state of the debate regarding place-based development and its ramifications for addressing socio-spatial inequalities, particularly within the context of serious challenges to European cohesion. As Scott contends, place-based development is not a magic solution for rectifying all that is wrong with 'mainstream' policies. Critical observations point out that as a paradigm of new development planning strategies, place-based action is itself frequently subject to external pressures, co-optations and 'deformations' that threaten to undermine its promise of local empowerment. As a result, the localities approach elaborated in this chapter makes a case for a pragmatic understanding of place-based development and spatial justice that eschews essentialist a priori definitions and instead focuses on what place-based action actually does and how it is practised. In addition, this approach recognizes the importance of understanding specific enabling conditions under which local promotion of social justice and development strategies can potentially flourish. Local development is seldom a question of bottom-up agency alone; it is a site where community interests, various levels of governance, multiactor networks, funding modalities and sources of general support coalesce, but always in highly contingent and specific ways.

### *A focus on spatial justice*

Part 2 of the book is devoted to understanding the complexities and contextual conditions involved in the incorporation of spatial justice as an element of local development. In their contribution, Peter Schmitt and Sabine Weck discuss findings stemming from more than twenty RELOCAL case studies which analysed how spatial justice is achieved in practice across Europe. The



authors identify and discuss generic types of promoters and inhibitors that emerged across different local and regional contexts and then relate them to achieved outcomes. More specifically, Schmitt and Weck distil factors and filters that enhance or limit local abilities to articulate needs and realize concrete outcomes. They also compare local capacities for exploiting the opportunities generated by local strategies and the extent to which policy changes are induced across places and time. The main objective of the authors is to test the hypothesis that appropriate and ‘fair’ procedures to ensure participation and accountability are key for a more just distribution of resources and opportunities. In concluding, they discuss from a European perspective lessons and prospects in approaching spatial justice in practice, including the dangers of policy failure.

Enikő Vincze, Cristina Elena Bădiță and Iulia-Elena Hossu continue discussion on spatial justice by focusing on the locally embedded injustices of stigmatization. On the basis of RELOCAL case studies from Spain, Finland, Hungary, France, the Netherlands and Romania, the authors compare ways in which stigmatization is linked with the material formation of peripheries, the constitution of which is a manifestation of spatial injustice and characterized, among others, by neighbourhoods that are impoverished, segregated, disadvantaged, polluted and/or otherwise underdeveloped. The authors investigate the extent to which actions targeted at reducing stigmatization are informed by understandings of its complex socio-political, economic and cultural underpinnings. In this way, the chapter provides analysis that contributes to the understanding of the role of ideas and ideational hegemonies in the creation of socio-economic and spatial orders.

Drawing again on selected case studies from the RELOCAL research project, Judit Keller and Tünde Virág interrogate the extent to which local perceptions of spatial injustice (access to public services, employment possibilities, demographic decline, spatial isolation, stigmatization, etc.) are reflected in policy responses. Moreover, Keller and Virág assume that counteracting spatial injustice is dependent on localized actions and the policy regimes within which they are embedded. Building on the idea that place matters, the place-based narrative advocates that socio-spatial inequalities can be overcome by the production of specific public goods designed and implemented through integrated and deliberative policy decisions. Place-based public policies can also make a positive contribution to spatial justice through participative procedures for a more equitable distribution of public resources. However, there is often a mismatch between perceptions of injustice, local desires for change, available resources and support mechanisms provided within systems of multilevel governance. As a result, the authors suggest that the long-term success and potential upscaling of place-based interventions are often dependent on the existence of ‘benevolent state’ policies committed to principles of spatial justice. In the absence of such commitments and strong local capacities for community action, the state can in fact co-opt place-based initiatives in order to promote national policy objectives rather than furthering social cohesion.



The following chapter focuses on scenarios and is the joint work of RELOCAL team members led by Paulina Tobiasz-Lis and including Andrew Copus, Margaret Currie, Dominic Duckett, Karolina Dmochowska-Dudek, Simone Piras and Marcin Wójcik. The authors elaborate scenarios for 33 European localities experiencing spatial injustices and in so doing identify potential change resulting from a variety of possible interventions ranging from public policies to bottom-up initiatives. As part of scenario-making, a novel methodological approach was developed which included elements of Theory of Change (ToC) and morphological scenario elaboration. The single most plausible scenarios for 2030 defined for each of the 33 case study locations in 11 EU member states revealed a high degree of uncertainty and, with a few exceptions, the future outlook seems likely to be negatively shaped by a neo-liberal paradigm perpetuating injustices in terms of winners and losers, especially in locations that do not benefit from spill-over effects generated by more prosperous urban centres as well as in areas stigmatized for different reasons. There seems to be a strong country effect even within regions characterized by the same welfare regime, which captures the country's economic potential and quality of institutions, confirming the importance of a place-based approach to effectively meet the spatial justice needs of a locality. Many of the local successes and failures are bound up with local factors and shaped by unique contexts. Policy-oriented lessons that can be learned from this analysis concern the tools to design future actions addressing spatial (in)justice as well as their planning in terms of integration, longevity and succession. Coordinated governance approaches appear to be key at this point, together with mutual trust, shared vision and continued support for future local development across administrative levels.

In closing this section, Sabine Weck and Sarolta Németh provide a brief overview of the theoretical approach, analytical framework and the rationales behind the choice of case studies that will be discussed in more detail in the case study sections that follow. The case studies serve to provide comparative insight regarding drivers, conditioning factors and constraints of community and area-level action as well as contextual depth regarding specific cross-cutting aspects of spatial justice. This chapter also discusses the specific methods that were developed in order to contrast and compare different local development experiences targeting spatial justice.

### *Urban case studies*

RELOCAL's urban case studies are in the centre of focus in Part 3. Rural versus urban are admittedly simplifying categories to apply in European societies with converging lifestyles and manifold urban-rural flows and interconnections. Nevertheless, there are territorial challenges that are more specific to, or more urgent in urban areas, such as for instance segregation and the spatial concentration of vulnerable population groups suffering from multiple disadvantages. Therefore, approaches targeted at places of concentrated



disadvantage, combating intra-urban inequalities in metropolitan areas and supporting neighbourhood regeneration, as well as new governance arrangements to increase citizens' engagement in local development form important action clusters in the urban cases.

Thomas Borén documents a place-based approach to combating exclusion and processes of urban fragmentation in the case of Stockholm. As Borén indicates, Stockholm represents a prime example of an internationally successful and competitive city, structured around a high-cost, innovation-driven economy. But it is also a highly socially, economically and ethnically segregated city with severe problems of exclusion, rule of law and poverty in a number of neighbourhoods. As in many capital regions in Europe and beyond, segregation is deepening, but the process is especially rapid in Stockholm. In 2014, after eight years of liberal-conservative rule, a left-leaning majority took control of the Stockholm City Council and spearheaded initiatives against inequality and segregation. As one important measure to achieve this goal, the city created a *Commission for a Socially Sustainable Stockholm*. The work of the Commission is the focus of this case study, based on an action carried out in 2015–2017 that in a direct sense addresses inequalities and spatial differences in life conditions within the city. The key issues dealt with in the chapter relate to the overall RELOCAL project hypothesis that processes of localization and place-based policy can support spatial justice and democratic empowerment. On the basis of interviews and document analyses, Borén examines the processes in place that promote and inhibit the Commission and the city to reach its main goals, with a focus on the role of local agency.

Ali Madanipour, Elizabeth Brooks and Mark Shucksmith then elaborate on the high-profile case of PLACE/Ladywell as a local response to the homelessness crisis in London. This is an architect-designed project with business spaces and 24 well-proportioned homes for homeless/insecurely housed families in the London Borough of Lewisham. The scheme, which opened to residents in 2016, is planned and built as a temporary modular structure, fully demountable, which can be moved across 'meanwhile' sites, over a total lifespan of around 60 years. The scheme addresses three aspects of the housing problem: the need for good-quality temporary housing to house families while the older social housing schemes are regenerated; raising the profile and readiness of derelict sites awaiting long-term development; and experimenting with new methods of housing development and provision and developing the capacity of the modular construction industry in line with government policy. The scheme has found instant popularity with media and policy-makers, in spite of its incapacity to mitigate Lewisham's homelessness, or provide tenants the reassurance of permanent housing. It is being replicated both within the borough and across London, partly funded by London's regional authority. The chapter explores the extent to which a scheme such as PLACE/Ladywell measures up as a locality-sensitive and responsive



intervention addressing spatial injustices and the needs of homeless families. The authors examine whether the project constitutes a pioneering niche innovation for construction and planning, or a publicly funded experiment in the production of urban space and rent on marginal sites.

Cyril Blondel and Estelle Evrard continue discussion of urban case studies by critically examining neo-liberal and elitist planning practices that have impeded spatial justice in the French cases of Euralens (Pas-de-Calais) and the regional development agency (Etablissement Public d'Aménagement or EPA) of Alzette-Belval (North Lorraine). Although profoundly different in nature and implementation, both initiatives under scrutiny aim to support long-term (re)development and enhance local governance capacities. The first case, Euralens, covers the territory of the Pas-de-Calais mining basin. This association was established in 2009 by regional and local actors as a catalyst for economic, social and cultural development and has capitalized on the creation of the Louvre-Lens Museum in 2012. According to the Euralens website, 'The transition from the black archipelago [the coal mines of the past] to the green archipelago [the sustainable future] takes inspiration from great European examples that managed the transformation from industrial legacy into culture and innovation.' In formal terms, Euralens is an association involving elected representatives and public agencies, civil society and business actors and its authority rests on its capacity to animate strategic discussions, prepare development plans and influence local governance. The EPA Alzette-Belval, on the other hand, is seemingly a counterexample of place-based local development. It is one of a dozen state-led public agencies responsible for major development projects in France and has the capacity to wrest control over planning from the eight peri-urban/rural municipalities. The EPA is theoretically empowered to tackle spatial inequalities, as it provides funding and high-level technical, planning and legal expertise to localities facing a continuous reduction in state funding and shifting governance remits.

As the authors point out, both these cases raise questions regarding the achievement of place-based spatial justice goals. Indeed, it is unclear what substantive change can be accomplished if action is conceived, decided and performed mostly without local populations. Despite its place-based *raison d'être*, Euralens does not appear to value local initiative or encourage capacity-building of local actors and project leaders that are struggling with bureaucratic and technical hurdles. On the contrary, Euralens appears more focused on labelling the region as an investment product. The Euralens case is indeed paradoxical, pursuing spatial justice goals, but through spatially unjust means, making alternative solutions more difficult. This incomplete form of procedural justice risks threatening Euralens' progress, as the rejection of the political class and its methods is expressed more and more through abstention (at a record level in the 2020 local elections) and the persistence of voting for the right-wing Rassemblement National (National Rally) party.



As for the EPA AB, the main decisions are still taken by local elites and technocrats without citizen involvement, much less citizen control. However, opposition movements have emerged in several municipalities and civil society movements have transformed into political platforms that successfully competed in the 2020 municipal elections. These platforms have openly criticized the governance style of the EPA and called for more participatory forms of democracy.

### *Rural case studies*

In Part 4 of the book, attention shifts to predominantly rural and/or remote regions which accounted for about half of RELOCAL's case studies. This category contains also small towns located in a wider rural region, such as the Finnish town of Lieksa, the peripherality of which is the origin of its persistent decline. Many of the rural case studies, especially those situated peripherally within national contexts, are characterized by processes of demographic decline, ageing as well as the out-migration of young and economically active population groups, and declining infrastructures and service provision. Besides this generic set of spatial justice challenges, a 'rural' cluster of actions can be characterized by the utilization of opportunities and targeted approaches offered under wider national and European policy frameworks, such as the LEADER programme.

Many municipalities in Europe have thus found themselves in a situation where they are required to engage in quick decision-making and problem-solving and cost-effective service provision (often under the guise of New Public Management) whilst simultaneously giving citizens and civil society a stronger role in governance processes. This includes empowering citizens as active agents in participative and collaborative decision-making. Against this background, Matti Fritsch, Sarolta Németh and Petri Kahila elaborate on a case study of a shrinking municipality, Lieksa, in eastern Finland. The authors explore how tensions between the aims of effective administration and democratic accountability manifest themselves in government/governance processes. The chapter first traces the process of managerial and processual change against the background of financial and economic upheaval in the municipality. It then subsequently unpacks the balancing act between achieving effective administration on the one hand and democratic accountability on the other. The focus is on the effects of recent changes – changes and processes that emerged from a failing municipal economy culminating in 2014 and the resulting reform-friendly administrative and political environment within the municipality, including a newly appointed, young mayor. These processes include the aim to enhance local capacities and autonomy, to establish a more effective and transparent city administration and to repatriate decision-making power from Q regional/sub-regional level to the local level. In addition, the town of Lieksa has assumed a more proactive stance with regard to the changing role of municipalities in light of ongoing regional



and social/healthcare reforms in Finland. Finally, the authors link their findings to the wider debates on the dynamics of local autonomy and spatial justice in Europe.

In the following chapter, Katalin Kovács, Elizabeth Brooks, George Zamfir, Mark Shucksmith and Gusztáv Nemes provide a comparison of rural local development projects funded by the EU's LEADER scheme in Hungary, Romania and England. LEADER started as a real-life laboratory for the new rural paradigm in 1991 and has since developed into a mainstream policy tool for European rural development. With over 30 years of operation, it has certainly left a very significant mark on European rurality, facilitating LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGS) and local development practitioners to absorb central resources and unlock local ones, empower local communities, and create a framework for integrated rural development. Proposed major changes to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), under which LEADER is funded (Atterton et al., 2020), as well as the United Kingdom's secession from the EU, make this a fitting juncture to explore the spatial justice contribution of the LEADER programme. In particular, this chapter seeks to discover whether LEADER has been able to fulfil the promise of autonomy that has inspired and motivated its participants (e.g., Navarro et al., 2016), and how this relates to its spatial justice impacts. The enablers and barriers to autonomy for local development actions and strategies have been a particular focus of the RELOCAL project. This chapter starts out with a theoretical presentation of the concept of autonomy, focusing on Clark's (1984) important distinction between powers of initiation and powers of immunity, and unpacking the seven autonomy dimensions generated to explore the interaction of local and project-level autonomy through RELOCAL (Blondel and Evrard, 2020: 12). It then goes on to outline the evolution of the LEADER programme since its inception in 1991, and to map the dimensions of autonomy against the core LEADER principles that have continued to inform the programme. The three case study rural LAGs – Balaton Uplands in Hungary, Mara-Natur in Romania and Northumberland Uplands in England – are introduced in relation to their national and local contexts, with the account centred on recent iterations. Each case study LAG is reviewed in relation to the seven dimensions of autonomy, and their associated LEADER principles, enabling cross-national comparisons and, to some extent, reflections on the programme's evolution over time. In the chapter's conclusion, LEADER's (mainly diminishing) autonomy is related to cohesion and spatial justice impacts, drawing out implications for the programme's future.

The Greek case study that follows highlights the importance of multilevel governance environments for both effective place-based strategies and achieving spatial justice goals. The authors, Lefteris Topaloglou, George Petrakos, Victor Cupcea and Aggeliki Anagnostou, present and discuss the experiences of a social economy ecosystem in the rural region of Karditsa. In their contribution the authors raise the critical issue that, aside from the evolution of



inequalities in national-level allocations of resources and economic opportunities, prospects of lagging regions also depend on local capacities to generate employment and income. Efficiency and equity issues are closely related here to the extent that policy options and responses, or the spatial organization of the state, should produce sustainable and inclusive growth. Addressing spatial imbalances and seeking policies and contexts that will allow a better allocation and utilization of existing resources at a local level is necessary to achieve both equity and efficiency goals. This chapter attempts to examine the capacity and conditioning factors of local initiatives to implement effective development policies in Greece. Given the polarized character of the Greek economy and the centralized structure of the state, the question could be posed whether place-based endeavours are indeed able to achieve spatial justice goals.

### *Conclusions and policy considerations*

In the final chapter of the book, the editors revisit the set of challenges defined at the outset, challenges which served to provide a frame of reference for comparative analysis of spatial justice and place-based strategies. Based on the case studies and the objectives that informed the overall research agenda, the concluding chapter provides a set of conclusions addressing the question: what can we learn from these different local development actions? Consequently, a number of issues are identified that have particular salience in practical terms:

- Local perceptions of spatial justice are key to addressing inequalities.
- Questions of scale and multilevel governance are locally significant in complex ways.
- The empowerment of grassroots action is locally contingent and has to be gauged with the challenges that place-based and participatory development generate for (an often weak) civil society.
- The need for greater learning opportunities, capacity building and experimentation requires redoubled policy attention.
- Despite its hypothetical desirability, place-based action often faces 'hostile' governance environments.

Local development experiences provide examples of experimental governance and institutional learning. As has been elaborated by our contributing authors, one insight from our case studies is that while changing formal governance modes is a difficult and long-term commitment, shifting informal practices can be a faster and highly effective way of creating new governance tools. Institutional learning of course differs greatly from locale to locale. It can, for example, take the form of voluntarism, governance partnerships and a combination of both.



The concluding chapter does not provide a long list of policy suggestions, but it does provide some messages with clear policy consequences. One of these is the insight that there is no such thing as a specific ‘good practice.’ However, in most cases, partnership and learning processes are key elements for successful strategies. Another message is that the creation of synergies through pooling of community and/or network assets increases degrees of freedom and visibility in meeting local development needs. It also helps reinforce a sense of community based on shared concerns. Finally, we find ample confirmation that the ‘network effect’ is not ephemeral or merely a question of therapy. Horizontal networks and exchanges that operate as communities of practice can, on the one hand, provide reliable and contextualized assessments of local problems, assets and relative (dis)advantages. On the other hand, networked learning is a rich source of practical knowledge regarding the elaboration of responsive and inclusive development strategies. While perhaps self-evident, the authors also underline the long-term aspect of achieving spatial justice. Despite steep learning curves and additional burdens that participatory development practices signify for public administrations, there is a wealth of knowledge-based resources available to local actors. However, there is a caveat: without continuous support and well-functioning multilevel governance relationships, place-based approaches to achieving spatial justice and greater cohesion will face an uphill battle.

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Part 1

# Cohesion and the role of localities

Research and policy debates





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## 2 The localities approach

(European) cohesion, spatial justice and the development role of place

*James W. Scott*

### Introduction

According to Edward Soja (2009: 2):

spatial (in)justice refers to an intentional and focused emphasis on the spatial or geographical aspects of justice and injustice. As a starting point, this involves the fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them.

The achievement of the European Social Model, based, among others, upon social protections, inclusion and a commitment to full employment is an important vision that guides many EU policies. Furthermore, as part of addressing the challenge of uneven spatial development, territorial cohesion, along with social and economic cohesion, has come to be a major goal of European Union policy. The concept of spatial justice is closely related to that of place; this is evident from ongoing debates regarding the need to democratize and develop planning processes beyond token participation. In terms of the technical and normative language of the European Commission (2010: 24), this is reflected in the ‘importance of the territorial dimension of access to services, sustainable development, “functional geographies” and territorial cooperation, and territorial analysis or the question how the territorial impact of policies can be measured.’

However, the persistence and exacerbation of territorial disparities in the European Union, coupled with the insecurity that economic crisis and austerity have generated, clearly challenge and even threaten this vision of cohesion. In national as well as European contexts, the aim of fairness with regard, for example, to access to opportunities, the availability of services of general interest and basic infrastructure, independently of location, has become increasingly difficult and expensive to achieve, specifically in sparsely populated or economically declining areas affected by massive outmigration. This raises the issue of reforming cohesion policies in order to develop more adequate responses to these social and territorial challenges. One important consequence of this situation is a greater need to connect European cohesion,



as both policy framework and principle, more directly to local needs and local scale. Place-based and endogenous regional development as well as the more effective use of territorial capital and assets are some of the approaches that have been invoked to facilitate a greater local orientation of cohesion, territorial development and other EU policies. And yet, the challenge of situating urban scale and other local development settings within these highly complex policy contexts needs greater attention.

The research project RELOCAL, which is the basis for the present volume, departed from the assumption that a greater focus on place and locality, not merely as sites of policy intervention but as communities where meaningful policy action is co-owned and co-created, is an essential part of addressing socio-economic inequality and territorial disparities within the European Union. The path towards recognizing the significance of place-based perspectives within wider policy arenas has been a long and complicated one. Informed by decades-long experiences of community development practices, the relational and participatory turn in planning and political pressures for more effective regional (territorial) development instruments, the European Union has also discovered the salience of place-based approaches.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss rationales and conceptual elements of RELOCAL's approach which sought to develop the existing state of the debate regarding place-based development and explore the ramifications of place-based thinking for addressing socio-spatial inequalities, particularly in the European case. The salience of place and spatial justice is exemplified by a need for policy alternatives which, apart from basic socio-economic well-being, promote the achievement of redistributive justice, empowerment and recognition – all of which strengthen a sense of locale and community. These arguments align with prominent criticisms of GDP as a measurement of development (Shrotryia and Singh, 2020; Stiglitz, 2020) and the recognition that identity and highly subjective feelings of well-being and security play an important role (Sen, 1993; Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Barca, 2017).

Place-based development is, of course, not a placebo for rectifying all that is wrong with 'mainstream' policies. Critical observations point out that as a paradigm of new development planning strategies, place-based action is itself frequently subject to external pressures, co-optations and 'deformations' that threaten to undermine its promise of local empowerment. As Wargent (2021) has argued, for example, localism in the United Kingdom has been subverted by political rationalities that subject local agency to national policy imperatives. Commenting similarly on the UK situation, Rolfe (2018) has warned that the promotion of place-based strategies can be part and parcel of austerity measures aimed at 'downloading' burdensome tasks to communities and in so doing constraining local agency. This situation is not limited to any specific country.

Pugalis and Bentley (2014) have voiced the more global concern that the policy appeal of place-based paradigms could be their undoing if instead of focusing on local context and the emancipatory nature of place, 'best practice' templates are imposed through political and economic pressure.



The chapter begins with a brief discussion of the policy and research rationales that informed the approach developed in the RELOCAL project. The research agenda was in fact motivated by a heightened sense of urgency given the EU's ongoing political crises that include the politicization of socio-economic and territorial divisions. In addressing the question as to how place-based spatial justice might contribute to greater cohesion within the EU, the next section of the chapter introduces defining elements of the localities approach. Here, discussion centres on the salience of place as a focal point of community and, as a consequence, on understandings of place-based development as a project of community-building. This implies that strengthening processes of citizen identification with and co-ownership of policy-making as well as the provision of public goods and services are necessary elements in strengthening a sense of shared locality. In terms of empirical case studies, the focus of RELOCAL was directed towards a comparative methodology that promoted understanding of drivers and constraints that condition place-based development initiatives. In the concluding section, potential consequences of place-based thinking will be elaborated with regard to the development of EU Cohesion Policy. These will be developed in a more policy-oriented manner in the final chapter of this book.

### **Place-based and spatially just: ideational and policy-driven rationales**

The debate regarding Cohesion Policy, and European cohesion more generally, takes place within the background of a profound crisis of European identity and challenges to democratic values as well as the economic integrity of the Union. There can be little doubt that the global crisis of 2008/2009 was much more than financial in nature; its negative effects on the legitimacy of the liberal world order and international institutions were profound (Tooze, 2018). Moreover, as part of the aftermath of the financial crisis, the refugee crisis, etc., the EU's legitimacy crisis has been clearly linked to popular perceptions of inequality and a failure to promote solidarity. As the International Labour Office has documented (Vaughan-Whitehead, 2015), austerity and 'fiscal correctness' have eroded social protections and solidarity, very fundamental elements of the European Social Model. These and similar tendencies could have grave consequences for the future of cohesion and the European Union as a political community more generally (see Chilla and Evrard, 2021).

Clearly, economic and territorial inequalities continue to represent one of the EU's single greatest challenges from the viewpoint of socio-economic and territorial cohesion. These inequalities expose the EU to economic and political vulnerabilities and even existential threats; the COVID pandemic is but one example of a crisis situation that both reflects and has exacerbated political and territorial divisions within Europe (Gräbner et al., 2020). As several EU Reports on Social and Economic Cohesion document, despite increases in general welfare, the imbalances between Europe's core areas and



its vast peripheries remain and depopulation of many rural zones continues unabated (European Commission, 2004, 2007, 2014). This is corroborated, for example, by Ketels and Porter (2018: 3), who provide a sobering assessment of Cohesion Policy:

In our view the growing concerns about the benefits of EU integration are to a significant part the result of a structural disconnect between what is needed for higher competitiveness across Europe and what the EU is offering . . . the traditional EU model of aligning rules and regulations to ensure similar conditions across Europe was appropriate when removing barriers to market integration among structurally similar countries was the key. But it is failing to meet the current demand for context-dependent strategies that help locations specialize around unique value propositions in a Europe that has become dramatically more heterogeneous.

According to Bachtler et al. (2019), the main single driver of spatial inequality is regional productivity gaps and, accordingly, lower rates through which structural adaptation and innovations spread throughout national economies. Similarly, Gräbner and Hafele (2020) identify macroeconomic divergence, for example, as measured in technological capabilities and firm performance, as the major cause of North-South divides within the Eurozone (Gräbner and Hafele, 2020). Processes of growing territorial differentiation are thus characterized by (1) relative abilities to attract/generate investment, especially into innovative sectors and (2) relative proximity of and accessibility to economically dynamic urban centres. Gorzelak and Smętkowski (2010) describe this as a process of ‘metropolization’: a general pattern of spatial concentration of economic opportunities and a steady decline of rural, semi-rural and old industrial areas. In stark contrast to the objectives of Cohesion Policy, a consolidation of territorial patterns based on core-periphery inequalities has thus taken hold in many parts of Europe (Magone et al., 2016).

This diagnosis is substantiated by Asso (2021), who argues that Italy’s Mezzogiorno represents a *longue durée* failure of structural policy to territorially integrate North and South. He argues that subsidies and perverse incentives have not provided long-term local benefits nor have they addressed the ‘time-bomb’ of outmigration and demographic decline. Asso’s observations for southern Italy can be applied to many regions of the EU. All in all, structural change is favouring metropolitan economies and spaces that are more or less directly linked to them. Differences between ‘pioneer regions’ and those lagging behind have in fact accelerated, increasing by 56% between 1995 and 2014 (Bachtler et al., 2019). Moreover, there are demographic issues involved – demographic shifts reinforcing the metropolization of Europe’s economy and the more accentuated ageing of smaller and rural centres. These polarized spatial patterns present a stark contrast to the policy



goals of social cohesion, understood as general welfare and harmonious and stable social relations that promote sustainable growth and development. Moreover, these patterns have led to a highly unequal distribution of social opportunity within the EU which mere redistribution cannot address. Furthermore, redistribution towards disadvantaged areas cannot be equated with promoting spatial justice if there is no sense of fairness in the process of allocating resources (Connelly and Bradley, 2004).

In the present context, a need for more sophisticated tools and a targeting of fairness, both in terms of social inclusion (European Anti-Poverty Network, 2018) and in the accessibility of development opportunities (Farole et al., 2018) increasingly informs policy debate. The idea of spatial justice as fairness can be understood as both a vision and a critique of the political objectives and ambitions associated with EU policies. As an aim of cohesion policy, the promotion of harmonious development and reducing regional inequalities should basically serve spatial justice as well. This goal is emphasized several times in official declarations, including the 3rd Cohesion Report (Commission of the European Communities, 2004: 27), which states that ‘people should not be disadvantaged by wherever they happen to live or work in the Union’. Spatial justice also informs the 1999 European Spatial Development Perspective (Dabinett, 2010) which targets balanced and sustainable spatial development. Furthermore, the Europe 2020 strategy emphasizes the importance of job creation and poverty reduction as a means to promote territorial cohesion and spatial justice. But it is not exclusively jobs or factors directly related to job markets that are at issue; fairness requires that attention be paid to a variety of social needs which are oftentimes group specific (e.g. youth, elderly, persons with impaired mobility). This goes beyond the equitable provision of services of general interest; for example, as part of Europe 2020, the Disability Strategy emphasizes the need to increase the quality of life and access to opportunities of people with disabilities.

Place-based development and spatial justice have indeed acquired political salience due to the polarizing effects of spatial inequalities. Fabrizio Barca (2017), a major architect and policy advocate of place-based thinking, has characterized the EU’s cohesion problem as one of threefold inequality – income inequality, social inequality and recognition inequality. It is the third aspect that is the most intractable. As Barca (2017: 1) states, recognition inequalities involve ‘recognizing the role of people’; in rural and crisis areas people ‘feel like they don’t belong in history, like they’re far away from modernity, as if it was only cities that were inevitably made creative and pioneering thanks to globalization’s technological processes’. In the case of the EU, crises have thus exacerbated political faultlines that were already contesting the future scope and trajectory of integration. Eurosceptic tendencies threaten to limit Europe’s possibilities and potentials by imposing particularistic national interests and singular notions of ‘Europeanness’. Above and beyond generic expressions of Euroscepticism, populist and particularly



right-wing populisms could result in attempts to re-appropriate the EU as a platform for national particularisms, anti-pluralist and illiberal political agendas. The political costs of ignoring peripheralization, regional divisions and socio-economic divides within the EU for the sake of competitiveness will come at a very high price. Andrés Rodríguez-Pose (2018) has captured the essence of this dilemma with regard to Cohesion Policy and questions of European cohesion in more general terms. His main argument is that a one-sided focus on centres of innovation has relegated many areas of the EU to the status of places ‘that don’t count’ and that this could in fact destabilize the EU, providing support to populist and extremist groupings. More carefully developed and place-sensitive policy instruments are needed to deal with this issue; it cannot be resolved with the traditional efficiency/equity trade-off.

Rodríguez-Pose’s (2018) message has been understood, particularly after Brexit and populist challenges which aim to ‘take back control’ of local affairs. This is reflected in the very broadly defined objective of getting the EU ‘closer to citizens’. The EU’s focus on innovation and synergies – which in itself can be seen to strengthen regional disparities – has thus also begun to incorporate the idea that ‘knowledge’ itself is a more basic resource and one that is in addition ubiquitous. As Barca (2017: 1) states:

The aim of [the place-based] approach is to unleash knowledge, remove barriers towards innovation and encourage a lively exchange between local knowledge and global knowledge. In this sense, we are glocalists: knowledge of the territories must ‘speak’ with the knowledge of the major centres, universities and corporations. But the latter cannot stand by itself without a knowledge of the territories.

### **The localities approach: spatial justice and the enduring salience of place**

Achieving a greater ‘knowledge of the territories’ to which Barca refers in the above quote was the basis for the RELOCAL project’s attempts to understand local development processes from a bottom-up and ‘inward-out’ perspective. Within this context, the RELOCAL project sought to link the social salience of place identity and attachment with questions of fairness regarding processes of community development. However, it was not assumed that local action automatically results in positive results, nor that a place-based strategy can be isolated from the general conditions of action that operate at various levels of governance. The complexity of policy networks within which localities are embedded and the complexities involved in locally constructing meaningful and inclusive development strategies suggest that policy innovation in terms of place-based spatial justice is a daunting challenge. However, Patsy Healey (2007: 11) has suggested that pragmatic steps towards innovative change are possible if localities are comprehended not in terms of the normative rationality of masterplans but rather as local cultures



composed of ‘complex socio-spatial interactions through which life in urban areas is experienced’. Jones and Evans (2012) have indicated that development and planning practice must pay greater attention to place-making and the affective relationships between townscapes, communities and a sense of neighbourhood that it involves. Attachment to locale is a major resource for the articulation of individual and collective interests. Furthermore, as a process of bounding space, place-making entails the incorporation of and adaptation to increasingly networked realms of social life. Following Tuan (2001) (urban) places are a product of human intellect and social uses of space in which formal and informal practices of organizing everyday life mutually reinforce each other. Urban places also reflect a need for rootedness and a sense of place (Relph, 1976) and in providing a sense of ontological security, establish conditions for social and political agency (Malpas, 2012).

Recognizing the importance of local rootedness and a sense of inclusion, fairness would require greater social understanding, more targeted engagement with different groups and their specific needs, and sensitivity to questions of access, opportunity and local capabilities. One important step in advancing current debate regarding the role of place-based development, local strategies and sustainability within broader understandings of cohesion would be to elaborate notions of locale and the significance of the local in terms of theoretical conceptualizations, development scenarios and potential policy options. One important point of departure is Susan Fainstein’s (2010) notion of the ‘just city’ which eschews the application of a universalist approach based on rational choice; in her reading of spatial justice, one major and necessary step is ‘changing the dialogue’ in order to counter the marginalization of equity concerns. For Fainstein, this entails the recognition of demands and needs rather than mere redistribution. As Attoh (2011) has argued, the right to the city can also be interpreted as a concrete democratic right based on citizen involvement. Similar to Fainstein, Sen suggests a comparative and situational rather than transcendental and universalist approach. In his elaboration of the capabilities approach, Sen (1999) posits the normative claim that the achievement of well-being is dependent upon equality of opportunity for people to achieve the aspirations that they see as central to their lives and to their flourishing within society. Sen also advocates an ‘agent-oriented view’ according to which sustainable development depends on active citizenship and supportive social and political environments (Kimhur, 2020). In this vein, the Barca Report (Barca, 2009: 22) refers to Sen (1999), who promotes the role of individuals ‘as active agents of change, rather than passive recipients of dispensed benefits’. By the same token, indeed, it is also important to understand the role of local participation in actions that construct spatial (in)justice, such as access to or exclusion from decisions and actions.

At one level then, place-based development can be related to processes of *community-building* through connecting local organizations, actors and citizens in ways that promote a sense of shared purpose and practical agency.



Moreover, this can be more easily achieved if concrete benefits, for example, in the form of public goods and services, are seen to result out of mutual action. Belanche et al. (2016) emphasize the role of city attachment and positive attitudes towards and greater accessibility of urban services in order to achieve efficiency and sustainable development goals. There can also be strong communications technology elements involved and Lee et al. (2014) link the application and use of such technologies to knowledge about place (see Schmitt and Weck, this volume) as well as greater participation of organizations that represent civil society. At another level, however, the localities approach recognized the importance of understanding specific enabling conditions under which local promotion of social justice and development strategies can potentially flourish (see Nordberg, 2020). Local development is seldom a question of bottom-up agency alone; it is a site where community interests, various levels of governance, multiactor networks, funding modalities and sources of general support coalesce, but always in highly contingent and specific ways.

These insights are highly relevant to the case of the EU where the principle of territorial cohesion can be read as a partial recognition of an interconnected and interdependent nature of the contemporary world. Taking Sen's (1993) concept of capabilities and Fainstein's just city as starting points, RELOCAL targeted its case studies on localities (rather than specific individuals) and social difference in terms of socio-economic, ethnic, gender-specific, mobility-specific and other issues that characterize such differences. This raised the difficult but essential question: what degrees of freedom and opportunity spaces might a specific locale require in order to sustain its inner workings, stabilize its economic existence and provide future prospects for the local citizenry? In order to address this question, RELOCAL argued for a pragmatic understanding of place-based development and spatial justice that eschews essentialist *a priori* definitions and instead focuses on what place-based action actually does and how it is approached by involved actors (see Abrahams, 2014).

As a consequence of these considerations, RELOCAL adopted a bottom-up focus on place-making as a continuous and iterative process of defining community needs and aspirations that at the same time is embedded within different scales of policy definition and delivery. As a result, local experiences in terms of practical implementation and perceived outcomes were of central interest. The project also focused on the role of civil society and public sector actors and as well as potentials for social entrepreneurship. In terms of empirical analysis, the localities approach appropriated Kantor and Savitch's (2005) analytical framework based upon the definition of concepts and key variables; these were then operationalized using quantitative and qualitative data sets. Steering variables (agency) and driving variables (structure) were defined that influence the impact of place-based strategies in terms of achieving balanced and sustainable development. Steering variables are those which



reflect how place-based development is shaped on the basis of preferences, options and values and reflect local culture and levels of public participation. Driving variables reflect processes that shape place-based development in terms of structural forces and framework conditions and include levels of multi-scalar policy integration and territorial and socio-economic position. Both variable types are interrelated, though they capture different resources available to 'successful' place-making, from an agency and structure perspective. These variables were operationalized and defined in order to allow comparative measurement of equivalent variables in different regional and national contexts. On the one hand, the approach allowed for the identification of drivers and constraints that condition place-based spatial justice outcomes. On the other hand, it was also a question of identifying the factors affecting local capabilities to achieve procedural and distributive justice (see Nordberg, 2020). In pursuing these aims, the localities approach focused on the following broad definitions:

**Inequalities:** what are they, who do they concern, and how can they be measured? Here we will gather local information from various sources regarding social development and territorial factors that influence opportunities and abilities to satisfy needs.

**Aspirations:** what are the locally set development priorities and how do they resonate with sustainability and cohesion goals? To what extent and how are stabilization, greater social equity and/or growth objectives reflected in local strategies?

**Capabilities:** the ability to articulate social needs and goals and to act upon them. This includes the level of participation and visibility of the most disadvantaged groups in agenda-setting as well as the quality of multilevel governance relationships.

This approach formed the basis for comparative case studies through which spatial justice and fairness were investigated as they were defined and pursued at the level of urban and rural communities (see Németh and Weck, Chapter 8, and Schmitt and Weck, Chapter 4). This involved reconstructing trajectories of local strategy development and their links with EU policies, Cohesion Policy in particular. The focus was therefore on the local definition of social needs and articulation of equality demands on the one hand and the ways in which these needs and demands have been pursued in conjunction with EU opportunity structures on the other. Importantly, it will be necessary to assess in a comparative manner the experiences of localities in achieving their objectives; this also involves identifying conditioning factors at the local, regional and national levels and their respective roles in goal achievement. Among the conditioning factors that were considered, we can include local institutions, quality of social infrastructures, levels of civil society engagement and performance, levels of participation, quality of multilevel relations, relative effectiveness of divisions of labour between localities in a regional context. The locality approach also involved an additional central element,



namely that of scenario elaboration for all case study areas (see Tobiasz-Lis et al., Chapter 7). Scenarios were based on past experience as well as more general good examples of local development practice in order to target prospective actions based on assessments of spatial justice deficits, local development aspirations and realistic goals of stabilization and/or growth.

### **Concluding observations**

It remains true that within the European context, but elsewhere as well, the local level is often rather a 'mere' beneficiary rather than a partner in policy development (see European Parliament, 2016b; Vaughan-Whitehead, 2015). While the political salience of both place-based approaches and spatial justice is undeniable, the potential policy consequences of their more comprehensive integration would require a substantial and political complex thinking-through of Cohesion Policy and territorial development more broadly. Evidence of change has in fact emerged in the last decade or so. A place-based approach has been reflected in EU Cohesion Policy since the Europe 2020 strategies and the 2014–2020 programming period which introduced new territorial instruments and simplified financing arrangements. Key examples of these are CLLD (community-led local development) and ITI (integrated territorial investments). In addition, normative as well as pragmatic understandings of place as a building block of social and environmental sustainability goals have gradually informed the EU's urban agenda (Sikora-Fernandez, 2018) and its embrace of the Smart Cities paradigm (Masik et al., 2021). Furthermore, policy objectives of territorial cohesion have sparked interest in things that help constitute place, albeit in the technocratic guise of 'territorial capital' which, according to Camagni and Capello (2013: 1398), encompasses 'a wide variety of territorial assets, both tangible and intangible, of a private, public or mixed nature'. Consequently, to emphasize territoriality in terms of place or locale means to take seriously the idea that locally available resources, public goods and services as well as capacities for action are shaped by place and are themselves place-shaping factors. This also suggests a policy imperative of genuinely integrated social and structural investment that supports community-building and fairness through a redoubled focus, among others, on social services (child care, health care, education), entrepreneurship, housing and group-specific services.

As our case studies demonstrate, the diverse experiences of Europe's cities and localities, particularly those in more marginalized regions, provide a wealth of valuable information regarding conditions necessary for achieving spatial justice and fairness. Above all, it requires the identification of areas of social and cultural activity that (1) resonate with local aspirations and local conceptualizations of policy priorities (e.g. in education, research, entrepreneurship, gender issues, health, linguistic rights, regional development), (2) promote partnerships between civil society organizations, public and private sector actors, the EU as well as other international organizations,



and (3) enhance everyday social mobility in educational, cultural and economic terms.

RELOCAL's localities approach also reflected the recognition that development is rarely truly 'bottom-up' and thus targeted the identification of specific aspects of local-regional-national interactions that either promote or hinder the articulation and implementation of spatial justice goals. Indeed, in our case studies questions of partnerships involving not only horizontal relations between local actors but also vertical relations between different levels of governance and policy support revealed themselves as critical. Ultimately, the achievement of fairness would also require resolve on the part of the EU and member states to 'even out' a playing field that for historical, economic, geographic and other reasons is not even and will not be for generations to come. As Gräbner et al. argue (2020), diverging patterns between technologically sophisticated cores and struggling peripheries are so entrenched within the Eurozone (and the EU as a whole) that only public investment and progressive redistribution policies will be able to alleviate the situation. These authors (2020: 666) remind us, for example, that undertaking entrepreneurial activity under uncertain conditions 'represents a social learning process that should be facilitated by government policies'. The same can be said for local strategy development; here as well social learning is a major factor in mid-term to long-term success. By the same token, openness to policy learning processes at all levels is also needed: while certainly disappointing, failures of place-based approaches are also sources of important knowledge that could improve the prospects of struggling places (Petrakos et al., 2021).

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### 3 Spatial justice and locality

#### The conceptual framework and application

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The aim of this chapter is to provide a brief outline of the RELOCAL project's concepts, methods, and their application. The chapter thus complements James W. Scott's previous discussion of the 'localities approach' in terms of elaborating the normative foundations of the project. The chapter is structured into two sections. The first section outlines the conceptual framework of the RELOCAL project by introducing the two key concepts of spatial justice and locality, the relationship between them, and the research methodology that was used in the RELOCAL project. The second section explains how this conceptual framework was applied during the course of the research, and how it was used in work packages. An extended discussion of the project's concepts and a full list of references are available in Madanipour et al. (2017, 2020, 2022). Some of the project's findings are available in two special issue journals of *Justice Spatiale/ Spatial Justice* (Blondel and Evrard, 2019) and *European Planning Studies* (Weck et al., 2022).

#### The concept of spatial justice

As Schmitt and Weck indicate in Chapter 4, the concept of spatial justice is one of the key concepts employed in the RELOCAL context. Spatial justice closely relates to, and overlaps with, the concepts of social justice, territorial cohesion, sustainable development, and the European Social Model. The European Social Model is one of the ways in which the EU pursues its efforts in social justice, but the Model does not engage with spatial justice. Territorial Cohesion Policy, with its focus on spatial connections and distribution, would be more closely related to the concept of spatial justice. Both, to an extent, address the more institutionalized forms of social and spatial justice through their emphases on improving some of the systems that could mitigate against oppression, vulnerability, and disadvantage. The concept of spatial justice indicates *equity in social space*, integrating five dimensions of justice: social, procedural, distributive, spatial, and temporal, which distinguish it from related concepts.



*Social: spatial justice as an integral part of social justice*

Social justice indicates *equity among the members of society*. A society is seen to be unjust if it is characterized by deep and persistent inequality among its members. Such levels of inequality undermine any claims to democratic legitimacy and social cohesion. A call to social justice, therefore, means a demand for reducing, and eradicating, these inequalities in wealth, opportunities, and privileges.

The social is inherently spatial, and so spatial processes are an integral part of social processes, contributing to the creation of just or unjust social conditions. The social and spatial processes are mutually interdependent: social processes find spatial expression and spatial processes influence the social processes. Spatial justice is the term that is used to capture this dialectical relationship. Elements of spatiality, such as the processes of agglomeration and dispersion, centralization and decentralization, centre-periphery relations, polarization, domination, boundary setting, rescaling, and spatial transformation are among the processes that play a significant role in social arrangements.

Spatial justice is the spatial dimension of social justice. In parallel to social justice, therefore, *spatial justice indicates the equitable formation of social space*. Social conditions and processes are inherently spatial, so spatial and social justice are integrated. Social inequality and exclusion can be present in all areas of social life, where access to resources, rights, decision-making, and cultural expression is not available to some groups. These forms of inequality and exclusion often find spatial expression, as exemplified in the privatization of public goods, services, and spaces, which consolidate the processes of inequality. The patterns of disadvantage tend to be concentrated in particular areas, and in turn spatial concentrations and transformations can cause further inequality and marginality. Spatial justice, therefore, means an equitable spatial distribution of resources and opportunities, and fairness in the relations of power that shape and transform the social space.

Spatial justice (incorporating social justice) focuses on both the just geographic distribution of resources and opportunities, and on the power relations that cause (in)justice between social groups and between spaces. Social and spatial justice are complex and overlapping theoretical concepts, with a strong normative character and a wide variety of different interpretations. Both see the distribution of resources and opportunities as a key factor in identifying (in)justice, with social justice focusing more on the distribution between social groups, and spatial justice more interested in the geography of distribution. Both forms of (in)justice are generated by power relations and procedures that enable the domination and oppression of certain groups of people, and by the way that space itself is constructed and used. Both of these types of spatial justice were empirically researched in the RELOCAL project.



*Distributive and procedural: spatial justice as a combination of distributive and procedural justice*

Spatial justice is a form of justice that combines procedural and distributive aspects. This enables us to go beyond the usual dichotomy of these two forms of justice, which should not be considered to be mutually exclusive. It would therefore enable the processes of multi-level governance to have the appropriate procedures for a better distribution of resources and opportunities, and better mechanisms to ensure democratic empowerment and legitimacy. Providing access to substantive needs and the provision of opportunities are as important as the ways of achieving them. This requires attention to both the procedures of ensuring justice and the outcomes of these procedures.

Social justice involves distributional and procedural aspects of justice as applied to households and social groups. It involves the material conditions, institutional arrangements, and social relations and processes that facilitate a fair and equitable distribution of resources and opportunities in society. Social justice under the conditions of social inequality, therefore, involves reducing social inequality and marginality, both through the provision of essential resources and opportunities, and through the institutional arrangements and processes that are necessary for reducing social inequality. In practice, social and spatial justice require putting extra emphasis on improving the conditions and life chances of the underprivileged and marginalized households and social groups. This would necessitate identifying and targeting the disadvantaged households and social groups, providing the essential resources and opportunities that would improve the living and working conditions of the disadvantaged groups, and creating the institutional and procedural arrangements that are needed to make it happen. Research into social and spatial justice means investigating the causes and conditions of social inequality, exclusion, and injustice, and identifying the material and institutional resources and arrangements that are needed for reducing social inequality and marginality.

*Spatial: spatial justice within and between territories*

Spatial justice is both inter-local and intra-local, as it is a concern at all spatial scales and territorial levels. It includes the questions of regional inequality as well as social inequality and exclusion within localities and regions. The focus on the locality should include both an investigation into spatial justice within the locality and across localities. Spatial justice would require a spatial rethinking of localities to ensure a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities and a more appropriate governance arrangement to deliver it. Spatial justice would also require an inter-local analysis, so that inter-regional inequalities can be understood and procedures for reducing them be identified.



*Temporal: spatial justice within and between generations*

The emphasis on the social relations in spatial justice would also mean that these relations are not static, but change in time, and therefore need to have a clear temporal dimension. The temporal dimension should be taken into account both for shorter periods of time and for the longer timescales of sustainability. In its broad meaning, sustainable development requires justice within and across generations. This requires paying particular attention to the natural environment and how our quest for social justice for the present generation needs to be balanced with the needs of future generations, as well as the needs and vulnerabilities of other species on earth. The RELOCAL project cannot focus on spatial justice without emphasizing the environmental aspects of social disadvantage and exclusion. Sustainable development overlaps with the notions of territorial cohesion and spatial justice. An important ingredient of the notion of sustainable development is a combination of inter-generational and intra-generational equity. It is important for the research to inquire the extent to which these forms of equity are detectable in localities, and how far it is possible to keep the balance between them in vulnerable places. The pressure for balancing local development and social justice should include the care of the environment and other species. All Work Packages, especially WP8, which deals with future scenarios, are mindful of this important challenge.

**The concept of locality**

The second key concept of RELOCAL is locality, as the spatial focus of research and the nexus of a range of forces that contribute to spatial (in)justice and democratic legitimacy. In the preceding chapter, James W. Scott has provided background on the rationales informing RELOCAL's localities approach. While notions of place and community-building are central to this perspective, localities are clearly not self-sufficient enclaves, but porous and interlinked parts of wider contexts. Therefore, RELOCAL adopts a critical and relational approach, analysing the locality from a critical and open perspective, through four interrelated dimensions: differential, vertical, horizontal, and transversal.

*Differential*

A locality is not a homogeneous place, but a place of multiplicity, variation, and diversity, which includes inequality and injustice within any given territory. Any understanding of the locality, therefore, needs to take this inner diversity into account, rather than assuming it to be a homogeneous entity. Patterns of social inequality and diversity, and the processes of social inclusion and exclusion are at work at all levels of a place, however defined.



### *Vertical*

The strengthening of local governance would potentially help bridge the democratic deficit, but it would need coordination and collaboration with other levels of power, as well as the cross-cutting procedures and forces, so as to ensure solidarity within and across regions. The concept of multilevel governance is part of a hierarchical conceptualization of power between local, national, and European levels, but it suffers from a mismatch between the ambiguous division of labour between different levels of power. Nevertheless, a locality is subject to governance forces from higher and lower levels of decision-making and power relations. The question becomes the relationship between these different levels of power and whether and how they can positively contribute to spatial justice.

### *Horizontal*

The inter-local relations are important for spatial justice within national and EU territories, as they aspire to social and territorial cohesion. A horizontal comparison and coordination of procedures across localities is needed to ensure the appropriate distribution of power, resources, and opportunities, in coordination with the vertical levels of governance. Horizontal relations may be investigated between adjacent localities, as well as through linkages and comparisons between localities in different parts of the EU.

### *Transversal*

The transversal forces of the market and technology do not necessarily work through the hierarchies of multi-level governance and the networks of inter-local comparison and coordination but operate at different scales and places and at different tempos, such as those of digital networks, international organizations, and multinational corporations. The locality is a combination of these four dimensions of differential, vertical, horizontal, and transversal relations. The forms of political action to ensure territorial cohesion are often performed at distinct spatial levels. But there are many social and economic forces that are not confined to these discrete boundaries of decision-making. The vertical relationships may create new hierarchies and generate the problem of democratic deficit and power imbalances. The horizontal forms of coordination are often presented as an alternative to the vertical arrangements. This is a tension between hierarchy and network. It is also a tension between subsidiarity and equity. Furthermore, the transversal relations cut through these policy networks and disrupt them.

A relational reading of the spatial, however, would enable us to go beyond the dichotomy of vertical and horizontal relationships, and also take into account the dynamics of heterogeneity and transversality. This would require locating the local in the context of its differential, vertical, horizontal, and



transversal relationships. It would enable the research to test the hypothesis that the localities approach can address the challenges of inequality, power imbalance, and democratic deficit. It would therefore address the Horizon 2020 Call's question on whether '*regional autonomy or decentralization are – or are not – justifiable on account of economic, political and social justice.*' The spatiality of the local becomes the framework that links solidarity, democracy, and sustainable development. The social life of the locality becomes the nexus of efforts for solidarity, democracy, and sustainability, but always in relation to the vertical, horizontal, and transversal axes, rather than an isolated and isolating parochialism. This would mean investigating the capacities of the local in both its procedural and distributive dimensions and for its capacities for spatial justice and social inclusion within and across territories and social groups.

### **The research framework**

The research hypothesis and key questions link the two concepts of spatial justice and localities. At the core of this relationship, and a primary defining relationship for the definition of spatial justice, is the relationship between procedural and distributive justice. Distributive justice is focused on identifying the patterns and perceptions of spatial injustice, exclusion, and inequality, while procedural justice concentrates on actions and institutions that can combat spatial injustice. These two key themes are then addressed through a series of subthemes in Work Packages (Figure 3.1).

The research framework therefore comprised a spatial ontology, a relational epistemology, and a mixed methodology.

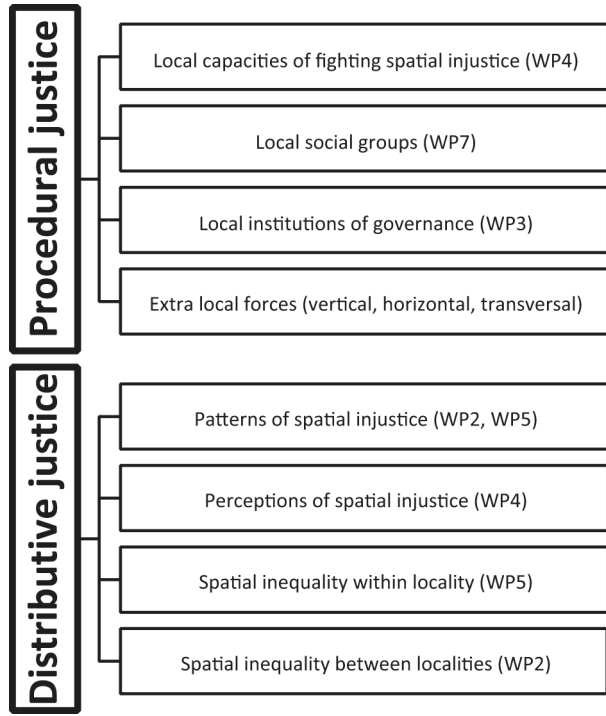
#### *A spatial ontology: the localities approach*

By adopting spatial justice as its starting point, the RELOCAL project's key assumption, and the focus of its empirical data, are localities, the places in which the challenges of spatial justice and democratic deficit, and the responses to these challenges and inequalities, can be analysed and understood. Such a spatial focus facilitates the investigation of various challenges and responses within given territories and in their relations to other places, particularly under the conditions of crisis. This would respond to the Horizon 2020 call's invitation to 'explore the links between territorial cohesion, sustainable development and spatial justice in Europe in times of crisis.'

#### *A relational epistemology*

Justice is a comparative concept: it is a process of judgement on the quality of relations between two or more states of affairs. On their own, the number and composition of agents and material objects are not judged to be just or unjust. It is only when they mediate the relations between people and





*Figure 3.1* The distributive and procedural dimensions of spatial justice

territories, and only in comparison with others, that they find such meanings. Relations, therefore, are the focus of analysis. Through them, the power arrangements that make up spatial governance, behaviour of actors, access to material goods and services, spatial and social relations between them, composition of localities and their relations with other localities become just or unjust.

#### *A mixed methodology*

The locality and its relations form the unit of analysis, where spatial (in) justice will be studied. The local area under investigation, however, does not need to be defined in a strict sense. We did not try to draw rigid and final boundaries around particular areas but saw them as a flexible definition of an area with porous and potentially changing boundaries. To undertake this investigation, the project used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative methods were used for measuring the substantive dimensions of spatial exclusion/inclusion, and qualitative methods for analysing the experiences, relationships, and processes and the various ways of combating spatial injustice. Investigating the power relations, the processes,



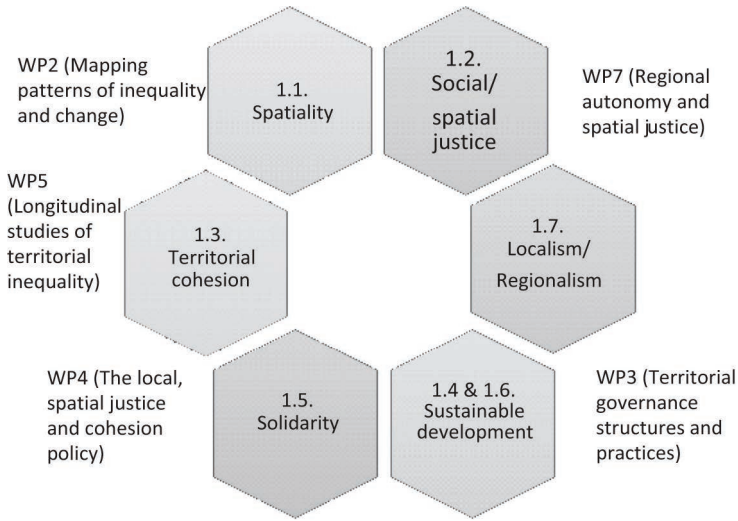


Figure 3.2 Relationship between the theoretical framework and Work Packages

the experiences of spatial exclusion and injustice, and the responses developed towards them, were analysed in qualitative case studies. In addition to Work Package 6, qualitative methods were also used in Work Packages 3, 4, 7, and 8. Quantitative methods were best placed to compare different localities, especially regarding distributive justice. Quantitative methods were especially used in Work Packages 2 and 5. These methodologies will be further introduced in the relevant sections and chapters (Figure 3.2).

The RELOCAL project, therefore, examines the capacity of place-based approaches to deliver spatial justice. Localities are defined as multifarious and porous, at the intersection of vertical, horizontal, and transversal forces. Spatial justice is conceptualized as integrating social, spatial, temporal, distributive, and procedural dimensions. By focusing on a spatial ontology, through a relational epistemology and a mixed methodology, we investigate whether spatial justice, as a fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them, can be achieved through place-based strategies, and whether these can be achieved within as well as across places and times.

## Applying the conceptual framework

### *Work Package 2: mapping patterns of inequality and change*

Work here focused on the distributive aspect of spatial justice, notably, the disparities in economic and social advantage between European regions and their interlinkages. Due to this focus on comparison across regions, the key



level of locality for this WP was the ‘horizontal.’ Moreover, the originality of this quantitative comparison of EU regions was reflected in a broader-than-standard thematic ambit, and also, where data is available, carrying analysis to a more fine-grained (NUTS 3) level than previous such studies. The role of this work package within the RELOCAL study was, through its initial analyses, to inform the selection of case studies. Its main findings emphasized the significance of looking beyond purely economic indicators and the importance of looking across multiple scales when investigating spatial justice.

### *WP3. Territorial governance structures and practice*

The core RELOCAL concept investigated here was that of procedural justice, viewed as one of the two key components of spatial justice mapped out in the project’s conceptual framework. Work Package 3 explored the procedural aspect of spatial justice through a comparison of how the RELOCAL case studies have implemented project governance: who are the key actors and institutions and how have these been mobilized to become stakeholders? The key level of locality that this analysis takes place at is the internal (or differential) level, in that the investigation, while it includes higher levels of governance, is concerned with how these impact at the local level and on the actions or projects that are the focus of the case studies. Work followed the example of many of the RELOCAL case studies, which provided its source material, in taking a broad and general perspective on procedural justice and its relationship to spatial justice. This is based on standard measures of participation and transparency, rather than providing details on accessibility to marginalized and excluded groups. Even at this very mainstream level of procedural justice, however, the analysis affords appreciation of the close relationship, or interdependency, between spatial justice and procedural justice.

### *WP4. The local, spatial justice, and cohesion policy*

The core RELOCAL concept explored in this work package was the perception of spatial justice in case study localities. It deployed a relational concept of locality which was one of the two main RELOCAL concepts alongside spatial justice (see Chapter 3), and included the component dimensions of differential (or internal), horizontal, vertical, and transversal relationships. WP4 could be described as taking a bottom-up perspective, in that it explores people’s perceptions of spatial justice and injustice in their locality. Its perspective is also relational in that it places these perceptions in a context where place-based actions are subject to various and changing influences across all four locality relationship levels that we identified earlier: those internal to the locality; those from similar places; those from higher levels; and those from distant locations, be they EU region or global levels. While all levels were considered, the key levels of locality relationship in this WP can be identified as the internal (differential) level and the vertical and transverse level (in



particular EU Cohesion Policy) with its significant impacts on the horizontal and internal relationships.

#### *WP5. Longitudinal studies of spatial inequality*

The core RELOCAL concept used here was the distributional aspect of spatial justice, and in terms of the level of localities it focused on neighbourhood effects regarding individual socio-economic outcomes, both as a snapshot in time and longitudinally. Because it was also comparative, dealing with outcomes between localities, internal and horizontal levels were the main focus. The intention of the work package was to gain a better understanding of the suitability of different geographical units, in terms of both scale and boundary, for assessments of area effects on individual labour income (after controlling for individual's characteristics and, where possible, family background) (Janssen and van Hamm, 2018). This is because the effects appear different depending on the scale of analysis, which evidently has consequences for the design and implementation of public policies. The main finding of this WP was that to determine the impact of place of residence on outcomes such as income, the relationship should be measured and tested at a number of scales; it also recommended that countries provide better and more detailed fine-level data to enable the closer-grain level of analysis (Melo et al., 2019).

#### *WP6. Case studies*

Following RELOCAL's conceptual framework, the aim of the 33 case studies carried out in the project was to investigate whether spatial justice, as a fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them, can be achieved through place-based strategies, and whether these can be achieved within as well as across places and times. The possibilities for case study selection were set wide: they embraced a wide range of local strategies. The studies could thus be place-based or community-based, involve participatory cohesion strategies for improving the local quality of life as well as promote more balanced and sustainable development (see Weck et al., 2020). Three pillars guided the process of case study selection:

- Representation of different welfare regimes in the list of final cases
- Informed knowledge of national case study representatives on localities and actions which correspond best with the study's research interest and questions
- Representation of different types of actions, such as level of maturity in the policy process, territorial governance arrangements, EU funding, diversity of top-down and bottom-up actions, etc.



**WP7. Regional autonomy and spatial justice**

Aspects of the two core RELOCAL concepts, those of locality and spatial justice, were addressed in this work package. The question of relative autonomy of a given locality in relation to vertical levels of governance relationships was the main focus. This produced some overlaps with the question as to whether case study actions were able to be effective in their place of operation. However, WP7 had a specific focus on aspects of actions that result from bottom-up local organization to address spatial injustices, and to what extent this might produce spatial justice gains both locally and at higher levels, including the question of to what extent these local initiatives may translate and alter within and across scales. Thus, there were two key levels of locality for this WP – the internal (or differential) and the vertical and transversal. Ultimately it asks the question of whether greater autonomy for local-level actions might generate greater levels of spatial justice. This relates back to the main question of the Horizon 2020 call to which RELOCAL responded, which sought an answer to the question of whether ‘regional autonomy or decentralization are – or are not – justifiable on account of economic, political and social justice.’

**WP8. Coherence and scenarios**

This is the second RELOCAL work package that reviewed the 33 RELOCAL case studies in their entirety and thus it addressed both key concepts of spatial justice (procedural and distributional) and the relationality of localities (at internal/differential, horizontal, vertical, and transverse levels). This work package used a scenario approach, defined as ‘qualitative methods to identify the drivers of certain phenomena (in this case, spatial injustice) based on expert opinion’ (Piras et al., 2020: 2). Mechanism Maps and Theory of Change narratives for each of the 33 cases allowed the authors to develop a typology of three types of spatial (in)justice faced by the localities and addressed through the actions: namely (1) Territorial Disadvantage (19 case studies), (2) Neighbourhood Effects (stigma) (11 case studies), and (3) Disempowered Places (three case studies). The first group were places that provide fewer opportunities and poorer outcomes compared to adjacent areas, for geographical and/or geo-political reasons. Neighbourhood effects were found mainly in urban contexts and represent segregated urban areas which reinforce population disadvantage with locational effects. Finally, the smallest category, of Disempowered Places, were those where ineffective, or inappropriate, multi-level governance structures blighted localities in terms of wellbeing and the entrepreneurial environment, relative to neighbouring administrative areas.

The approach used was unusual, compared with the extant literature on scenario methods, in requiring partners to determine the single, most likely, scenario for their action, rather than the more standard approach of



presenting a number of possible scenarios, or contrasting examples of a positive and negative scenario. This simplification enabled comparison between all 33 cases but did not exclude the recording of uncertainty, because at the same time, factors influencing development over time were rated for relevance as well as probability, enabling a further level of analysis about future contextual impacts on spatial justice. Finally, the individual Mechanism Maps created for each action were adapted by each RELOCAL case study team and, as necessary, restructured to reflect the anticipated change in contextual conditions and drivers by 2030 that had been identified through the Nexus-State Array exercise.

## Conclusion

The analysis of work packages and academic output has shown that the Conceptual Framework (Madanipour et al., 2017) for RELOCAL, as developed at the start of the project, has served the project well. Two concepts formed its core: spatial justice (with its five dimensions: social, procedural, distributive, spatial, and temporal) and locality (with its four dimensions: differential, vertical, horizontal, and transversal). Based on these two key concepts and their relationships, a spatial ontology, a relational epistemology, and a mixed methodology were developed, which were applied in 10 work packages over a period of five years, 2016–2021. This theoretical-analytical framework provided a primary foundation upon which the teams of RELOCAL researchers have conducted their empirical investigations and analysis. The intersection of distributive and procedural justice with relational spatiality and different aspects of locality has provided a framework through which communication across research teams has been facilitated and the collection and analysis of empirical material have been supported. The outputs of each work package demonstrate how the concepts of spatial justice and locality, as discussed and unpacked in RELOCAL's Conceptual Framework, have been taken up and developed further by the different research teams. These researchers have further elaborated the initial conceptual framework with their additional literature reviews and theoretical tools that were specifically necessary for their work package but have broadly shared RELOCAL's definitions of spatial justice and locality.

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## Part 2

# Spatial justice in local development





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## 4 Approaching spatial justice in local development actions

A European comparative perspective on promoters, inhibitors, and achievements

*Sabine Weck and Peter Schmitt*

### Introduction

The challenging question of how procedurally and distributively just forms of governance can be achieved has attracted considerable interest in the local and regional development and planning literature (Reynolds and Shelley, 1985; Davoudi and Brooks, 2014; Uitermark and Nicholls, 2017; Williams, 2017). In this chapter, we approach the questions regarding procedural and distributive justice from an empirical perspective. Building on a sample of 22 case study reports on local development actions, we scrutinize the extent to which the investigated actions provide evidence of procedural and distributive justness. These actions are either policy-driven or bottom-up initiatives that aim to achieve greater spatial justice within a specific policy area (see Chapter 8 on case study research in this book) focusing on a specific locality (e.g. neighbourhood, metropolitan area, rural village). Drawing on the debates in the literature on ‘just’ or ‘fair’ processes as well as their outcomes, we systematically assess the investigated local development actions. As examples, we further analyse five cases in detail, discussing the promoters and inhibitors of procedural and distributive justness that become evident.

Our chapter contributes to research on ‘just planning’. On the basis of rich empirical evidence, we derive several practical principles for assessing the justness of processes and outcomes of local and regional development projects. In addition, we identify the promoters and inhibitors of just processes and just outcomes that are relevant across different local or regional settings, and that can be instructive for leading local actors coping with similar local development actions in practice.

### Assessing procedural and distributive justice

‘Justice is not static, instead it is always in process, being negotiated, maintained and brought into being through practice’ (Williams, 2017: 2222).

In the RELOCAL project, we conceptualized spatial justice relationally, with a focus on both the processes and the extent to which these cause (un)just distributive outcomes. This approach can be distinguished from a



distributive understanding that seeks to analyse the distributive outcomes of policies or projects in confined territories, and their implications for contributing to (un)even geographies across different scales (Madanipour et al., 2017: 3). There are diverse conceptions of spatial justice in the academic literature, depending on whether they are embedded in egalitarian, libertarian, or utilitarian paradigms (for a deeper understanding of this debate, see Davoudi and Brooks, 2014; Israel and Frenkel, 2017; Uitermark and Nicholls, 2017; and Moroni, 2019). While acknowledging this diversity in normative positioning, our approach in this chapter is different. We seek an empirically grounded understanding of just planning processes and just outcomes, that is, how spatial justice is actually pursued and achieved through policies or projects in a wide range of localities, from the neighbourhood level to urban regions. In assessing the achievements, we rely on perceptions of local and regional stakeholders, and the critical analysis of case study researchers (for more details on the research process, see Madanipour et al., Chapter 3, and Németh and Weck, Chapter 8).

Our assessment of the cases thus relies on researchers' thorough understanding and analysis of the actions in their local context, rather than measuring the outcomes of the actions against predefined concepts of spatial justice. It is based on a thorough reading of the case study reports developed within the RELOCAL project, filtering out those promoters and inhibitors which were identified to be of key importance for explaining case-specific outcomes. More specifically, for assessing the local development action's contribution and impact in terms of procedural and distributive justice, we draw on several principles emphasized in the spatial justice, planning, or political theory literature. These include issues such as transparency, the participation and inclusion of stakeholders in procedural justice, the redistribution of resources, and the recognition of marginalized interests.

### *Procedural justice*

As alluded to above, procedural justice forms one of two main dimensions in the debate around spatial justice. The normative claim or expectation behind the concept of procedural justice is that just processes may even lead to a fairer distribution of resources and opportunities. Within planning studies, the concept of procedural justice is tightly related to some main principles that are discussed in the collaborative planning literature, as well as in related debates on 'good' place/territorial governance (e.g. Davoudi and Cowie, 2016; Hillier, 1998). In what follows some of these main principles are presented, as they constitute our analytical framework for assessing procedural justness in the 22 case studies (see Schmitt, 2020).

Within local development actions the coordination of various actors and interests, ultimately representing different policy levels and sectors, is often handled by establishing social networks as the dominant mode of governance. Within these networks various forms of coordination are practised



within more or less institutionalized formats (i.e. often within forums or platforms) to discuss and negotiate the design and implementation of a public policy, project, or the local development action as such. These chosen forms of coordination also function as gatekeepers, since they usually regulate the integration of interests, the mobilization and inclusion of stakeholders in general, and the extent to which even weakly positioned actors with limited capacities and resources are or should be integrated. In addition, these various forms of coordination, or to be more precise, the choice of institutions to regulate interactions between different actors, are also critical regarding the extent to which consensus and synergies across sectors, stakeholders, and other interest groups can be achieved in view of policy design and the implementation of concrete actions (Schmitt and Van Well, 2016). Specifically, the role of the leading actor, that is, the person or organization who is supposed to be responsible for the implementation of the action, is critical regarding the functioning of the chosen forms of coordination. Hence, the actual practised type of leadership is crucial, since reported governance failures are often related to cases in which leadership is contested or unclear, or even cause conflicts and frustration if the leading actor does not facilitate platforms or forums as expected by other involved actors (Schmitt and Van Well, 2016).

In the 'good' governance and collaborative planning literature the participation and inclusion of various actors is key to addressing procedural justness. It is argued that integrating those who represent the local civic society is essential, and it is therefore also vital to activate 'their' specific (lay) knowledge, incorporating 'their' claims and concerns in the formulation and implementation of public policies and actions to compensate for the democratic deficits that are somewhat (pre)defined due to the given political and institutional environment. In other words, a key element in this literature is giving concerned actors a legitimate role in the decision-making process and eventually even the implementation process of a specific local development action to attenuate the general wariness about expert or elitist manipulation of the proceedings (Sager, 2018). Hence, practical critical aspects include where the discussion is supposed to take place, how actor involvement is promoted, in what style of participation processes are carried out to create a comfortable atmosphere, how and which arguments are selected and considered relevant, and so on (Healey, 2003). Within this debate, Hillier (1998) emphasizes further related key principles such as clarity and transparency about the policy process at hand, just access to all relevant information, and the comprehensiveness of feedback, but also mutual respect, and honesty and trustfulness. These principles are also important for avoiding frustration or even disillusionment if the intelligibility of the action and the further procedure are unclear to all participating actors (or those who are supposed to become involved). Schmitt and Van Well (2016) argue that the timing of the integration of different views and actors is vital, since some processes may be transparent for those who actively participate (or are allowed to do so) from the beginning, but it may be rather difficult for initial outsiders joining at a



Table 4.1 Conceptualizing spatial justice

	<i>Assessment Criteria</i>	<i>Assessment</i>
Justness of processes	Forms of leadership of identified leading actor(s)	...
	Forms of coordination and functioning of collaboration	...
	Participation of initial non-key actors and their exertion of influence	...
	Transparency and intelligibility	...

later stage to gain an overview and thus become fully engaged in the issues at stake.

On the basis of this discussion in the literature, we have identified four main principles to analyse procedural justness in concrete cases (see Table 4.1). These principles were then rated in an iterative process by seeking validity from the responsible case study researchers with first-hand experience in the localities (Schmitt, 2020). Each case was then ultimately assessed regarding whether the observed practices were ‘promoting’ or at least ‘slightly promoting’ procedural justice, or whether they could be assessed as ‘mainly neutral’, ‘slightly inhibiting’, or even ‘inhibiting’ procedural justice.

*Distributive justice*

A starting point for assessing outcomes is the ‘fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them’ (Soja, 2009: 2). Following Soja and others (Pirie, 1983: 470; Reynolds and Shelley, 1985: 271; Israel and Frenkel, 2017: 650), distributive and procedural components are best conceptualized as closely interlinked. As Davoudi and Brooks (2014: 2686) have argued: ‘Justice is not only about how people are treated (legal rights), but also how the benefits and burdens of societal activities are distributed (distributive justice) and how this distribution is decided upon (procedural justice)’. A one-sided emphasis on allocation falls short of understanding the mechanisms behind the distributive patterns, that is, how deeply engrained processes of discrimination or power inequalities continue to produce and reproduce distributive inequality in local societies (Pirie, 1983; Davoudi and Brooks, 2014). It is therefore crucial to focus on processes which lie at the root of unjust access to resources or unequal burdens. According to the political philosopher Nancy Fraser (1997: 7), justice is about redistribution as much as it is about recognition, and about economy as much as it is about culture, and how these two interact in the production of injustices. A cultural politics of recognition and a socioeconomic politics of redistribution therefore need to be combined to achieve greater justice (ibid.). To assess these outcomes, we accept this principle and conceptualize distributive justice in terms of both redistribution and recognition.



Table 4.2 Conceptualizing spatial justice – assessment criteria

	<i>Assessment Criteria</i>	<i>Assessment</i>
Justness of outcomes	Redistribution of resources (material/ economic)	...
	Recognition of thus far underrepresented interests (socio/cultural)	...

In terms of redistribution, we focus on the material and socioeconomic outcomes of the local development actions targeted at disadvantaged or marginalized population groups. These outcomes may be material in nature, such as new meeting places for disadvantaged groups or other built infrastructure. They may also have a socioeconomic dimension such as new jobs or improved education and qualification levels. In terms of recognition, we focus on the extent to which we can find evidence for an improved recognition of the interests of population groups in the local decision-making arenas that have thus far been marginalized. Recognition of the needs and identities of marginalized groups by societal and institutional actors, and meaningful participation, are key to reducing inequalities in just societies (Walther, 2019; drawing on Honneth, 1995; see also Young, 1990). We examine the extent to which the action enables the building of social capital and supports capacity building and the representation of community groups that have thus far been less engaged (the social dimension). We also look for outcomes of the action in terms of mitigating the stigmatized image of a place, or the recognition of the needs and identities of a marginalized group (the cultural dimension).

For a comparative analysis, we apply a qualitative interpretative approach. Statements on the socioeconomic, material, and cultural outcomes of the actions in the 22 case study reports were coded, using software for a qualitative text analysis (MaxQDA). Each case was assessed regarding its achieved outcomes and assigned to one of the following groups: ‘just outcomes’; ‘fairly just outcomes’; ‘unjust outcomes’; and both ‘just and unjust outcomes’. The final results of the assessment of outcomes were then set in context with the grouping of the cases according to procedural justice (see Table 4.3).

## Empirical findings

Setting the assessments of the justness of processes in context with the justness of outcomes for all 22 cases resulted in five groups (groups A to D and a mixed group; see Table 4.3). To illustrate the specific characteristics that underpin each group and the differences between the five groups, we use exemplary cases to explain our approach and the resulting assessment for each of the five groups. For Group A, development actions showing just processes and just outcomes, we analyse the case of a youth initiative in the



**Table 4.3** Grouping of cases based on the assessed justness of processes and outcomes, along with the case studies analysed and authors of the case studies

	<i>Grouping of cases based on the assessed justness of processes and outcomes</i>	<i>Number of cases</i>	<i>Illustrative case for each group</i>
<b>Group A</b>	Just processes and just outcomes	Seven cases	Youth Centre, Görlitz town, DE <i>Authors: Kamuf V. et al. (2019).</i>
<b>Group B</b>	Unjust processes and unjust outcomes	Three cases	Alexander Innovation Zone, Metropolitan Area of Thessaloniki, EL <i>Authors: Topaloglou L. et al. (2019).</i>
<b>Group C</b>	Unjust processes but fairly just outcomes	Three cases	Rotterdam South on Course, Neighbourhood of Rotterdam, NL <i>Authors: Dol K. et al. (2019).</i>
<b>Group D</b>	Fairly just processes but unjust outcomes	Three cases	Urban regeneration, György-telep, Neighbourhood of Pécs, HU <i>Authors: Jelinek C. and Virág T. (2019).</i>
<b>Ambiguous group</b>	Just as well as unjust processes and outcomes	Six cases	Strengthening Communities, Western Isles, UK <i>Authors: Currie M. et al. (2019).</i>

city of Görlitz in Germany. For Group B, cases indicating unjust processes and unjust outcomes, we select the action ‘Alexander Innovation Zone’ in the Metropolitan Area of Thessaloniki in northern Greece as an exemplary case. Groups C and D represent interesting local and regional development actions, as one of the dimensions was assessed as fairly just (or showing tendencies towards justness), whereas the other dimension indicated a tendency towards unjust processes or outcomes. The question here is how fairly just outcomes can be explained when the process itself is assessed to be rather unjust, as in the case of the neighbourhood regeneration ‘Rotterdam South on Course’ in the Netherlands. In contrast, we analyse which components or factors inhibited just outcomes – when the process leading to the outcomes was assessed as partly just, as in the case of neighbourhood regeneration in György-telep in the Hungarian city of Pécs. There is a final group that comprises cases with rather ambiguous tendencies. The group includes cases about which it is still too early to draw conclusions, or cases that show a sort of balance between both just and unjust characteristics regarding processes and outcomes. For this group, we analyse the case of ‘Strengthening Communities’ in the Western Isles in Scotland.



On the basis of the assessment criteria, as introduced in the previous section, we analyse case by case exactly how procedural and distributive justice constitute themselves in each of the local development actions. In what follows we provide more details about how we arrived at our assessments, and what proved decisive factors for the observed (un)justness of processes and outcomes in the five case studies representing groups A to D and the mixed group.

### **Group A – just processes and just outcomes: youth centre in Görlitz**

Görlitz is a medium-sized town (57,000 inhabitants) in south-eastern Germany on the German-Polish border. Like many other East German cities and towns, Görlitz suffered major transformation processes in the aftermath of German reunification. Most of its factories closed, and the (coal mining) region around Görlitz is undergoing structural regeneration. In recent years, following a youth protest in 2011 which demanded that greater attention be paid to youth policies in Görlitz, a group of young activists has actively called for more involvement of young people in local decision-making. This eventually led to the establishment of the ‘Rabryka’ youth and cultural centre in the town in cooperation with the municipality (Kamuf et al., 2019). The initiative was positively assessed in terms of the justness of processes and outcomes.

Drawing on analytical categories such as leadership, forms of coordination, and participation processes (see Table 4.4), the initiative was assessed positively according to the criteria for procedural justice. Empirical evidence shows it is easy for outsiders to become acquainted with the initiative. A transparent non-hierarchical mode of leadership has attracted young people in recent years to become regularly engaged in the initiative or even to become core team members. Rabryka is intentionally set up as a modular platform, which facilitates small-scale projects (writing graffiti, urban gardening, skateboarding) and enables young people to informally experiment and develop projects. The initiative thereby supports the participation of young people in self-organized projects, which eventually leads to their active engagement in local development. It is specifically the fact that this initiative is characterized by broad participation processes and offers considerable opportunities for engagement for initial non-key actors that led to its positive assessment from a procedural justice perspective.

In terms of distributive justice, Rabryka has also diversified the local landscape of sociocultural activities and created an anchor institution for engaged young people in Görlitz. Communication on the Rabryka youth and cultural centre has also had an impact on local administration. There is evidence of officials having an enhanced understanding of (youth) participation processes and listening to the voices of young people, which affects how local politics understands (and appreciates) the civic engagement of young people



Table 4.4 Assessed justness of processes for the ‘Youth centre Rabryka in Görlitz’ case

	<i>Assessment Criteria</i>	<i>Assessment</i>
Justness of processes	Forms of leadership of identified leading actor(s)	<b>Potentially promoting procedural justice</b> Leadership was acknowledged by other initially involved formal actors, which supported coordination and implementation of the action.
	Forms of coordination and functioning of collaboration	<b>Slightly promoting procedural justice</b> Action was embedded within existing and well-functioning forms of collaboration, which offered room for informality and flexibility.
	Participation of initial non-key actors and their exertion of influence	<b>Promoting procedural justice</b> Action was characterized by a rather broad participation process that offered considerable opportunities for engagement and exertion of influence by initial non-key actors.
	Transparency and intelligibility	<b>Slightly promoting procedural justice</b> Transparency and a high level of intelligibility for initial non-key actors existed if these actors became acquainted with the action.

Based on Schmitt, 2020.

Table 4.5 Assessed justness of outcomes for the ‘Youth centre Rabryka in Görlitz’ case

	<i>Assessment Criteria</i>	<i>Assessment</i>
Justness of outcomes	Redistribution of resources (material/ economic)	<b>Promoting distributive justice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Creates new infrastructure/anchor institution for young people in the locality.</li><li>– Enhanced understanding of officials in terms of youth participation (transformative impact on city governance and resource spending).</li></ul>
	Recognition of thus far underrepresented interests (socio/ cultural)	<b>Promoting distributive justice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Supports young people’s capacity building</li><li>– Positive effects on belonging for those who get involved in the initiative</li><li>– Processes of learning on both sides, the municipality and the Rabryka stakeholders</li><li>– Positive narratives about Görlitz.</li></ul>



in local development processes. The Rabryka stakeholders actively reach out to various youth groups, motivating young people to get involved in collective decision-making processes. At the same time, as the interviews show, becoming involved with the initiative can strengthen young people's feeling of belonging to the town. In the context of outmigration, structural change, and the rise of populist parties in the region the relevance of these impacts of the initiative has been acknowledged by the majority of the Görlitz population. However, this positive assessment is not generally shared by the local population or across all political parties. The researchers noted a politically polarized debate about the initiative and its impact. The initiatives' response to it is to try to keep out of party politics and remain non-partisan and neutral, communicating with all interested parties and stakeholder groups.

Involving young population groups, including marginalized ones, and increasing youth engagement, as the case study authors have argued, are deeply linked to how the initiative is set up and managed (Kamuf and Weck, 2021). The initiative has created a new platform for sociocultural activities and makes a difference in the locality not only in new infrastructure and meeting places but also in the capacity building of young stakeholders. The analysis of the Görlitz case reveals promoters for just processes and outcomes that also prove relevant for other cases in Group A. Actions in this group are characterized by rather broad participation processes and a high level of intelligibility and transparency for (initial) non-key actors, which helped them to become engaged with the action and exert influence. Thus, the actions succeeded in increasing community resources and engagement. Importantly, the exertion of influence was often linked to material investments (physical rehabilitation measures, new meeting places, etc.) and thus concrete outcomes for local population groups and enhanced opportunities. Ultimately, actions in this group are shaped to different degrees, according to the priorities and needs of local community groups, even if the actions do not develop from the bottom up but are initially designed by higher local or regional policy levels.

### **Group B: unjust processes and unjust outcomes: Alexander Innovation Zone**

The representative case for this group is from the metropolitan area of Thessaloniki in Greece, which faces significant growth and restructuring challenges. According to Petrakos et al. (2021: 10), this is particularly noteworthy, because despite the presence of significant academic and research institutes and an organized industrial area, 'Thessaloniki is behind the national average in terms of GDP per capita, faces significant unemployment problems and has a low innovation and competitiveness index compared to European standards'.

To unlock this metropolitan area's innovative potential, the local 'Alexander Innovation Zone' action, established in 2006, aims to connect universities and other research institutes, as well as 'incubators' and related private firms



located in the larger metropolitan area of Thessaloniki through a permanent public-private cooperation platform. This platform is intended to identify common interests and potential benefits, and thereby to function as a magnet for other large and small enterprises, and to stimulate the transformation of innovations into commercial activities. The action is supervised by the central government, here through the Minister of the Interior in the form of an outsourced company that forms the managing body of the intended metropolitan innovation ecosystem. The decisions are taken by a board of directors appointed by the Ministry of Macedonia and Thrace (Topaloglou, 2020: 85–87).

The action as such is assessed as a top-down public intervention, characterized by a complex legislative framework, rigorous public accounting, and overregulation by the prevailing centralized administrative system (Petra-kos et al., 2019). This structure has also prevented the action from showing a clear and mutually accepted leadership and developing a collaborative culture among the involved local stakeholders. Even more seriously, it has discouraged locally available creative forces from participating. Hence, the action succeeded neither in involving all relevant stakeholders nor in empowering other non-initial actors that could exert influence. In other words, the action appears to have been handled within a closed club and is thus characterized

Table 4.6 Assessed justness of processes for the case of the ‘Alexander Innovation Zone’

	<i>Assessment Criteria</i>	<i>Assessment</i>
Justness of processes	Forms of leadership of identified leading actor(s)	<b>Inhibiting procedural justice</b> Leadership was contested and/or characterized by a high level of ambiguity and negatively affected the coordination and implementation of the action.
	Forms of coordination and functioning of collaboration	<b>Slightly inhibiting procedural justice</b> Action was coordinated by a rather formalized network, which developed some forms of collaborative culture, but with considerable room for improvement.
	Participation of initial non-key actors and their exertion of influence	<b>Slightly inhibiting procedural justice</b> Participation during the action was limited to those who had the capacity to engage themselves; otherwise, the initial key actors mainly exerted influence on the action.
	Transparency and intelligibility	<b>Neutral</b> Transparency and a high level of intelligibility for initial non-key actors existed only if these actors became acquainted with the action.



by a lack of transparency. Since the central state has the power to intervene, its traditionally strong influence on local affairs is reproduced, which has made it impossible for the respective local actors ‘to change the prevailing “dependence culture” and to take a greater share of collective responsibility in developing an innovative ecosystem in their city’ (Petrakos et al., 2021: 10).

Overall, since its inauguration in 2006, the connecting platform, promotion of business-research networks, and the facilitation of innovative actions have been assessed as ineffective at fighting distributive injustice. According to Petrakos et al. (2021), there were no measurable outcomes, either in mobilizing endogenous dynamics that could lead to a redistribution of resources or in concerning the utilization of the existing critical mass in the form of the many local actors and their innovative capacity, because they could not be mobilized and integrated with the zone as such. These disappointing outcomes are mainly associated with the ‘dependency culture’ mentioned earlier, as well as the limited capacities of the involved leading actors to formulate a clear strategy, navigate the complicated legislative structure, and set realistic goals that were subsequently followed up (Topaloglou, 2020).

Table 4.7 Assessed justness of outcomes for the ‘Alexander Innovation Zone’ case

	Assessment Criteria	Assessment
Justness of outcomes	Redistribution of resources (material/economic)	<b>Promoting distributive justice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Positive educational achievements (decline in school dropouts, an increasing number of higher-level students mentoring their younger peers).</li> <li>– Positive achievements for young people on the labour market, career guarantees by local employers.</li> <li>– The action avoided a further socioeconomic decline in the district; specifically in relation to other ‘problem districts’ in the national context.</li> </ul>
	Recognition of thus far underrepresented interests (socio/cultural)	<b>Promoting distributive justice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The redistributive achievements have been widely recognized among different groups; positive image of the action (e.g. being effective), two-thirds of projects are on course (in terms of their expected goals).</li> <li>– Strong focus on some focus areas in Rotterdam South; groups that represent other areas that are not targeted by the action partly may recognize this as an issue of distributive injustice.</li> </ul>



### **Group C: unjust processes but fairly just outcomes: Rotterdam South on Course**

Rotterdam South is characterized by a relatively strong concentration of socioeconomically vulnerable households, compared not only to other parts of the city, but also to other urban districts in the Netherlands. Many of Rotterdam South's approximately 200,000 residents suffer from a multitude of problems such as low income, inadequate professional skills, educational and language deficiencies, unmanageable debts, substance abuse, and health and mental problems (Dol et al., 2019: 1).

In 2010, in response to this precarious situation, the *Nationaal Programma Rotterdam Zuid* was initiated by the national government with the main goal of improving education and employment opportunities specifically for the younger generation and promoting more social diversification based on broad participation across the district. This specific national programme is a long-term approach that is still running. A relatively small office forms the locus of a network of several stakeholders and organizations which coordinates several actions that are financed by the national government. This office is the leading actor, which, unlike the Alexander Innovation Zone case, works independently of the national government. The case study shows that this leading actor can harmonize various sectoral interests, but at the same time 'is not shy about taking action' (Dol et al., 2019: 18). Such leadership was acknowledged by other formal actors. Despite shifting political majorities and changes to its board's chairs and delegates, the office was also able to maintain strong leadership due to charismatic personalities, and at the same time was able to mobilize the participation of initial non-key actors. In doing so, the office succeeded in guaranteeing long-term commitment and solid funding to projects across parties and stakeholders.

However, the office's central position also led to a somewhat controlled, strict, and formalized collaboration, which allowed little room for the voicing of the opinions of those who have restricted capacities to do so. In addition, some wariness of and reluctance to engage with individual representatives of different social groups or organizations (e.g. schools, residents in specific neighbourhoods) were noted (Dol et al., 2019). Hence, the collaborative culture and the power to influence the design and scope of the action at hand is centred on formalized networks between initially involved formalized actors, but has not developed beyond them. The initial objective, which was to guarantee representation of the most marginalized groups, has therefore not been achieved (Keller and Virág, 2021: 8). One reason for this weak representation of vulnerable groups and those with little organizational capacity is that the transparency and intelligibility of the action for initial non-key actors decreased during the action's lifetime.

Despite these weaknesses regarding procedural justness, the outcomes of the action have been assessed much more positively (Dol et al., 2019).



Table 4.8 Assessed justness of processes for the ‘Rotterdam South on Course’ case

	<i>Assessment Criteria</i>	<i>Assessment</i>
Justness of processes	Forms of leadership of identified leading actor(s)	<b>Promoting procedural justice</b> Leadership was acknowledged by other initially involved formal actors, which supported coordination and implementation of the action.
	Forms of coordination and functioning of collaboration	<b>Slightly inhibiting procedural justice</b> Action was coordinated by a rather formalized network, which developed some forms of collaborative culture, but with considerable room for improvement.
	Participation of initial non-key actors and their exertion of influence	<b>Slightly inhibiting procedural justice</b> Participation during the action was limited to those who had the capacity to engage themselves; otherwise, the initial key actors mainly exerted influence on the action.
	Transparency and intelligibility	<b>Slightly inhibiting procedural justice</b> The transparency and intelligibility of the action for initial non-key actors decreased during the action’s lifetime.

It was recognized that the local action showed positive impacts on educational scores (e.g. declining school dropouts), and long-term unemployment has decreased. At the same time, the situation of the labour market for young people has improved, specifically since local employers continue to provide career guarantees for those choosing education in ‘technical subjects’ and ‘(health)care’. Overall, the action seems to have avoided a further socio-economic decline, because the situation has somewhat deteriorated in other urban districts in the Netherlands with a similar context. In this sense, Rotterdam South seems to have broken that trend (Dol et al., 2019: 34–35). In addition, the achievements of the action are widely recognized by diverse social groups in Rotterdam South. As such, the action is considered to have been effective and to have achieved its goals (specifically in regard to its educational objectives). However, on closer inspection, some local voices have criticized the action’s geographical selectivity, because only some targeted areas clearly profit from it. Explicitly, those areas whose inhabitants’ self-organizational capacity is rather low are targeted to a lesser extent by this action (Dol et al., 2019: 30–32).



Table 4.9 Assessed justness of outcomes for the ‘Rotterdam South on Course’ case

	<i>Assessment Criteria</i>	<i>Assessment</i>
Justness of outcomes	Redistribution of resources (material/ economic)	<b>Promoting distributive justice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Positive educational achievements (decline in school dropouts, an increasing number of higher-level students mentoring their younger peers).</li><li>– Positive achievements for young people on the labour market, career guarantees by local employers.</li><li>– The action avoided a further socio-economic decline in the district; specifically in relation to other ‘problem districts’ in the national context.</li></ul>
	Recognition of thus far underrepresented interests (socio/ cultural)	<b>Promoting distributive justice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– The redistributive achievements have been widely recognized among different groups; positive image of the action (e.g. being effective), two-thirds of projects are on course (in terms of their expected goals).</li><li>– Strong focus on some focus areas in Rotterdam South; groups that represent other areas that are not targeted by the action partly may recognize this as an issue of distributive injustice.</li></ul>

**Group D – fairly just processes, but unjust outcomes:  
neighbourhood regeneration György-telep, Pécs**

György-telep is a neighbourhood of some 700 residents in the northeast of Pécs, the fifth largest city in Hungary. The first development projects here started in 2007. The integrated neighbourhood renewal action for the last ten years, as investigated by Jelinek and Virág (2019), addresses issues such as housing, poverty, unemployment, and community building in what is officially delineated as a ‘segregated area’. The action has been initiated at multiple levels: national, regional, and local. It is carried out and implemented by an NGO, the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta (known as Málta) in cooperation with the local municipality and other stakeholders. We assessed the case as showing some fairly just processes (at the neighbourhood level), but with unjust outcomes overall.

In the national context, this neighbourhood renewal action receives prominent attention for its place-based, integrated approach in a highly stigmatized area (with a large percentage of Roma in the population), and for a long-term



Table 4.10 Assessed justness of processes for the ‘Neighbourhood regeneration in György-telep’ case

	<i>Assessment Criteria</i>	<i>Assessment</i>
Justness of processes	Forms of leadership of identified leading actor(s)	<b>Slightly promoting procedural justice</b> Acknowledgement of leadership by other initially involved formal actors was rather weak at the beginning, but increased throughout the coordination and implementation of the action.
	Forms of coordination and functioning of collaboration	<b>Neutral with regard to procedural justice</b> Action was embedded within existing and well-functioning forms of collaboration, but offered hardly any room for informality and flexibility.
	Participation of initial non-key actors and their exertion of influence	<b>Inhibiting procedural justice</b> Generally, weak participation of initial non-key actors throughout the action, so that only initial key actors exerted influence on the action.
	Transparency and intelligibility	<b>Inhibiting procedural justice</b> Transparency and intelligibility for initial non-key actors hardly existed due to the complicated structure of the action or an increasingly paternalistic approach by the leading actor(s).

approach combining social with physical regeneration. Furthermore, unlike similar actions in the domestic context, this action explicitly aims to engage the local community and contribute to capacity building. The interaction with the local community was mostly in the hands of Málta, which became the leading actor in the implementation of the action, acting as a broker between the local community and the local authority (specifically, the housing department), and ensuring considerable continuity over the years and across different project funding cycles (Jelinek and Virág, 2019). Although embedded in a local development coalition with other stakeholders, including the municipality, case study researchers noted that the local authority willingly handed over all responsibility to the NGO and practically withdrew from the process, which inhibited learning processes and the establishment of common problem definitions, and flexible adaptations of the implementation. As the case study report shows, initial non-key actors such as local community stakeholders could attain only a weak influence on the overall decision-making and implementation.



György-telep has achieved positive results in recent years, measured, for example, in terms of unemployment indicators, housing quality, and the household indebtedness of local residents. This action shows a socially sensitive regeneration approach implemented using a long-term approach and was thus good practice in the national context. The impact is directly related to the NGO's approach to the local community. Those residents signing a cooperation agreement with the NGO received help and long-term intensive care (in what researchers noted was a sometimes paternalistic approach). At the same time, however, in a wider context, the action did not tackle the municipalities' institutional routines that were producing inequalities in the locality. Evictions in other neighbourhoods were therefore carried out, for example. 'While injustice is counteracted with a concentrated effort in one territory as a result of EU funds, the production of injustices is reproduced systematically elsewhere' (Virág and Jelinek, 2019: 19). In its broker role, the NGO has achieved improvements in how local people are treated in the housing department. But these achievements are counteracted in a municipality which is not cooperating on a par with the NGO, but rather sees the NGO

*Table 4.11* Assessed justness of outcomes for the 'Neighbourhood regeneration in György-telep' case

	<i>Assessment Criteria</i>	<i>Outcomes</i>
Justness of outcomes	Redistribution of resources (material/ economic)	<b>Slightly promoting distributive justice (neighbourhood level)</b> – Long-term, socially sensitive regeneration approach achieves positive effects in the neighbourhood according to some indicators (unemployment, housing quality, household indebtedness, etc.). <b>Inhibiting distributive justice (city as a whole)</b> – Improvement in one neighbourhood achieved at the expense of others in the locality.
	Recognition of thus far underrepresented interests (socio/ cultural)	<b>Slightly promoting distributive justice (neighbourhood level)</b> – Smoother cooperation between the local community and the local housing department due to the broker role of Málta. <b>Inhibiting distributive justice (city as a whole)</b> – No change in the municipalities' institutional routines (structural discrimination), no structural reforms.



as a problem solver. Overall, there are therefore few to no intra- or inter-organizational learning processes in the municipality, and structural routines continue, reproducing inequality and discrimination in the city as a whole. While the NGO is striving for a just planning and implementation process in György-telep, the outcomes cannot be assessed as just in a wider municipal context.

The example of György-telep is representative of several actions in our sample that show structural limits with regard to the transformative power of place-based approaches to changing unfair policy routines and procedures (beyond the very local context in which they are implemented). Mechanisms which enable knowledge transfer from bottom-up to higher policy levels, and which provoke changes in the governance system, bridging routines, and practices across levels, would make these local and regional initiatives more effective and would allow spatial justice to be achieved in many places. As Keller and Virág (2021) show in their comparative article about three neighbourhood regeneration approaches, including the case of Rotterdam South discussed earlier, place-based strategies are strongly shaped in their outcomes by how they are integrated with local and higher-level contexts and politics. They depend on the strong commitment of the municipality, as well as the regional and national institutional environment to support place-based projects, and the political will to implement institutional learning processes.

### **Just and unjust processes and outcomes: strengthening communities in the Western Scottish Isles**

Strengthening communities, capacity building, and sustainable economic growth are some of the Scottish Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) economic and community development agency's priority work areas. The Highlands and Islands is a rural and sparsely populated region. It has experienced a long-standing process of selective outmigration of younger and more economically active people, and the strengthening communities work of HIE is designed to tackle this challenge, fostering social and economic development in an integrative approach. HIE's work involves two place-based intervention tools which were chosen as the focus of research: support of community land buyouts and Community Account Management, which is offered to community trusts to support their long-term growth in social and economic terms. In their report, the case study researchers analyse the strengthening communities work of HIE on the Isle of Lewis in the Western Isles since 2007 (Currie et al., 2019).

HIE is only one among several agencies working to support communities in the Western Isles, but it has become a key player in supporting local communities in land buyouts and strengthening community trusts in their long-term strategic development. HIE provides practical and material support to communities aspiring to buy land (according to the Scottish Land



Table 4.12 Assessed justness of processes for the ‘Strengthening communities’ action in the Lewis’ case

	<i>Assessment Criteria</i>	<i>Assessment</i>
Justness of processes	Forms of leadership of identified leading actor(s)	<b>Potentially promoting procedural justice</b> Leadership was acknowledged by other initially involved formal actors, which supported the coordination and implementation of the action.
	Forms of coordination and functioning of collaboration	<b>Neutral with regard to procedural justice</b> Action was coordinated by a newly established network of actors, which developed rather well-functioning forms of collaboration with some room for informality and flexibility.
	Participation of initial non-key actors and their exertion of influence	<b>Slightly inhibiting procedural justice</b> Participation during the action was limited to those with the capacity to engage themselves; otherwise, the initial key actors mainly exerted influence on the action.
	Transparency and intelligibility	<b>Neutral with regard to procedural justice</b> Transparency for initial non-key actors existed, but the action was driven by expert knowledge or the rather fast decisions of leading actor(s) and was therefore difficult to comprehend from the outside.

Reform Acts). It also promotes networking, joint learning processes, and the exchange of knowledge and best practice among community landowners, thus contributing to capacity building. A particularly interesting programme is Community Account Management, which assists community trusts in constructing a long-term strategic vision for their development and a viable pathway to growth. Quite a number of trusts have been assisted and have benefited from this support. While the procedures are transparent and the same rules apply to every community group, not all communities in Lewis have the same abilities, resources, and potential to benefit to the same degree. Unfortunately, it seems in this context that in recent years there has been less flexibility and responsiveness to local and place-based needs in HIE’s work, and a perceived centralization of decision-making and control (Currie et al., 2019: 25).

The researchers noted that the action facilitated local communities’ empowerment, autonomy, and the possession of assets. At the same time, they made it very clear that community land buyouts did not automatically



Table 4.13 Assessed justness of outcomes for the ‘Strengthening communities’ action in Lewis’ case

	Assessment Criteria	Outcomes
Justness of outcomes	Redistribution of resources (material/economic)	<b>Promoting distributive justice</b> – The action directly responds to the wider needs of Lewis. <b>Inhibiting distributive justice</b> – The opportunities of community land buyouts are uneven across Lewis.
	Recognition of thus far underrepresented interests (socio/cultural)	<b>Promoting distributive justice</b> – The action facilitates a process of empowerment, autonomy, and access to assets. – The action has a positive impact on depopulation and service decline.

lead to spatial equality. While the community trusts have opened up new opportunities for some local communities (i.e. employment opportunities, revenues from wind energy), other trusts provide fewer opportunities for their local community, or are struggling to secure an income and raise money. Thus, despite good intentions, the dynamics of recent years entail the risk of community land buyouts potentially increasing spatial inequalities within Lewis. As Currie et al. (2019: 3) point out:

Thus, whilst the community land buyout process is widely celebrated, and rightly so, it’s important to note that its effects have not been evenly distributed between localities; the trusts that have emerged are highly differentiated in terms of their asset base and capacity. Arguably, then, the process of Community Land Reform has in certain respects contributed to new and emerging forms of spatial injustice.

More than 70% of the population in Lewis now lives on community-owned land (Currie et al., 2019: 21). This high percentage of community landowning entails huge potential for community influence on and control of local development issues. However, an equal playing field with the same rules applying to everyone does not necessarily bring equality. Instead, we see potentially increasing inequality between thriving community trusts that can bring revenue to their communities and less well-endowed or successful communities. As an analysis of other cases shows, there is a downside to localized approaches that rely on the specific territorial capital of a community (in terms of their social capital, creativity and engagement of communities, territorial resources, etc.). Localized approaches may favour strong communities and weaken further vulnerable communities if policies do not actively counteract or balance out evolving inequalities.



## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have analysed how and to what extent spatial justice has been achieved (thus far) in several concrete local and regional development actions across Europe. In doing this, we have revisited 22 case studies that have been carried out within the RELOCAL project. Analytically, the concept of spatial justice has been approached from two perspectives by considering procedural and distributive aspects. Furthermore, we have derived four principles from the existing literature ('forms of leadership of identified leading actor(s)', 'forms of coordination and functioning of collaboration', 'participation of initial non-key actors and their exertion of influence', 'transparency and intelligibility') to assess procedural justness, and two for distributive justness (here: 'redistribution of resources', 'recognition of thus far underrepresented interests'). We suggest that these six principles covering the two main dimensions of spatial justice can also be used for other types of assessment, thus offering an alternative approach to evaluating whether a specific action, project, or intervention has contributed to greater spatial justice. Our in-depth analysis of five exemplary cases reveals different types of assessment, and they have therefore been assigned to different groups (see Table 4.3). This is an important finding, because just outcomes are not necessarily based on just processes in local development actions. Similarly, unjust outcomes can appear even though they are based on a just process.

The aforementioned six principles for assessing spatial justice within local and regional development actions have enabled us to identify specific promoters and inhibitors of procedural or distributive justice, respectively. These promoters and inhibitors offer practical lessons and may specifically inform the policymakers, planning professionals, and especially the lead actors responsible for facilitating and implementing similar local and regional development actions.

The Görlitz case study reveals a case that was assessed as indicating several promoters for just processes and outcomes. The high level of intelligibility and transparency for (initial) non-key actors, which helped them become engaged with the action and exert influence, even on material investments, should be highlighted here. As such, the case aptly demonstrates how a just process can underpin outcomes that are also perceived as just. The case of the Alexander Innovation Zone shows how the prevailing political and institutional environment limits the collaborative spirit among different types of actor. The top-down character of the action and its overly bureaucratic structure have inhibited any form of accepted leadership, trust, strategy formation, and ultimately the empowerment of relevant local stakeholders. In addition, this case showcases how the perceived procedural unjustness of an action hampers any noticeable positive outcomes with regard to achieving distributive justice. The case of Rotterdam South on Course shows that despite some weaknesses regarding procedural justness, the outcomes of the action have been assessed as rather just. What is notable about this case is that although the type of somewhat centralized and formalized leadership



was largely acknowledged, and has shown some robustness over time, it has at the same time caused the action to appear somewhat non-transparent and incomprehensible to those with restricted capacities to voice their interests and thus become engaged with the various projects facilitated by the action. This has considerably hampered the collaborative culture of the action and limited its scope across the various local communities within the district. Yet the action has delivered several distributive improvements in the district that have also been recognized by various social groups.

The case of neighbourhood regeneration in György-telep located in the city of Pécs is one that illustrates some elements of fairly just processes, though with inhibiting factors, which have nevertheless generated unjust outcomes overall. The key lesson from this case is that although it shows a socially sensitive regeneration approach with an NGO as an acknowledged leading actor, the action is caught in a wider structural context with resisting institutional routines that continue to reproduce inequalities in the locality. As such, the case is an example of actions that have good intentions in terms of contributing to distributive justice but have failed to do so due to the resistance of the prevailing local and higher-level institutional contexts and politics, meaning the action at hand cannot unlock its full potential. The case of strengthening communities in the Western Isles in Scotland is representative of other cases in its multifarious and ambivalent tendencies, which makes it difficult to clearly classify the case. On the one hand, and thanks to the Scottish Land Reform Acts, this case illustrates an action enabling local communities to gain control of and access to land and resources. On the other, recent years have seen an increasing emphasis on the economic self-reliance of community trusts by the leading actor, HIE, which entails a risk of widening intraregional inequality across differently endowed local communities.

Naturally, the grouping of the cases entails several generalizations. Specifically, the last three mentioned groups show promoters and inhibitors with regard to both procedural and distributive (in)justice. As such, they do not always illustrate clear distinctive tendencies. We therefore argue that it is of the utmost importance for scholarly work, but also for those working in the practice, design, launch, facilitation, and implementation of local and regional development actions, to take the many facets of the two main dimensions of spatial justice discussed here into consideration. This implies a need for a holistic approach, because several potential traps need attention and can hold back the potential added value of an action that is intended to contribute to greater spatial justice.

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## 5 Stigmatization and cultural foundations of spatial injustice

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### Introduction

Our study addresses the subject of spatial (in)justice from the perspective of several analytical approaches that characterized the RELOCAL research project. Following Ed Soja's (2011a, 2011b) call to embrace a critical spatial and historical-temporal perspective in conceptualizing injustice, we are interested in both the unequal territorial distribution of resources and the processes that cause and perpetuate unjust geographies. In particular, we address Soja's perspective regarding place-specific manifestations of uneven development and underdevelopment. Moreover, by making use of the empirical material that is available as part of our collaborative research (i.e. the case studies and the national and comparative reports), our conceptual understanding of spatial injustice enlarges the basic RELOCAL theoretical frame in three directions: (1) towards addressing uneven development and spatial fix as endemic features of capitalism (Harvey, 2001, 2005; Smith, 2006, 2010; Jessop, 2001); (2) interrogating the role of the state and neoliberal governance in the support of capital accumulation regimes (Jessop, 1997, 2002; Hubbard and Hall, 1998; Sager, 2011); (3) interrogating the role of cultural hegemony in the formation and maintenance of the social order (e.g. as suggested by Gramsci, 1971), and especially the role of territorial stigmatization in (re)producing spatial unevenness (Wacquant, 2007, 2014; Kallin and Slater, 2014; Slater, 2015; Horgan, 2018).

The principal question addressed here concerns stigmatization as part of a larger cultural/ideological apparatus, its material effects, and its role in (re)producing territorial unevenness. Chapters 4 and 8 of this volume provide an overview of the project's case study methodology, as well as information regarding the location and nature of the specific cases of place-based action that were investigated. Starting with the clustering that resulted from a cross-comparative analysis of country perspectives on spatial injustice,<sup>1</sup> we selected 12 out of the 33 case studies conducted in 2018 and 2019 for our purposes. In particular, we focused on the cluster of cases where stigmatization was addressed as part of combating spatial injustice. This work concerned cases in Spain, Finland, Hungary, France, the Netherlands, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Romania.<sup>2</sup>



The first section of our chapter addresses unequal territorial development across the selected RELOCAL countries as reflected in Eurostat data regarding poverty, inequalities, and housing deprivations, but also in government spending on their reduction. We interpret these manifestations of social injustice as characteristics of uneven territorial development, which is in turn an endemic feature of capitalism. In the second section, using the RELOCAL reports that made a comparative analysis of the case studies from a national perspective,<sup>3</sup> we highlight the role of the state, and in particular of neoliberal governance in the (re)production of territorial inequalities within the national and local contexts of the addressed actions, tackling stigmatization and other phenomena to reduce spatial injustice. In the chapter's third section, we make a comparative analysis of the selected case studies by answering two sets of questions regarding territorial stigmatization: (1) What and who was stigmatized in the particular local contexts, and what kind of stigma(s) were attached to them? (2) Who were the stakeholders participating in the actions tackling stigmatization, and how did they understand stigmatization and explain its enduring character? In closing our chapter, we provide a synthesis of our conceptual framework and its contribution to the analysis of spatial (in)justice. The conclusion synthesizes the contribution of our analysis to the theoretical/conceptual approach adopted by the RELOCAL research. We emphasize the flux of mutual determinations between the capital accumulation regime, neoliberal governance and policymaking, and (territorial) stigmatization. Moreover, we highlight some trans-local patterns and trends of stigmatization, as well as factors which contribute to its temporal endurance as simultaneously a spatial and temporal, and material and symbolic, process.

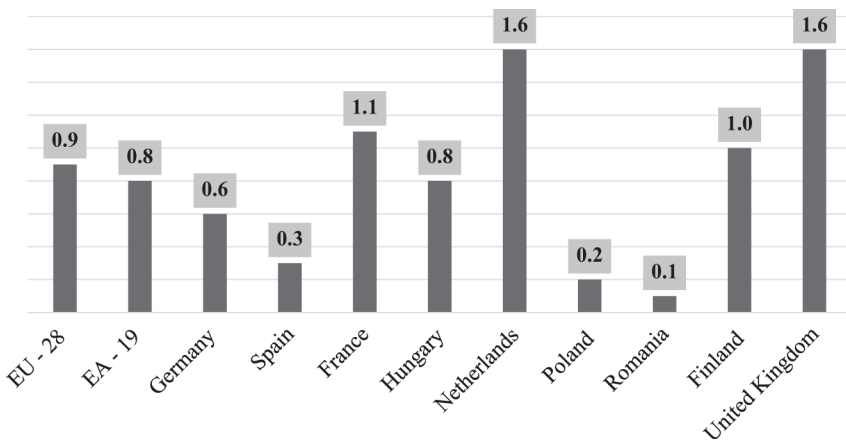
### **Uneven territorial development and welfare state retrenchment**

The overall subject of this volume is the pervasive problem of uneven development and spatial inequality, and questions that emerge as to how spatial (in)justice can be understood and elaborated as a policy issue. The debate on European cohesion has been marked by a robust academic and policy research that has investigated persistent and often increasing patterns of unequal territorial development. In parallel with the economic transformations of recent decades, processes of welfare state retrenchment have resulted in increasing levels of poverty that have also affected certain groups such as single-adult and single-parent households more than others (Alm et al., 2020). In their study, Iammarino et al. (2019) confirm a more general trend to a greater spatial inequality, and the failure of market processes and policies to create conditions for greater prosperity and opportunity. Without more just redistributive practices the danger of polarization within European societies – and more globally between countries – will certainly increase, and with it the danger of social and political destabilization.



This situation is even more precarious for Europe's more 'peripheral' economies. As Petmesidou and Guillén (2014) argue, the effects of the 2008–2011 economic crisis were particularly brutal for southern European countries, raising questions as to the sustainability of their welfare regimes. The EU's 'post-socialist' member states were generally not better off, given the low fiscal capacity of their government sectors and large shadow economies (Aidukaite, 2010). Figures 5.1 and 5.2 show that in countries where poverty, income inequalities, and housing deprivation are high, state investment in social protection, social inclusion, and housing tends to be lower. While such data require contextual interpretation, they do indicate a divide between old and new member states, particularly in terms of housing expenditure. Eventually, this divergence is not only manifested spatially but reinforced by territorial unevenness, which is deepening as capital and expertise freely move towards areas promising more profit.

We cannot delve more deeply into the local-level consequences of these complex issues, given a lack of statistical information for the areas where initiatives addressing spatial injustice were conducted. As the RELOCAL report on the multi-scalar patterns of spatial inequalities showed,<sup>4</sup> from the large pool of the targeted countries only Sweden, the Netherlands, Finland, and the United Kingdom had data measuring spatial inequality at multiple geographical scales (Janssen and van Ham, 2018). Regardless of the scale at which they are displayed, the statistical data used reveal territorial inequalities within the EU in poverty, inequalities, and housing deprivation, as well as government spending to reduce them. The RELOCAL national reports<sup>5</sup> highlight that rising unemployment rates, persisting long-term unemployment, a weak



*Figure 5.1* Percentage of government expenditure addressing social exclusion for selected countries, 2018

Source: Eurostat



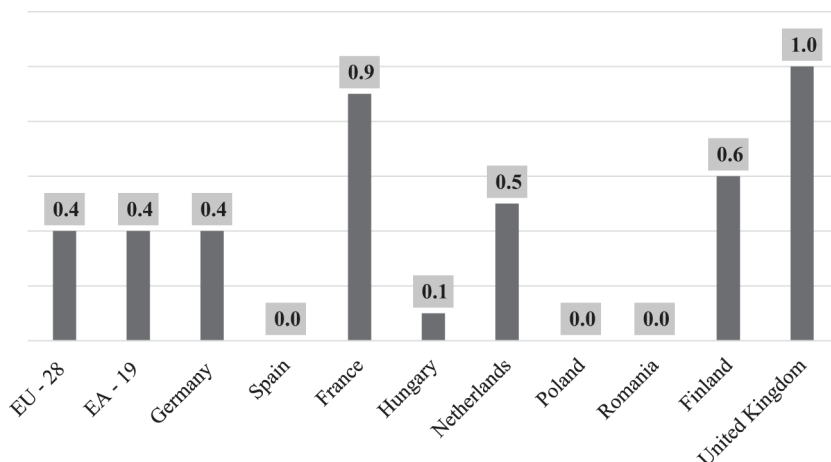


Figure 5.2 Percentage of government expenditure on housing for selected countries, 2018

Source: Eurostat

economic infrastructure, low incomes, and shrinking cities and rural areas as a result of de-industrialization and youth outmigration are issues in all the EU member states where our research was conducted. Concerning city-level territorial disparities, the Report on Multiscalar Patterns of Inequalities<sup>6</sup> – comparing the patterns of spatial inequality at the lowest spatial scale across Sweden, Finland, and the Netherlands – saw the highest level of segregation in Finland and the lowest in the Netherlands, and considered that a possible explanation for this was the large social housing sector in the Netherlands, with social housing available in a large proportion of neighbourhoods.

What is lacking is effective territorial development policies that might equalize the disparities driven by the logic of capital accumulation, resulting from the concentration of capital and productivity in certain core areas of the EU. We therefore apply an interpretation of this situation through the prism of neoliberal governance. Indeed, it should be mentioned that the persistence of unevenness across the EU member states in what, despite the cohesion policy, can be termed a competition union, may be explained by the spatial fix underlying the historical process of *EU-fication*, alongside the structural tension between the economic and social policies practised by the European Union (see Vincze, 2021).

### Varieties of neoliberal governance across countries

The sources for the analysis from this section are the RELOCAL reports that conducted a comparative investigation of the case studies from a national perspective.<sup>7</sup> Based on them, we highlight in what follows the role of the



state, and in particular of neoliberal governance in the (re)production of territorial inequalities. These reports reveal that despite the embeddedness of neoliberal governance in different country-specific types of administrative-territorial organization, similar patterns of in-country inequalities manifested in space are reproduced. Because our analysis focuses on stigmatization, we selected those countries where case studies were conducted to tackle stigmatization in reducing spatial injustice. From the western and northern core European countries we included Germany, France, and the Netherlands (the creators of the first European economic community), the United Kingdom (which acceded in 1973), and Finland (a latecomer core country, acceding in 1995); and from the southern and eastern peripheries, Spain (acceding in the 1980s), Hungary (acceding in 2004), and Romania (a latecomer member state, acceding in 2007). Of these, France, the Netherlands, Finland, Hungary, and Romania are defined as unitary states undergoing a recent process of decentralization, while Germany, the United Kingdom, and Spain display a longer history of decentralized administrative-territorial governance.

As the EU country with the best economic indicators and the largest number of multinationals conquering the economies of the European periphery, federal Germany, sustaining a state-based welfare regime or social state, even if weaker than in previous decades, displays disparities among its western and eastern, and northern and southern territories. The RELOCAL case studies reveal how its remote rural areas seek innovative connections with the world (through digitalization), and how youth from cities undergoing depopulation attempt to reinvent local community life through cultural events. The authors of the National Report<sup>8</sup> consider – in conditions in which a shift of responsibilities to the local level has recently been observed – that the German social state should not be eroded and should remain accountable for structural inequalities and territorial disparities. Besides, while appreciating what a social city might do, they consider that it would be good to integrate successful civil initiatives in higher-level structures. Nevertheless, it would also be necessary for dispersed grassroots projects to be coordinated by an overarching public administration structure.

In the recent decades of neoliberalism, the centralized republic of France has undergone successive waves of decentralization. Yet the French ideal of equality has not disappeared from the public sphere but has seen several transformations. The century-old principle of *l'égalité des territoires*, which recognized the value of each space due to their specific contribution to the economy as a whole, has been transformed in the conditions of decentralization and de-industrialization into the idea of the competitive regulation of territorial cooperation. The new role of the state in this context is to launch nationally led thematic initiatives to support local development and provide related financial schemes. The analysed French cases displayed top-down and bottom-up initiatives. One was more focused on improving procedural justice in the metropolitan government; the other implemented a housing



project in a severely declining region. The authors of the National Report<sup>9</sup> ask if greater autonomy assures greater spatial justice. They conclude that in conditions in which the deepened territorial inequalities require committed government redistributive measures, and the real access of those in need to EU regional policy tools and resources is reduced, the French state should plan and coordinate more top-down appropriate measures, even if bottom-up case-sensitive local projects should also continue to be supported from the public budget.

Centralized government in the United Kingdom began to undergo devolution in the 1970s, so the analysed RELOCAL cases in Scotland and England were already affected by the particularities of the different national contexts. Nevertheless, after the 2008–2009 crisis, the central government of the United Kingdom disbanded the regional levels of government and promoted the distribution of EU funds to initiatives with a strong business focus. The authors of the National Report<sup>10</sup> note that beyond these changing trends it was the neoliberal welfare regime and austerity-led reduction in the public sector that created a huge need in both territories to tackle – via project-based interventions – structural spatial problems. The analysed English local action therefore aimed to halt homelessness in conditions of high rents, insecure tenancies, and insufficient social housing, while the Scottish initiative created a community land trust to empower low-income people from disadvantaged areas. In the relatively small Netherlands<sup>11</sup> the switch to decentralization that started around 2015 resulted among others changes in a shift from the former urban restructuring policy, which was characterized by a top-down national policy framework and hundreds of millions of euros of investment capital from housing associations and other actors. With the significant budget cuts and reforms in policies regarding youth and elderly care, education, and employment, in the domain of housing and urban regeneration, this change also meant that local governments turned more to ‘the market’ for housing construction and area upgrading. The actions studied by RELOCAL case studies observed that in both Rotterdam and Groningen the stakeholders currently identified a set of spatial injustice-related problems that were of a magnitude that local policies and resources alone were deemed insufficient to address. Consequently, both localities are now the target area of a ‘national programme’.

In the RELOCAL project, Sweden and Finland<sup>12</sup> represent society-based/social democratic welfare regimes. Nevertheless, the financial crisis in the late 1980s saw the introduction of several neoliberal policies from the beginning of the 1990s. In the last three decades, they have therefore seen the growth of large inequalities. The Accession Treaty for Sweden and Finland to join the EU in 1995 included a special provision to promote the development and structural adjustment for Northern Sparsely Populated Areas. One of the Finnish case studies that also had an anti-stigmatization component was a community-led development initiative implemented in the city of Kotka.



Its beneficiaries were the young, unemployed, and immigrants, as well as other disadvantaged groups facing issues such as high levels of morbidity, substance abuse, and mental health problems. The Kotka case represents the larger EU-inspired recent trend of place-based strategies for local development, and despite its many empowering effects, it also displays the limits of the local level in addressing spatial injustice, because both the problems they seek to address and the actions themselves are governed by multiple levels.

Since 1978 Spain has been divided into seventeen autonomous communities and two autonomous cities as a way of recognizing the right to self-government of the 'nationalities and regions'. The autonomous communities have wide legislative and executive autonomy which is enacted through their parliaments and regional governments. The authors of the National Report<sup>13</sup> observe that urban growth in Spain between 1960 and 1975 created several disadvantaged and under-urbanized neighbourhoods, with poor communications with the rest of the locality, and suffering from an infrastructure deficit and socio-spatial segregation. In time, many of these neighbourhoods became increasingly abandoned and marginalized, and these disadvantages were only partly overcome by people's struggle to improve their conditions. After 1990 the local administrations, pressurized by civil society, began to improve infrastructure and services in mostly declining rural areas to increase the opportunities for regional development. Nevertheless, what has subsequently happened seems insufficient, and the targeted rural areas' populations continue to decrease each year, which in turn triggers an increase of territorial inequalities across all the autonomous communities. Experts agree that one of the most important policy domains to focus on in urban areas should be housing, because difficult access to housing is one of the key factors leading to the increase of social inequality in today's Spain. Housing is also the target of civil society organizations. The 'Sindicat de Llogaters' in Barcelona fights for fair rents in the city; 'Santa Coloma – Renovem els barris' is a project to improve housing stock in a street in the Metropolitan Region of Barcelona; 'Habitatges en cessió d'ús' is a project through which the Barcelona City Council facilitates access to land to be used for housing cooperatives; and 'Fundació Hàbitat 3' is a private foundation that manages housing to support social inclusion in Barcelona.

Following the fall of state socialism in Hungary,<sup>14</sup> the 1990s were characterized by an emphasis on local democracy and the elimination of central state control in local affairs, while the funding allocated for the provision of public services did not cover the real costs of their maintenance. In parallel with this, the emergence of the market economy brought about new patterns of spatial inequalities that have been characterized by growing territorial disparities triggered by a structural crisis (the cessation of mining, decline of light and heavy industry, and dissolution of large-scale cooperative farms). The early decentralization trend was followed by a recentralization process that began in the early 2000s. With regard to territorial policies, a Government Decree from 2007 launched the 'Most Disadvantaged Micro-Regions'



programme, which targeted the development of these extremely deprived territories. In 2010 the conservative/right-wing government began intensive centralization in public policymaking by pulling administrative and executive functions away from local government in all policy areas. By 2012–2013 local government reform was especially devastating for peripheral/marginalized settlements and regions, characterized by the heavy outward migration of their competent professional elite. The two actions analysed by RELOCAL in Hungary that targeted stigmatization were implemented from 2007 under these changing national contexts, focusing on segregated areas suffering from deep poverty.

The actions studied by RELOCAL in Romania have taken place in the context of the country's major transformation in the last three decades, that is, the transformation of actually existing socialism into neoliberal capitalism, which have aggravated previous manifestations of unfairness and created new ones. The processes of privatization, marketization, the formation of the banking sector, and the reduction of social expenditure were conditions for Romania's accession to the European Union and/or for gaining loans from international financial organizations. The author of the National Report<sup>15</sup> observes that Romania's competitive advantage on the stage of global capitalism is the low cost of its labour force, its market for imported products, and as a territory open to foreign capital investment. Regarding the territorial distribution of several socioeconomic problems, statistical data show that Romania entered the 'transition' with a relatively low level of regional disparity compared with other new member states, but that these disparities have rapidly increased. Territorial planning aims to support the dominant developmental trends in the country, sustaining the model of polycentric development and the agglomeration of economic activities in a few big cities. In this system, the 'magnet cities' compete to attract capital and demonstrate their entrepreneurial capacities. The country's administrative-territorial organization remained unchanged after 1990 in the sense that the localities and the counties continue to be the units where decisions are taken by the elected deliberative bodies, but the whole system of public administration underwent a process of decentralization. However, new forms of territorial governance that lack administrative/political attributes have been formed to absorb EU funds. The four case studies conducted in Romania highlight several manifestations of spatial injustice such as the persistent residential segregation of the Roma, informal housing, declining rural areas in former mining territories, and the underdevelopment of some urban areas in the capital.

The RELOCAL case study reports reveal that government representatives, whether national, regional, or local, did not consider using the concept of spatial injustice to uncover inequalities within their territories, but they mostly preferred to use the terms disparities or differences. Nevertheless, as the investigations revealed, people from the deprived or underdeveloped territories and grassroots-action stakeholders shared a strong sense of injustice,



expressed in a sense of being left behind by their cities, states, and/or by Europe.

Besides, the interviewed representatives of governing stakeholders expressed an official optimism about the great potential of EU funding to tackle this phenomenon. Nevertheless, in all the cases covered earlier, the means of project-based interventions proved too weak in the face of the historically formed socioeconomic inequalities, accumulated over time in particular territories, that is, in spaces where economies and people have suffered most from the economic transformations of the last five decades of neoliberal capitalism. The actions (projects, strategies, programmes) tackling manifestations of spatial injustice could therefore make available more resources to more people during their lifetime (slightly compensating the deficits created as a result of the collapsing government redistribution system, economic congestion, and the lack of proper incomes); and/or could create in the actions' participants a sense of increased procedural justice in immediate community life, however ephemeral and formal this was in many cases. Nevertheless, they could not induce structural changes in either form of justice.

### **Making and unmaking stigmatization in local contexts**

In this section, we make a comparative analysis of how stigmatization was made and unmade in the local contexts analysed by the RELOCAL case studies. We understand stigma as a contextual product that marks the negative differentiation of an entity (country, city, neighbourhood, people) from the perception of the mainstream's 'normality' in society at large. This differentiation is not a simple semantic act, but a practice of classification and hierarchization with severe material effects. In what follows, starting from the already listed RELOCAL case studies, we describe comparatively what/who is stigmatized in different contexts, and how the stigmas are defined.

#### *What/who is stigmatized?*

By scanning the selected RELOCAL case studies, we could observe a recurrence of particular groups that were affected by spatial injustice and its associated stigmatization. Although they were constituted in different local contexts via specific economic processes, social relations, and institutional/policy arrangements, one may use the following typology to highlight their occurrence across localities:

- a) Former working class. Our research covered cases of miners who had lost their jobs due to the decline of the mining industry. Nevertheless, the unemployed from other branches of bankrupt industries also belong to this category of the stigmatized (FR 17, HU 14, RO 26).
- b) Immigrants. Some of the RELOCAL cases described how, on arrival in the host country, immigrants lacked good material and social capital, and



- ended up living in deprived areas with low living costs (ES 8, ES 9, FI 12, NL 20, UK 32). They often failed to leave these neighbourhoods, lacking access to the resources of the majority/native population.
- c) Historically stigmatized minorities. The RELOCAL research displayed many examples of impoverished Roma being settled in segregated communities as a result of their multiple dislocations and their rejection by the majority society. They often lived on the outskirts of localities (RO 25, RO 27, ES 9, HU 13, HU 14) in informal and infrastructurally underdeveloped settlements. Moreover, the stigmatization of the Roma has a long history, linked to the production and maintenance of their inferior status, marginalization, and violations of their rights (Lucassen et al., 2008).
  - d) Young people with a low level of school education. Very often they are the second or third generation of the inhabitants of deprived areas whose material conditions and stigmatization are great obstacles to any socio-spatial mobility. Trapped in the vicious circle of such socioeconomic contexts, people are subjected to intergenerationally reproduced marginalization (ES 8, FI 12, DE 2, UK 31, RO 25, RO 27). Nevertheless, we could observe that many actions studied by the RELOCAL research targeted youth, because they were considered a potential key in the process of disrupting marginalization and stigmatization at the level of the whole community to which they belonged.
  - e) Specific vulnerable groups (such as drug users). The RELOCAL case studies focused less on this category (except UK 32, ES 8, FI 12), but wherever they were subjected to stigmatization it was observed that such practices were ways people attempted to escape from their severely depressing realities. Yet even if drugs are widespread across social groups and classes, their most negative association is with deprived areas.

### *How are stigmas defined?*

The case studies illustrate that injustice was recreated in time and space at local levels, as well as the ways in which the inhabitants affected by it were associated with stigmas. In their turn, the latter were defined by some negative characteristics associated with the places where people lived, their ethnicity, social background, jobs, and other elements that placed them in particular positions in the overall local socioeconomic and spatial structure. Interviews revealed that regardless of the specificity of the local contexts, some terms associated with the categories described in the previous section of our analysis or their places of living occurred repeatedly: 'different'; 'underdeveloped'; 'negative reputation'; 'behavioural difficulties'; 'poor population'; 'disadvantaged'; 'low income'; 'uneducated'; 'poor conditions'; 'survival mode'; 'sewage drain'; 'uneducated'; 'peripheral'; 'penal'.

Below we describe a list of utterances used by the majority society and public authorities to identify stigmatized spaces and inhabitants, which,



beyond naming and symbolic inferiorization, multiplied the effects of their effective marginalization as a material process.

- a) Names with negative connotations. Informal names were especially used to identify the neighbourhoods where the Roma lived. The interviews showed that these names were used by outsiders as mockery. The term ‘Gypsy’ was generally used (RO 25, RO 26) to suggest that there was something especially bad about the area. These informal names not only illustrated how negative the perception of such areas and their residents was, but also acted as a discursive means to exclude them from what was considered ‘normal’ by the majority of society (HU 13, HU 14).
- b) Neighbourhoods’ bad reputation. Outsiders often projected a negative image onto deprived areas, thereby showing that they considered them dangerous and frightening. The social distance created by several material factors thus became even stronger: such territories became infamous due to their bad reputation as places ‘respectable others’ would/should never want to visit.
- c) Poverty as a personal failure. Regardless of the economic situation of the country where the case studies were conducted, poverty occurred everywhere and was stigmatized. The interviews revealed that the outsider better-offs, when speaking about ‘their’ poverty versus ‘our’ wellbeing, were unconcerned with the structural causes of this inequality, but mostly with the poor’s responsibility for becoming poor. Such stigmatization of the victim happened in relation to the residents of former mining areas (FR 17, HU 14), the inhabitants of scattered rural localities (UK 31), the homeless population in big cities (UK 32), Roma’s long history of marginalization (ES 9, RO 25, RO 26, HU 13, HU 14), and immigrants from non-EU countries (FI 12, ES 8, NL 20).
- d) Infrastructural underdevelopment. The stigmatized areas described by the RELOCAL research are indeed characterized by poor housing conditions, muddy streets, or a lack of water and light, all of which have an enduring effect on people’s means of overcoming their socioeconomic marginalization. From our perspective, the problem is that outsiders easily conclude that this is how ‘these people’ like living; that it is their natural state of existence. Moreover, when such conditions are perpetuated, despite some projects implemented in the respective areas, mainstream society is unfortunately ready to decide that there is nothing that can be done in such situations, or that any further attempt at improvement is a waste of money.
- e) Presence of vulnerable groups. Stigmatized neighbourhoods are often identified and naturalized as areas where inhabitants ‘recognized’ as vulnerable persons/groups make a living, including immigrants, ethnic minorities, the unemployed, people with disabilities, and the homeless. People with divergent histories of spatial marginalization are therefore melded



into a universal category and perceived through its associated stereotypes. Stigmatization serves to naturalize people's socioeconomic conditions. Consequently, 'vulnerability' becomes a supposedly biological or cultural weakness of people forced into situations of material and housing deprivation.

- f) Low level of school education. In cases when the intergenerational educational capital remains very low, people's opportunities for socio-spatial mobility are close to zero. In this context, the destructive effect of stigmatization consists of sustaining the argument that 'these people' from 'these territories' do not want to be educated or fail to invest in their children's education. As a result, education-related stigmas hide how spatial marginalization and economic deprivation are on the one hand responsible for the perpetuation of unequal access to quality school education and on the other, the meritocratic and segregated school system reproduces socio-spatial inequalities. The low educational level label is often attached to immigrants because they do not speak the language of the host state (at least in the early stages), and the system of recognition of school educational level is a bureaucratic maze which they lack the tools to negotiate.
- g) High rates of criminality. The issue of how correlation is built between stigmatized neighbourhoods and a higher rate of illicit acts is mentioned in many RELOCAL case studies. This process is characterized by stereotypes and sustains the creation and perpetuation of the further stigma associated with territories and people while stigmatizing stereotypes become self-justifying mechanisms not only for marginalization but for maintaining people in places under policing surveillance.

### **Unmaking stigmatization**

The RELOCAL case studies illustrate a series of practices that the stakeholders involved in the analysed actions have employed to reduce spatial injustice and/or the inequalities between the selected communities/neighbourhoods/social categories and the remaining localities. Whether a series of practices has been developed to attempt to achieve an improvement in the quality of housing (RO 25, RO 27, UK 32, ES 8, ES 9), the economic development of the area (UK 31, FR 17, NL 20, FI 20), or to invest in human capital (HU 13, HU 14), these practices targeted this larger aim. As already noted, in several cases reducing stigmatization was an organic part of the actions. One can therefore conclude that stigmatization is very much a structural factor of spatial injustice and should be studied as such beyond its local manifestations. In what follows, we will direct attention to the stakeholders of the studied actions that aimed, among others, to unmake stigmatization, and in the further section, we will describe how they explained its enduring character or the difficulties of unmaking it.



*Involvement of institutional stakeholders*

The RELOCAL cases displayed a myriad of institutional arrangements which were created and mobilized in the localities to address spatial injustice, including stigmatization. Enduring local economic, social, administrative, political, policy, civic, cultural processes, and vested interests enabled the formation of different partnerships established with this aim in public administration and other public institutions, non-governmental organizations, and informal associations. However, the form and content of the local actions were shaped not only by such local constellations and their histories but also by international donors and other involved international actors. Their principles – localism, community development, and participation – invented in the context of larger political decisions regarding decentralization, the withdrawal of the state from its social roles, or entrepreneurial governance, became a norm of project-based initiatives across borders.

In many RELOCAL cases, institutions of public administration were (among) the initiators and/or the main implementers of the local actions assuming accountability for the projects. These include municipalities (in Spain/Premià de Dalt and Premià de Mar; in the Netherlands/Rotterdam; or even central government ministries in the Netherlands). However, in other cases, these institutions were partners in projects initiated by non-governmental agencies, as in Romania (Codlea) or Hungary (Pécs, Encs). Nevertheless, in several other cases, the initiator and implementer stakeholders were bottom-up, locally well-embedded civic actors, self-organized around critical local issues (as in France/Pas de Calais; Germany/Görlitz; Finland/Kotka) or private organizations with a public utility formed precisely with the goal of absorbing EU or other types of funds (as in Cluj in Romania). However, one should note that across all the cases partnerships between public and private structures were established, while non-governmental actors usually focused on unmaking stigmatization via cultural programmes or other strategies for constructing large solidarities around the aim of spatial justice.

As a general challenge, all the actions had to address the fact that the stigmatization of people and places could not be disentangled from material and spatially relevant forms of injustice. The analysed cases therefore demonstrated that local forms of spatial injustice should also be tackled as temporal/historical processes that were deeply embedded in the larger political decisions, policy regimes, and institutional arrangements that affect (under) development.

*The difficulties of unmaking stigmatization*

The Spanish cases reveal a paradox consisting of the *long-durée* character of the interventions in deprived neighbourhoods: theoretically, they could have been a good response to their historical formation and perpetuation, but in reality, long-term planning and implementation reproduced the stigma attached to them. Furthermore, reference to history might become an alibi



or excuse for not achieving substantial change in the material condition and social status of such vicinities. Besides, another good intention for tackling a complex problem – the involvement of stakeholders from different levels – can create confusion and a lack of a common understanding of precisely what and who the development strategies and beneficiaries are, and the precise role of the inhabitants.

The Rotterdam case led to the conclusion that the enduring character of stigmatization was determined by an interconnected mix of factors. Among them, the direct formal representation of the affected vulnerable groups was insufficiently granted in the network implementing the project; the ethnic diversity of the population played scarcely any role in the stakeholders' approach; many people were in survival mode, inhibiting participation; and it was difficult to speak of a single 'local community' in Rotterdam South. In Kotka (Finland) even if the idea of Community Led Local Development also attracted the attention of policy fields other than rural development, the general marginalization and implicit stigmatization persisted. The limits that could be considered determinative factors of this reality were the inconsistency between governance levels, the exclusion of part of the community from the projects' benefits, and the lack of visibility of anti-marginalization actions.

The Romanian Pata Cluj project exemplifies how the historical existence of a deprived and segregated housing area in the proximity of a landfill is used by the project implementers to justify the perpetuation of the problem without self-critically assuming what they have done wrong, or the kind of structural factors that hinder project-based interventions in the absence of political and financial commitments from City Hall. The Mălin action from Codlea, Romania, implemented to legalize informal homes, had a success rate of only 10%. The responsibility for this failure was placed on people who had been living in the city's informal Roma settlement for decades, not on the complex institutional and policy frames that created and maintained this situation. Believing it had done everything possible, City Hall discredited the people and reinforced the stigma associated with them by affirming that they were not and could not be transformed into 'accountable citizens'.

The two Hungarian cases revealed that despite the temporary benefits of the desegregation and anti-poverty projects, the real accessibility of stigmatized groups to local resources remained far from a priority in local development strategies. However, such a local failure was not necessarily the failure of the actions themselves, but of the whole post-socialist institutional and policy arrangement that not only tolerates socioeconomic inequalities but also contributes directly or indirectly to their (re)production. Among other reasons, this happens through the delegitimization of public planning as part of the rejected socialist legacy, and through the corporatization of the local authorities and various business–NGO project coalitions. A project dedicated to the economic revival of a former mining basin in France was implemented



by an association with no decision-making competence, acting as a people's forum that focused on procedural justice. Among the main inhibiting factors maintaining stigmatization were therefore the following: a disregard for the social dimensions of injustice; a lack of sufficient attention to the integration of civil society in decision-making; an absence of expert knowledge on their territory; or a failure to provide financial support.

In the United Kingdom, both actions, one in a rural, the other in an urban, context, targeted peripheries and stigmatization, the latter acting as a tool for the reproduction of the former in a larger policy context known for its welfare cuts. Ultimately, the actions could not properly involve disadvantaged rural groups. They failed to reach many suffering from urban homelessness, because they were much more connected with ministerial agendas than local efforts for improving social justice.

## Conclusion

The major question of our comparative study concerned the role stigmatization played in the (re)production of territorial unevenness or the role of territorial stigmatization in the persistence of socioeconomic inequalities. We proposed interpreting these processes in the context of the governance and policy changes across all the EU member states since the 1970s. Like the findings of Kallin and Slater (2014), we observed that the RELOCAL cases were 'small stories' not only about stigmatization but also about policymaking. They happened in different geographical locations, yet all were associated with state policies. They resulted from governments' action or inaction in domains such as housing and territorial development, while their major preoccupation was privatizing and deregulating housing, and decentralizing responsibilities in these domains.

The timing of such evolutions has overlapped with the changing capital accumulation regime from an industrial/productive/national to a post-industrial/financial/globalized one, and with an increase in poverty, inequality, and housing deprivation in European societies. These economic trends resulted from neoliberal governance, which withdrew the state from its social roles and facilitated the privatization of the urban space, marginalizing those who could not afford the increased prices of market-oriented competitive cities. Moreover, to present their localities as sites of success, decision-makers used several justification mechanisms to naturalize the (unjust) urban order created with their active participation. These mechanisms included stigmatization, a process of subjectivation through which territories and/or people disadvantaged by market-oriented urban development were associated with natural or culturally inferior qualities.

We can conclude that stigmatization functions as an instrument of the cultural formation of spatial injustice that is fully embedded in material processes, both as a result of and as a condition for their perpetuation.



In Figure 5.3 we indicate the workings of a complex flow of mutual determinations between the larger accumulation regime, governance, policies, and stigmatization.

Another central question of our chapter was whether, regardless of the RELOCAL country territory involved, processes of stigmatization displayed some general or trans-local patterns and trends. Generally speaking, the examples we have discussed demonstrate that stigma and socio-spatial injustice, as well as efforts to destigmatize and foster greater fairness and justice, were interlinked in each case in multiple ways. This phenomenon is summarized in Figure 5.4.

Regardless of the local context, our cases also showed that the endurance of stigmatization is stronger when it is associated with both territories/geographies and particular groups of people. In such instances, the justification of inequalities/injustices through stigmatization makes use of both the supposedly natural features of the physical space and the allegedly biological roots of people’s cultural practices.

Our conclusion also supports Horgan’s (2020: 9) affirmation that ‘housing stigmatization may well be a global phenomenon, . . . but it is unevenly applied and varies contextually’. The case studies discussed in our article illustrate the diversity of situations displayed in various geographical, historical, and sociocultural contexts. Beyond such differences, all the cases show similar trends. Here we mention a few. Stigmatization involves generalizations practised in two interconnected steps: imagining collective identities as

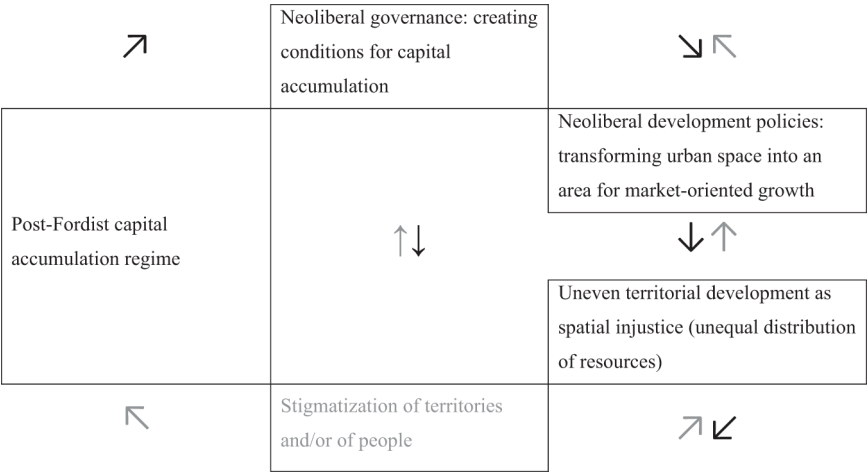
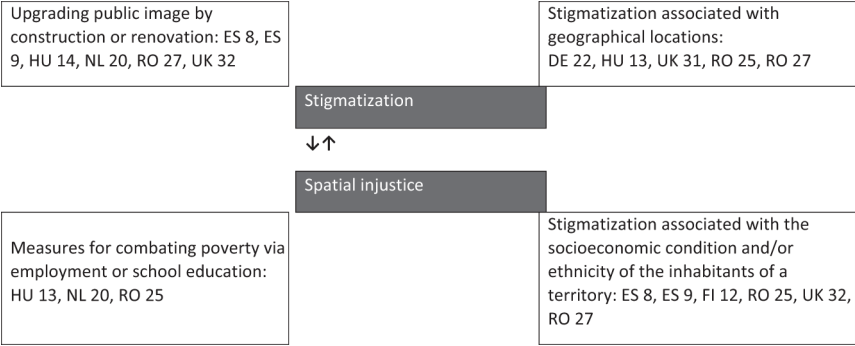


Figure 5.3 Interconnections between forms of capital accumulation, neoliberal governance, and socio-spatial stigmatization

Source: Authors





*Figure 5.4* Links between actions promoting spatial justice and stigmatization  
*Source:* Authors

homogeneous (as a result of which the subject of the stigmatized is created) and applying the stigmas associated with them to each of the individuals, (self-)perceived through their belonging to such collectives. When an individual is an inhabitant for a long time of a stigmatized area, he/she is blamed by several actors/stakeholders. Stigma is interconnected with historical contexts that may change over time, but once it is installed, it is strongly connected with structural inequalities and contributes to their intergenerational transmission (Frost, 2011). Stigma prevents individuals belonging to a group taking a full part in the life of the community, but even more, the whole group comes to be identified with the stigma itself over time.

Finally, the analysed RELOCAL cases reveal that spatially manifested stigmatization is always shaped over a long period (Horgan, 2018: 503). We therefore conclude it is both a spatial and temporal, as well as a material and symbolic, process. It includes a history of marginalization resulting from racialized and class-based inequalities and denigration, but also from poorly considered or implemented policies that reinforce instead of tackling the latter. Furthermore, if the dispossession of a territory of developmental resources is longer because of structural causes, its stigmatization linked to the supposedly natural features of the territory and/or cultural/biological characteristics of the inhabitants becomes stronger, and its unmaking is more difficult. In such cases, the role of stigmatization in reproducing injustice is also definite among others because of how its impact leads policymakers and politicians wrongly decide that people do not deserve to be invested in or to live where they do. When stakeholders consider spatial disparities as natural manifestations and not inequalities produced by economic policy or manifestations of injustice, stigmatization not only justifies the status quo but also plays a political role in the (re)production of the structural disadvantages of particular territories and their inhabitants.



## Notes

- 1 *Situating the RELOCAL cases: Cross-comparative analysis of country perspectives on spatial justice*, January 2020. Available at: [https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/D-6.4-RELOCAL-Situating-the-Cases\\_Final\\_20200130.pdf](https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/D-6.4-RELOCAL-Situating-the-Cases_Final_20200130.pdf).
- 2 According to the RELOCAL key (see Chapters 1 and 8), the case studies dealt with here are: ES 8 – Action Plan for the Promotion of Quality of Life in a Segregated Neighbourhood, Premià de Dalt; ES 9 – La Mina Neighbourhood Transformation Plan, Barcelona; FI 12 – Community-led local development, Kotka; HU 13 – Give Kids a Chance programme, Encs; HU 14 – Ten Years of Urban Regeneration in a Poor Neighbourhood, György-telep; FR 17 – Euralens, Pas-de-Calais; NL 20 – Rotterdam South: Nationaal Programma Rotterdam Zuid, Rotterdam; DE 2 – Second Attempt: Centre for Youth and Socioculture, Görlitz; UK 31 – Northumberland Uplands Local Action Group, Northumberland; UK 32 – A Homelessness Project: The PLACE/Ladywell ‘pop-up village’, Lewisham; RO 25 – The Pata Cluj project, Cluj-Napoca, and RO 27 – The Mălin-Codlea project, Braşov County. Available at: <https://relocal.eu/all-cases/>.
- 3 Available at: <https://relocal.eu/all-cases-2/>.
- 4 Available at: <https://relocal.eu/multi-scalar-patterns-of-inequalities/>. Accessed 31 August 2021.
- 5 National reports are available on the project website at: <https://relocal.eu/all-cases-2/>.
- 6 National reports are available from the project website at: <https://relocal.eu/multi-scalar-patterns-of-inequalities/>.
- 7 Available at: <https://relocal.eu/all-cases-2/>. Accessed 30 August 2021.
- 8 Kamuf, V., Matzke, F. L., Weck, S. & Warnecke, L. *National report Germany*. Available at: [https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2019/09/RELOCAL-National-Report\\_Germany.pdf](https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2019/09/RELOCAL-National-Report_Germany.pdf).
- 9 Evrard, E. & Blondel, C. *National report France*. Available at: [https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/RELOCAL-National-Report\\_France.pdf](https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/RELOCAL-National-Report_France.pdf).
- 10 Brooks, E., Currie, M., Wilson, R., Copus, A., Pinker, A., Madanipour, A. & Shucksmith, M. *National report United Kingdom*. Available at: [https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/RELOCAL-National-Report\\_Scotland-and-England-CHECKED-FINAL.pdf](https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/RELOCAL-National-Report_Scotland-and-England-CHECKED-FINAL.pdf).
- 11 Kleinhans, R. *National report The Netherlands*. Available at: [https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/RELOCAL-National-Report\\_Netherlands.pdf](https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/RELOCAL-National-Report_Netherlands.pdf).
- 12 Löfving, L., Borén, T., Heleniak, T. & Norlén, G. *National report Sweden comparing Västerbotten and Stockholm from a spatial justice perspective*. Available at: [https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/RELOCAL-National-Report\\_Sweden.pdf](https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/RELOCAL-National-Report_Sweden.pdf).
- 13 Biosca, O. & Noguera, L. *National report Spain*. Available at: [https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/RELOCAL-National-Report\\_Spain.pdf](https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/RELOCAL-National-Report_Spain.pdf).
- 14 Jelinek, C., Keller, J., Kovács, K. in collaboration with Tagai, G. & Virág, T. *National report Hungary*. Available at: [https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/RELOCAL-National-Report\\_Hungary\\_AD\\_Checked.pdf](https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/RELOCAL-National-Report_Hungary_AD_Checked.pdf).
- 15 Vincze, E. *National report*. Available at: [https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/RELOCAL-National-Report\\_Romania.pdf](https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/RELOCAL-National-Report_Romania.pdf).

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## 6 Drivers of place-based community development

### Perceptions of spatial injustice and the role of institutionally embedded responses

*Judit Keller and Tünde Virág*

#### Introduction

Economic, social, and territorial cohesion has been a fundamental policy norm of the European integration process since the 1957 Treaty of Rome. As an overarching policy goal, it has been stipulated in a number of EU documents, most recently in the new Territorial Agenda 2030, which views territorial cohesion as one of its central priorities for a just Europe (Informal meeting of Ministers responsible for spatial Planning and Territorial Development and/or Territorial Cohesion, 2020). The notion of a ‘just Europe’ is derived from the concept of spatial justice. Academic discussions have defined spatial justice as the distribution of resources and opportunities (distributive justice), linked to fair and transparent decision-making about resources (procedural justice) (Pirie, 1983; Israel and Frenkel, 2017; Madanipour et al., 2022). The implementation of spatial justice is envisioned by commentators and EU policy documents through place-based policies that promote participative procedures for the more equitable distribution of public resources (European Commission, 2011; Camagni and Capello, 2015; Madanipour et al., 2022; Weck et al., 2022).

Since its inception in the Barca report (2009), the place-based approach has become the mainstream policy tool of the EU’s cohesion policy. The ‘new paradigm of regional policy’ proposed to tackle persistent patterns of social exclusion and the underutilization of potential through the provision of ‘integrated bundles of public goods and services aimed at triggering institutional change’ (Barca, 2009: XI). The place-based approach contends that national governments and top-down strategies have limited capacities to design good local policies to address challenges perceived at the local level. The ownership of development is best advanced locally through the deliberation of local stakeholders (Keller and Virág, 2022).

This chapter aims to contribute to discussions on the relationship between local perceptions of spatial (in)justice and place-based policy efforts. It investigates the extent to which local perceptions of spatial injustice (access to public services, employment possibilities, demographic decline, spatial isolation,



stigmatization, etc.) are reflected in place-based policy responses. Perceptions of spatial justice are related to local citizens' wellbeing. Drawing on Amartya Sen's capability approach (1999), the Barca report argues that an individual's perceptions of wellbeing are multidimensional and 'are largely determined by the success or failure of public institutions to provide public goods and services . . . [in] healthcare, education, housing, law and order, working conditions, transport services and so on' (Barca, 2009: 32). Since perceptions of wellbeing and individual contentment are place-based, interventions to combat challenges to wellbeing should also be place-based (Barca, 2009).

Contrary to this proposition, empirical evidence in RELOCAL case studies suggest that counteracting spatial injustice depends not only on the 'place' and localized actions but also on the policy regimes within which they are embedded. The variety of place-based actions featuring in RELOCAL case studies were embedded in the heterogenous institutional environment of RELOCAL states and accommodated the logic of place-based interventions in different ways. The post-crisis structural trends and meta-level governance architecture of individual RELOCAL countries influenced the implementation of place-based actions. While the former demonstrates similar trends in RELOCAL countries in the aftermath of the global economic crisis, the latter displays diversity in states' commitment to subsidiarity, partnership, integrated policy mechanisms, and support for place-based actions. We often found a mismatch between perceptions of injustice, local desires for change, available resources, and support mechanisms provided within systems of multilevel governance. These findings suggest that the long-term success and potential upscaling of place-based interventions often depend on the existence of 'benevolent state' policies committed to principles of spatial justice. In the absence of such commitments and strong local capacities for community action, the state can in fact co-opt place-based initiatives to promote national policy objectives rather than furthering social cohesion.

We ground our analysis in theories that view development as institutional change (cf. Sen, 1999; Evans, 2004; Rodrik, 1999). According to this approach, development is about 'the enhancement of freedom' (Sen, 1999: 37) inherently requiring the elicitation of local knowledge through participation and public discussion. Defining developmental goals adequately and exercising capabilities require deliberative institutions such as joint planning, problem-solving, and strategizing (Fung and Wright, 2003). Deliberative institutions can thrive in governance that describes the relationship and different forms of interaction between diverse societal and institutional actors (Pierre, 2014). Discussions of governance consider the distribution of power and resources, and how they influence collective action (Pierre, 2014) by studying formal and informal, public and private, and regulatory and normative mechanisms. Ultimately, governance reviews who can have a say, and what counts, in joint planning.



Awareness of multiple actors in development is related to state rescaling processes (Brenner, 1999) and the resulting complex contingencies in which localities are embedded (Piattoni, 2010; Pierre, 2011). The array of vertical institutional scales (transnational, central state, regional, local) and horizontal relationships in which cities are entrenched prompts governance to be sensitive to both formal institutions and less institutionalized interactions (Rodríguez-Pose, 2013; Pierre, 2014). Formal institutions define the rules of the game, while ‘effective practice’ (Sen, 1999: 159) and ‘institutional arrangements’ (Rodríguez-Pose, 2013: 1037) denote local, potentially less institutionalized, solutions shaped by local actors who always retain the capacity to interpret rules. Studies of governance have underlined that stable developmental results require interventions to be embedded in an institutional framework that endows local actors ‘from above’ with capacities to mobilize institutional resources ‘from below’ (Trigilia, 2001: 439).

The multi-level governance system of the EU enables the European Union, member states, and regional authorities to set policy directions that local actors can implement through funding within a regulatory system for integrated policies. However, the diversity of national institutional environments in EU member states results in there being no uniform way for the ‘effective practice’ of place-based interventions (European Commission, 2015). The effects of place-based actions largely depend on the coherence of multiple levels of governance (Pike et al., 2007). In member states with an experience of and/or a strong central state commitment to collective action, a solid regulatory framework, and a financial commitment to principles of (spatial) justice in public policies, place-based interventions fare better (Avdikos and Chardas, 2016). In member states that lack the central state’s financial and regulatory commitment to partnership, deliberative governance, and the equitable distribution of public goods, place-based interventions may struggle (Andreotti and Mingione, 2016; Keller and Virág, 2019).

The analysis draws on selected case studies of the RELOCAL project, which studied place-based actions in deprived urban neighbourhoods. The RELOCAL case studies were compiled using a common methodology for comparative purposes. The inductive process-centred approach of the case study research sought to discern the complexities and contradictions in manifestations of spatial justice (Weck and Kamuf, 2020). Localities were understood as places in which power relations, processes, and the experiences of spatial injustice could be understood and investigated at different geographical scales (Weck and Kamuf, 2020).

Almost a third of the RELOCAL case studies were concerned with deprived urban neighbourhoods (DE 2, ES 8, ES 9, FI 12, HU 14, NL 20, RO 25, RO 27, RO 28, UK 32). The vulnerable development position of marginalized neighbourhoods was tackled through hybrid action, mixing community-driven bottom-up initiatives with externally (state-) driven, top-down actions. CP and other transnational instruments played an important role in financing



some of these place-based interventions. This chapter presents the main findings of these case studies through an in-depth analysis of a series of integrated urban development projects targeting a poor neighbourhood in György-telep, Hungary. Our choice of György-telep was driven by our familiarity with this case study site, where we conducted extensive sociological fieldwork between June 2018 and February 2019. We collected and analysed documents and articles, and statistical data about the neighbourhood.

In what follows, we first present the perceptions of spatial injustice in relation to other localities/scales as they appeared in RELOCAL case studies of deprived urban neighbourhoods. This is followed by an overview of structural trends in RELOCAL states in the aftermath of the global economic crisis. In the next section, we present findings derived from urban development projects through an in-depth analysis of the series of integrated urban development projects that took place in György-telep. In the final section, we draw some lessons and present a conclusion.

### **Perceptions of spatial injustice**

RELOCAL case studies give an account of local actions attempting to temper and remedy diverse challenges to citizens' wellbeing. The concept of wellbeing has been of interest to philosophy and the social sciences for centuries. For Aristotle 'being well' and living a good life meant achieving one's fullest potential of knowledge, health, friendship, wealth, etc. (Western and Tomaszewski, 2016). In recent decades studies have posited a multidimensional definition of wellbeing, based on subjective and objective perceptions of 'living a good life'. Subjective wellbeing is linked to people's own assessment of their lives and their perceptions of their conditions. Objective wellbeing is related to the individual's capabilities of living the life they value by having the freedom to choose between various 'doings and beings' such as bodily health and integrity, the exercise of reason and autonomy with respect to one's own life, flourishing through education, and social and political participation (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000). Subjective and objective wellbeing is closely intertwined: people's own perceptions of their conditions may not have an 'actual' objective measurement, since it is they alone who can provide information on their state and values. However, the enhancement of people's capabilities may improve their perceptions of their lives, even if it does not trigger greater subjective wellbeing (Sen, 1999; Stiglitz et al., 2009). Wellbeing occurs when individuals 'have the psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge' (Dodge et al., 2012: 230). These resources may be economic, such as income and consumption products, and non-economic, such as opportunities for people in health, education, work, political voice, social connections, etc.

These resources – as well as the constraints that challenge them – are manifested in people's lives within the social space of their communities, that



is, through the locality in which they live. The fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and opportunities to use them constitutes spatial justice (Soja, 2009). Recent interpretations of spatial justice have drawn on a relational understanding of space and its linkages to social processes (Shucksmith et al., 2021). These approaches have defined spatial justice

as geographical distribution of social benefits and burdens; as access to space as a condition of possibility for decent living; as the processes of spatial formation and production that consolidate and generate unequal social relations; and as temporality of spatial justice across and between generations.

(Madanipour et al., 2022: 324)

Thus, the distribution of resources and the procedures to use them are not exclusively tied to the locality, but are inherently shaped by objective/structural variables such as key aspects of governance (e.g. rule of law, legislative guarantees, power mechanisms, transparent and fair decision-making processes) or the state's regulatory capacity to uphold social cohesion across different localities, scales, and social groups and to guarantee 'citizens' rights independently of the local conditions in which a person is embedded' (Andreotti et al., 2012).

The RELOCAL case studies enumerate this relational understanding of spatial justice and the interlinked subjective and objective perceptions of wellbeing through *dual semantic structures* within local narratives. Dualities presented on different scales compare localities with other more desirable places in terms of (a) urban-rural divisions, typically when rural localities are compared with capital cities or regional centres, (b) differences between neighbourhoods within cities, and (c) differences between more and less prosperous regions. These comparisons express how stakeholders position their locality in the broader space, how they perceive and explain injustice, and what they define as the reference point for the locality's desired future development trajectory.

The spatial position of localities was generally related to the intertwined effects of larger structural shifts (deindustrialization and crisis-related economic restructuring) and migration patterns. Domestic mobility and different migration waves affected urban and rural areas differently: as certain territories lost their economic significance, they slid down the hierarchy of places (within a city, or within a larger regional/national setting), and selective migration processes occurred. Although they affected local societies differently, the downward spiral of a parallel economic and social downturn was usually reinforced by stigmatization. Several case studies described the historical trajectory through which disadvantaged neighbourhoods were produced. As a common meta-trend, the production of disadvantaged neighbourhoods



was connected with larger structural shifts, most importantly to deindustrialization and economic restructuring. In urban areas, the historical significance of the mass immigration of lower-status households was often mentioned as a factor resulting in local tensions and in the production of disadvantaged segregated neighbourhoods. Another important element in these historical narratives was immigration: as certain territories lost their economic significance, and as they were filtered down in the hierarchy of places (within a city or a larger regional/national setting), households of a lower status moved into the neighbourhood. This parallel economic and social downturn is usually reinforced by stigmatization. The production of disadvantaged neighbourhoods thus seems inseparable from larger structural processes of uneven development (see Hadjimichalis, 2011; Vincze and Zamfir, 2019).

While in each case there were different combinations of these socioeconomic factors, local perceptions of spatial (in)justice in RELOCAL case studies were always related to challenges of wellbeing generated by structural trends. Perceptions of spatial injustice could be clustered around three dimensions: (1) access to public services and the quality of governance structures supporting this access; (2) employment possibilities; (3) stigmatization and other labelling processes. In the majority of the localities, there was a clear demand for better access to basic public services such as education and healthcare. In urban areas, manifestations of differences in the quality of services within the city were connected to the existence of segregated, impoverished neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, challenges in access to various institutions were cited in both rural and urban localities, which indicates that the dysfunctionality of public services and basic infrastructure provisions is a crucial aspect of spatial (in)justice. Perceptions of injustice related to the lack of employment possibilities are derived from processes of deindustrialization and the subsequent disappearance of old employment possibilities in 'traditional' blue-collar sectors such as the mining and textile industries. Although in these localities people with low and/or very specific educational attainment felt 'left behind' (FR 17–18, GR 3–5, HU 14, NL 20, ES 9, PL 21, RO26), local perceptions of being 'left behind' varied according to the locality's positionality. Differences depended on whether the entire surrounding region (EL3, RO26), the whole locality (FR17), or just one part (a neighbourhood) of the locality (ES8, NL20, RO25, RO28) was affected by economic decline. Perceptions of having been 'left behind' were also triggered by selective outmigration. Selective job-related outmigration from rural to urban regions, particularly of younger and well-educated people that led to a constantly shrinking population and ageing, was also often perceived as 'being left behind' (cf. German, Polish, Finnish, Hungarian, and Romanian cases).

The third most frequently cited perception of spatial injustice was stigmatization and negative labelling, which appeared at the interplay of remoteness, social and demographic polarization, and fragmentation in the most disadvantaged rural and urban localities. Based on negative discourses and



the subsequent ‘bad’ social image of the locality, injustices are reproduced both externally and internally. These stigmatized territories are usually labelled with negative stereotypes such as ‘sewage drain’ (NL20), ‘racist’, ‘uneducated’, ‘no jobs, no future’, ‘periphery’ (LU17), ‘end of the world’ (HU13), ‘little Beijing’ (PL22), ‘penal colony’ (HU14), ‘Gypsyhood’/‘Țigănie’ (RO27), ‘uncivilized’, or ‘garbage dump’ (RO25). Territorial stigmatization is internalized by inhabitants, resulting in feelings of guilt and shame, leading to negative self-attributions (Wacquant, 2007; Rhodes, 2012), which can hinder development processes. Thus, stigmatization and negative labelling operating at different geographical scales are the most important ways of creating distinctions between spaces and social groups.

RELOCAL case studies focusing on deprived urban neighbourhoods defined the main justice-related problems as complex issues, and the actions were therefore usually planned as integrated interventions. The most frequently mentioned problematic dimensions were segregation, income inequality, (youth) unemployment, poverty, housing problems, ethnic tension, and ethnic segregation. In almost all the case studies the interwoven and intersectional nature of these dimensions was emphasized; and the vicious circle of becoming disadvantaged and stigmatized was implicitly described. However, ‘being disadvantaged’ was not a universally shared experience by all local inhabitants in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Some case studies highlighted that being or becoming disadvantaged was not necessarily a natural, straightforward, all-encompassing process. We could identify ‘local’ voices that challenged or even objected to the act of labelling places as disadvantaged. This is in line both with the literature, which challenges the concept of a ‘neighbourhood effect’ (e.g. Slater, 2013), and with novel approaches that advocate a semantic shift in expert discourse from ‘deprived’ or ‘disadvantaged’ areas to ‘priority areas’ (Bressaud et al., 2019).

### **Structural trends**

Place-based actions aiming to tackle challenges to wellbeing in RELOCAL case studies were embedded in multiple institutional processes. On the one hand, post-crisis institutional processes indicated some overarching trends in institutional solutions deployed by RELOCAL states. At the same time, the institutional architectures of RELOCAL states displayed great variety in their accommodation of the logic of place-based interventions. Place-based actions were ultimately shaped by the interplay between the dynamics of austerity-driven institutional processes and domestic institutional conditions, which meant that the effects of the crisis were mitigated by central governments in different ways, even though ‘centralization reflexes’, particularly fiscal centralization and cuts in public expenditure, were prevalent across EU member states (Andreotti and Mingione, 2016).

Three overarching trends were identified in RELOCAL case studies regarding national institutional processes that influenced the implementation



of place-based projects: (1) varying dynamics of austerity-driven state withdrawal and welfare retrenchment (HU, EL, ES, FR, RO, NL, UK, SE); accompanied by (2) selective decentralization, which can range from downloading responsibilities to the local level (NL, UK, SE, RO) to outsourcing services or policy coordination to non-state actors such as NGOs, charity organizations, public/private companies (UK, HU, DE, RO); and (3) varying temporality of fiscal centralization and disciplining (HU, RO, EL, UK, ES, NL, DE).

In the immediate aftermath of the global economic crisis, fiscal centralization – fiscal rigour and/or public cuts – took place in all RELOCAL states. Both the temporality and degree of fiscal disciplining varied across national cases, setting off different degrees in the vulnerability of the local level, depending on the percentage of unconditional financial transfers they received from higher governmental levels (Ladner et al., 2016). The proportion of unconditional financial transfers from the central to the local level increased to more than 60% in the Netherlands between 2000 and 2014, which gave Dutch municipalities sufficient room for manoeuvre in local development (Ladner et al., 2016). Similar financial guarantees and the commitment of the state to multi-level problem-solving in Germany, Sweden, Finland, the United Kingdom, and Spain accommodated the institutional logics of bottom-up place-based interventions.

In other countries, such as Hungary, Romania, and Greece, fiscal rigour, bureaucratic centralization, selective decentralization, and the overall absence of multi-level problem-solving have impeded the success of place-based interventions. The transfer of policy delivery to the local level (Romania) or its outsourcing to non-state actors (Hungary) coupled with fiscal centralization and inadequate funding from local authorities inhibited autonomous developmental planning at the local level. Unconditional transfers in Romania were cut in half, while in Hungary activity-based financing equipped municipalities with decreasing amounts of an earmarked sum based on costs calculated by the central government (Ladner et al., 2016). This crunched the local government budget and reduced capacities for place-based interventions.

In Hungary and Romania, in addition to decreasing state transfers, national financing for small-scale development projects shrank significantly (Jelinek et al., 2019). This increased the dependency of Romanian and Hungarian municipalities on transnational and especially EU funds (Cohesion Funds). It is the norm in post-socialist EU member states that CP funds are instrumental ‘for propping up local budgets’, whereas they are considered ‘expensive money which demands efficient and accountable spending’ in older member states (Telle et al., 2019: 166). In post-socialist member states an average of 40–80% of all public investment was financed through CP between 2015 and 2017 (European Commission, 2017: XXII). In some policy areas, this ratio is even higher, while in integrated urban development in Hungary, practically no public investment is realized without EU funds (Jelinek and Virág, 2019).



### The case of György-telep, Hungary

György-telep is a former miner colony on the periphery of the county seat city of Pécs. In the 1970s Roma families were settled in the neighbourhood after the miners were relocated to better flats in the city. The neighbourhood lacks public institutions and services, including adequate public transport, which makes access to institutions in other parts of the city difficult for local residents. As the local authorities have not invested in the renovation of the neighbourhood, housing conditions have declined, leading to an extremely high proportion of substandard flats. In the early 2000s, the city's development strategies earmarked the neighbourhood for demolition, but the municipality has repeatedly postponed the elimination of the colony due to the political risk of a potential residential outcry against the relocation of 'problematic' inhabitants to 'non-problematic' neighbourhoods. Over the years György-telep has become a highly stigmatized neighbourhood, functioning as a 'penal colony' within the city, where problematic inhabitants can be 'hidden' by the local authorities. Segregated Roma neighbourhoods are perceived as dangerous criminal places in Hungary. The general aim of mainstream society is to separate these neighbourhoods from town/city centres with sharp mental boundaries. Moreover, with the relocation of families, local governments are often active agents of reproducing marginalized spaces.

The evolution of the local action targeting György-telep was closely intertwined with the transformation of territorial governance and the institutional reshuffling of public policymaking in Hungary that took place after the landslide victory of the Fidesz party in the national elections of 2010 and 2014. The post-2010 transformations involved two main processes. On the one hand, intensive centralization entailed the removal of the main parts of the administrative and executive functions of the local government. Increased state involvement in policy administration led to local governments' weakened mandates to maintain some public institutions and influence local spheres of life. It also resulted in the insertion of the local level into a type of domestic scalar hierarchy in which the control of the local level was exercised by the central state's design and coordination. The emerging hierarchical and clientelist governance forced local welfare interventions to align with the political objectives of the national government (Jelinek et al., 2019). On the other hand, selective welfare retrenchment implied the erosion of provisions for low-income families and the outsourcing of social services for the poor to religious charity organizations (Jelinek et al., 2019).

These processes also took place in Pécs, where the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta (Málta) initiated a small-scale project in 2008 based on the organization's hallmark method of engaging the long-term presence of social workers in marginalized neighbourhoods. Through this project, Málta convinced the mayor of Pécs to find solutions to the ills of György-telep beyond demolition. The local government's intention 'of doing



something' with the city's most disadvantaged neighbourhood met the capacities of the municipality's Department of Natural and Human Resources (DNHR), which relied on the embeddedness of Málta and Khetanipe, the most powerful Roma NGO (Virág and Jelinek, 2019).

In 2012, a call for tenders was published for EU-funded developments targeting segregated neighbourhoods. The framework of the call was highly influenced by Málta's *Presence* methodology, which provided social and community work based on the bottom-up mobilization of local knowledge. The DNHR was the key broker of its emerging development coalition with Málta and Khetanipe. Despite the differences in institutional logic and organizational expertise, power relations were distributed more or less evenly within the coalition. To meet the technical criteria, the DNHR functioned as a project manager and coordinator, Khetanipe ran the education programmes, and Málta continued the family-based social work in György-telep. The role of the DNHR was to create communication channels and to build a joint spirit between partners through its collaborative leadership. Khetanipe acted as the voice of the local Roma population, while Málta transmitted and translated between local realities and 'the project world' (Virág and Jelinek, 2019).

In 2013 two large EFRD-financed infrastructure development projects were launched, which provided funding for the renovation of social housing units and the relocation of inhabitants into mainstream neighbourhoods through social work conducted individually. These projects, reinforced by the results of the 2014 local elections, transformed the synergic alliance and more or less equitable relations between partners. The DNHR was abolished, and its duties were transferred to a municipal unit, the Urban Development Company (UDC), which was previously responsible for large-scale infrastructure projects. Málta strengthened its brokering position through its continued assistance of families and the organization of relocations. Although Khetanipe remained a member of the development coalition, it was in practice marginalized in decision-making. Through its strengthened position Málta hired employees of the former DNHR and Khetanipe, which enabled the organization to retain key positions. The alliance of partners within the new development coalition was thus based on the hegemonic duo of Málta and the municipality.

These local processes can be linked to political changes and the reshuffling of policy objectives at the central state level. The marginalization of Khetanipe and the concentration of power in the Málta-UDC duo was the local manifestation of the intensive centralization of power and the side-lining of non-governmental actors in domestic policy processes. Málta's enhanced position in the coalition was related to its status as a national organization with ambitions to expand its authority to welfare policies for the poor (Virág and Jelinek, 2019). Its efforts met the central government's growing strategy of outsourcing welfare provisions for marginalized communities to religious charity organizations. Málta's growth and powerful position in the coalition was derived from its capacity to translate between various stakeholders



(the municipality, local residents, the central state, the EU), connect different interests and aspirations, and turn them into a coherent intervention. After the organizational shift in 2014, its position in local affairs can be regarded as ‘shadow municipal’, because its growing local power in practice meant the informal outsourcing of some of the municipality’s poverty management functions (Virág and Jelinek, 2019: 16).

## **Discussion and conclusion**

This chapter has studied local perceptions of spatial injustice in RELOCAL case studies focusing on deprived urban neighbourhoods, and how place-based actions addressed these local challenges to wellbeing. Place-based policies and interventions are considered to make a positive contribution to spatial justice through participative procedures for the more equitable distribution of public resources. To illustrate the institutional mechanisms of place-based actions, we used the example of one urban development action from the RELOCAL cases, the action in György-telep, Hungary, which was enabled by the common methodology of RELOCAL case selection and analysis compiled for comparative purposes.

In general, the RELOCAL cases produced evidence that the counteracting of spatial injustice depended not only on localized actions but on the policy regime’s embeddedness within such place-based interventions. The success of place-based actions was generally shaped by the interplay between the dynamics of austerity-driven institutional processes and the domestic governance processes in RELOCAL states. Post-crisis institutional reforms – state withdrawal, selective decentralization, and fiscal centralization – did not take a uniform unilinear pathway in RELOCAL countries, and their impact on place-based interventions depended on their interaction with the overall governance trends in each state.

The success of place-based actions in tackling instances of spatial injustice depended on how place-based logics were accommodated in the domestic policy field. In some countries, the overall institutional framework was more supportive and accommodating of place-based actions. In these countries, fiscal centralization was only temporary, and the overall multi-level approach of the institutional framework supported localities from the top in mobilizing resources from below. In others, bureaucratic and centralized fiscal policies provided insufficient financial, professional, and institutional resources at the local level. Irrespective of degrees of centralization, outsourcing, externalizing, or downloading problems of urban marginality by the central state was a common feature of institutional processes in the selected RELOCAL cases. At the same time, decentralization did not necessarily entail the central state’s abandonment of the local level in all RELOCAL cases. In some cases, the central state may have delegated the coordination of neighbourhood policy to local actors, but it remained committed to providing regulatory and financial support for place-based actions. In others, centralization indicated



the central state's selective abandonment of particular policy segments and actors.

As the Hungarian example showed, filtering place-based interventions through diverse domestic institutional environments can yield different policy procedures and outcomes. Variation in long-term success and the potential upscaling of place-based interventions are largely related to the state's commitment to delivering spatial justice to disadvantaged neighbourhoods. In the absence of such commitments and strong local capacities for community action, the state can in fact co-opt place-based initiatives to promote national policy objectives rather than furthering social cohesion. In Györgytelep former collaborative institutional solutions were terminated as a result of shifting local power relations following the 2014 national and local elections. The changes meant the marginalization of NGOs and the curtailment of local governmental capacities for autonomous development actions. Local institutional changes have followed the national trends of increasing centralization since 2010, characterized by growing central state authority in the definition of development objectives, top-down policy decisions, hegemonic institutional practices, and selective state withdrawal from policy areas that manage poverty. At the local level, hegemonic trends can be seen in how Málta, favoured by the domestic institutional environment as a church-related organization, was provided with capacities to manage urban marginality and evolved into a powerful developmental broker at the expense of the local government, which was left with decreasing resources. As the local government's mandate to shape local policy strategies had shrunk in the centralized system, local institutional arrangements began to be dominated by informal solutions that could be seen in Málta's shadow municipal position, as some municipal functions were informally outsourced to the organization.

Overall, the findings of the RELOCAL case studies in deprived urban neighbourhoods show that the state's commitment to principles of spatial justice is a key factor in the efficiency of place-based interventions. State commitment to spatial justice can bring stability to governance structures and enable the upscaling and long-term success of place-based interventions. In an ideal case, it means a Burkean virtuous representation of the public good (Bruszt, 2007), in which making decisions about public policies is based on the accommodation of diverse understandings of the public good and the non-favouring of any particular representations of the concept.

The case studies indicated that state commitment is a fragile concept. Even in 'policy-dense' countries it is vulnerable to political wavering, and it relies on political will. Changes in political objectives can castrate spatial justice policies and initiatives by changing governance procedures, resulting in the uneven reshuffling of power relations and responsibilities. As the Hungarian case shows, political shifts can change the state's commitment to providing an enabling institutional background and financial support for spatial justice, and thus also divert project objectives to hegemonic and exclusionary local practices. This raises questions about the limitations of place-based



initiatives within the EU's multi-level regulatory framework, in which domestic political/institutional constellations can have a more marked influence on local development than the catalysing effects of the place-based approach in a multi-level governance system. In the absence of domestic commitments and strong local capacities for community action, the state can in fact co-opt place-based initiatives to promote national policy objectives instead of furthering social cohesion.

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## 7 Towards spatial justice across Europe through place-based interventions

Lessons learned from considering medium-horizon future scenarios

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### Introduction

This chapter presents medium-horizon (2018–2030) development scenarios for 33 European localities experiencing spatial injustice at different scales and identifies implications for interventions targeting spatial justice, ranging from public policies to bottom-up initiatives. A novel methodological approach has been developed (Piras et al., 2022), combining scenario planning and Theory of Change (ToC) approaches (see Serrat, 2017) to assess the internal and external coherence and effectiveness of place-based interventions addressing spatial justice across Europe. This can be a useful tool for monitoring and course-correcting policy interventions during their implementation, and for final evaluation to shape future policies in the same locality or elsewhere. The final goal of the presented analysis was to extract relevant stylized facts that inform us about the mid-term effectiveness of interventions addressing spatial justice, and what is expected to drive or inhibit their success.

The notion of spatial justice is simultaneously abstract and complex, and expands the more widely used concept of social justice, incorporating the spatial implications of fairness into a focus on the fair distribution of resources across social groups (see Schmitt and Weck, this volume). According to Soja (2010), the universal and normative character of the theory of justice does not reflect the distribution of inequalities through space, the specifics of different societies and cultures, and the temporal aspect of development in modifying the level of spatial disparities. This author proceeds to argue that despite the equal distribution of socially valued resources across a territory, it is practically impossible to achieve equal access (Soja, 2010). If other factors are added to basic distributional inequality (e.g. institutional inefficiency, budgetary demands, ethnic intolerance, or the abuse of power), inequalities



are further accentuated and may be reflected in people's perceptions of injustice (see Keller and Virág's discussion in Chapter 6). Soja (2010: 5) stresses the interrelation of justice and space, recognizing a dialectical relationship between spatial organization and social processes: 'spatiality of injustice . . . affects society and social life just as much as social processes shape the spatiality or specific geography of injustice'. For the purposes of the EU Horizon 2020 RELOCAL, spatial justice was defined as 'an equitable spatial distribution of resources and opportunities, and fairness in the relations of power that shape and transform the social space' (Madanipour et al., 2020: 75). The focus is thus on two main domains: 'procedures' (institutions and power mechanisms) and 'outcomes' (distribution of resources and opportunities).

The EU includes a large diversity of places where place-based interventions addressing spatial justice are implemented. Place-based development strategies have been defined in the Barca Report (Barca, 2009) as 'long-term strategies aimed at tackling persistent underutilization of potential and reducing persistent social exclusion in specific places through external interventions and multilevel governance'. Such strategies were recognized as more effective than neoliberal space-blind approaches. Thirty-three European interventions were chosen as case studies in the RELOCAL project, either for their relevance to place-based development or as examples of coping strategies for improving living conditions and promoting more balanced and sustainable growth. The project's main aim was to assess how far spatial justice could be achieved through place-based strategies, and whether achievements were place-bound or could be extended to other locations and times. Although the underlying motivation of the studied local actions was to ameliorate disparities in opportunity, potential, or socioeconomic outcomes, empirical research revealed that the translation of spatial injustice into policy concepts varied among countries and localities. In terms of the perceptions and geographic scales at which spatial injustice occurs, Copus et al. (2019) distinguish its three main manifestations: (1) Territorial Disadvantage (TD), exemplified by rural municipalities, remote places, and post-industrial regions where interrelated deficits in a range of territorial capitals and the lack of a 'critical mass' for local development make attaining an acceptable level of wellbeing or sustainability challenging; (2) Neighbourhood Effects (NE), referring to the problems of residential segregation due to ill-conceived planning policies, or unregulated development aggravated by secondary effects such as stigma or the sense of limitation associated with disadvantaged neighbourhoods and leading to poorer opportunities for future living, business success, or achieving a satisfactory level of wellbeing; (3) Disempowered Places (DP), often associated with ineffective multi-level governance structures which may lead to localities performing relatively worse in terms of wellbeing compared to neighbouring areas, because they lack the capacity to address local needs and support local businesses. It is not claimed that these three manifestations represent the full range of spatial







by territorial disadvantage aim to reduce developmental disparities that frame the conditions and quality of life as their inhabitants perceive them. Interventions in this group focus on finding alternative development paths and developing new functions of particular places through integrated or inclusive development programmes that require the empowerment of social capital, cooperation, and institutional or administrative changes. Digitalization as a tool for sustainable development is implemented especially in remote rural areas lacking the ‘critical mass’ to provide residents with sufficient access to goods and services. Eleven cases affected by neighbourhood effects aim to address poverty, segregation, and polarization through ad hoc interventions or by promoting socioeconomic renewal in the area so that everyone can benefit from positive spill-over effects. The key targets of these interventions are vulnerable social groups, whereas housing (affordability, good quality, without spatial segregation) is the most common intervention area. Three interventions implemented within the third category of spatial injustice – disempowered places – focus mainly on administrative issues, for example, small-scale municipalities are merged to improve their situation in the future, and border areas adopt a cross-border governance model (Copus et al., 2019).

An analysis of the intervention logic for ongoing actions in 2018 allowed the identification of five generic ‘paradigms’ for enhancing spatial justice with place-based strategies (Copus et al., 2019):

1. Wellbeing can be improved by focusing on the built environment and open space.
2. Local development and wellbeing are contingent on endogenous processes rooted in community and social capital.
3. ‘Identity’ – that is, place attachment and understanding of local assets’ unique values is a starting point for ‘placemaking’.
4. Human capital, entrepreneurship, and innovation improve local economic performance, with beneficial spill-overs for the rest of the locality.
5. Administrative-scale economies and cooperation can boost the voices of smaller localities and their administrations.

Medium-horizon scenarios, the main subject of this chapter, allowed an assessment of the resilience of these paradigms from the perspective of 2030. They were elaborated before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe in March 2020. They therefore do not consider the potential effects of this crisis on the economy (including redistributive measures for recovering from the lockdown) and society (reduced mutual and institutional trust, or a re-evaluation of the social dimension). As the pandemic’s direct impact and the measures taken by single countries to limit its spread are not included, the present discussion should be interpreted in the pre-pandemic context.



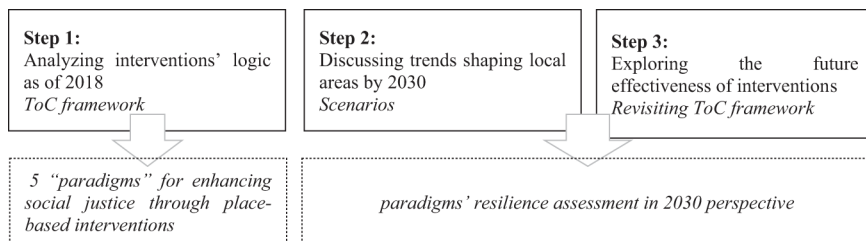
## Methodology

Scenario planning emerged as a formal research method during the second half of the last century and quickly became an important instrument for supporting public policy. Applying systematic analysis to ‘clarify present action in the light of possible and desirable futures’ was a core of the prospective approach established by pioneering futurist Gaston Berger (1896–1960) (Godet and Roubelat, 1996; Durance and Godet, 2010: 1488). More recently, a range of techniques has emerged (see Bishop et al., 2007; Martelli, 2001), and scenario planning is not considered a single method but a set of methods integrating the theoretical background with applied knowledge and planning practice (Duckett et al., 2017). Further to the prospective approach, Kosow and Gaßner (2008: 1) underline that ‘scenarios are not intended to represent a full description of the possible futures but to highlight central elements of a possible future and draw attention to the key factors that will drive future developments’. Their value thus lies in their ability to process and interpret information associated with complex issues in the future (FOREN Network, 2001; Börjeson et al., 2006; Bishop et al., 2007). Depending on their application’s purpose, scenarios can take various forms: descriptive or normative; exploratory or projective; desk research or participatory; qualitative or quantitative (Van Notten et al., 2003: 426). Their chronological horizon can be flexible and range from short-term scenarios of two to three years to the distant future; however, political cycles tend to influence planners to set time horizons in the range of five to ten years. Scenarios can be developed at multiple spatial scales, including the global, international, national, regional, or local levels (Kosow and Gaßner, 2008: 36).

The RELOCAL project assessed either ongoing interventions, or interventions whose impacts were not yet fully realized. Thus, a single most plausible scenario was judged more suitable than elaborating a ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ scenario for each of the 33 case study areas in 11 EU member states. Scenarios were elaborated in the framework of a multi-step process, including elements of the Theory of Change (ToC), mechanism mapping, and morphological scenarios (Figure 7.2). It was a participatory forecasting exercise, implemented by analysts in consultation and with the substantial contribution of local experts and stakeholders. We describe here the methodology used, showing the three main steps undertaken to draw the final synthesis. However, the results presented in the rest of the chapter, focusing on future frames of place-based interventions undertaken to improve local communities’ wellbeing and indicating their effectiveness, will be derived mainly from the second and third steps. For details of the methodological approach developed for the purpose of the RELOCAL project, see Piras et al. (2022).

The methodology’s first step focused on deconstructing the logic underpinning each intervention as of 2018 and the assumptions on which this logic was conditional. This activity was centred on a systematic diagram developed in two stages, roughly equating to the basic ToC and mechanism mapping.





*Figure 7.2* Overview of the process envisaged in the methodology

*Source:* Own elaboration

The two methods are overlapping and complementary, as the intervention's internal assumptions identified through the baseline ToC are crucial for considering, relations with external contextual conditions and drivers in mechanism mapping (Williams, 2017, 2020). Henceforth, the ToC and mechanism mapping exercises' joint output are identified as a 'baseline mechanism map' (Figure 7.3). The maps were elaborated by analysts in collaboration with local stakeholders, drawing on the latter's familiarity with the interventions and the local context. Our approach deviates from the original ToC mechanism map (Connell and Kubisch, 1998; Taplin and Clark, 2012), because the process was implemented *ex post* on an already running (or completed) intervention. To build their baseline mechanism map, analysts must follow seven steps:

- 1) describe the intervention's long-term realistically achievable goal;
- 2–3) identify the intervention and deconstruct it into one or more constituent actions;
- 4–5) specify intermediate outcomes and link them as milestones between the initial intervention and the long-term goal;
- 6) add baseline assumptions, alongside the intermediate outcome(s) or the causal link(s), to represent either drivers boosting a certain causal pathway or inhibitors hindering it;
- 7) add contextual conditions and drivers (CC&D) representing the external environment in which the intervention is implemented. CC&D can be divided into various domains, and we focused on three: (i) geography; (ii) policy; and (iii) society and market. CC&D represent the link between the mechanism map and the scenario(s) developed in the next step. Analysts should therefore select them carefully, possibly deriving them from the 'states' of the 'nexuses of changes' defined in the following paragraphs.

The second step in reflecting on the future of RELOCAL case study localities focused on formulating scenarios to explore how particular interventions were likely to perform within a potential future context. This context



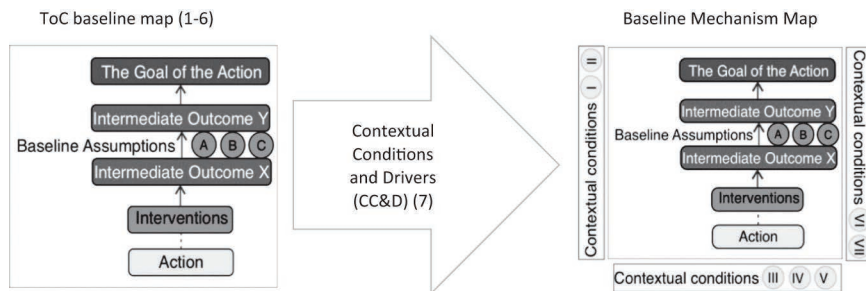


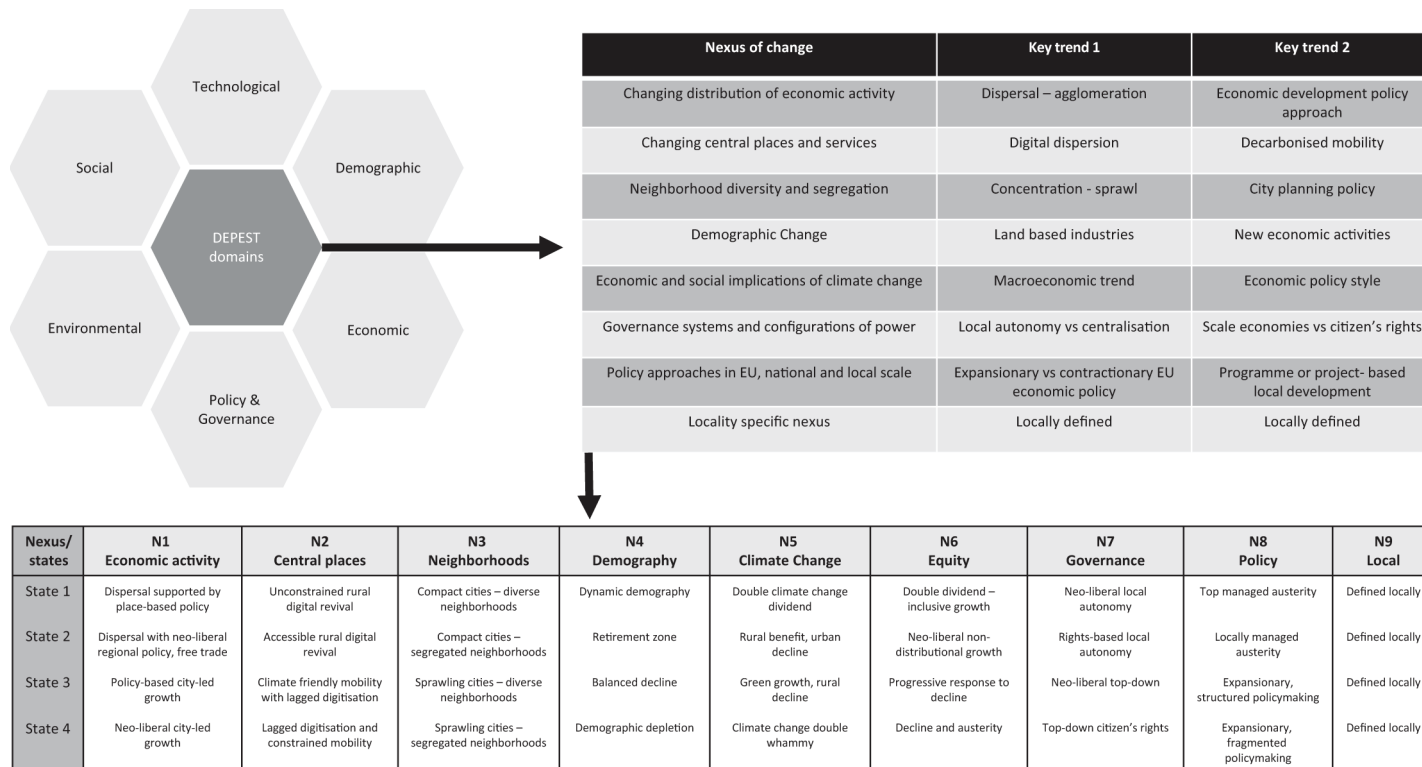
Figure 7.3 Overview of the first step integrating elements of the ToC framework

Source: Own elaboration

was defined based on macro-trends affecting local communities throughout Europe, which were in turn structured into six domains: Demography, Economy, Policy and Governance, Environment, Society and Technology (DEPEST). The DEPEST domains, including several potential macro-trends for the 2020–2030 period, were identified to guide the case study analysts in their reflections about the plausible futures of their particular localities. The DEPEST structure follows Aguillar (1967), who introduced PEST (Political, Economic, Social, Technical), to be further extended to include additional domains, that is, PESTEL, STEEPLE, STEEPVL, DESTEP (Walsh, 2005; Burt et al., 2006; Nazarko et al., 2017). Similar structures are used in management sciences to provide a comprehensive list of influences on the possible success or failure of development strategies and thus a starting point for scenario planning (Schoemaker, 1995; van der Heijden, 2005). However, due to their high level of abstraction and relatively wide (global or national) character, the DEPEST domains could not be used directly to formulate local spatial justice scenarios. They were therefore disentangled and reassembled to identify eight more explicit ‘nexus of change’ capturing two dichotomous key trends with spatial implications. When cross-tabulated, the dichotomous trends generated four possible but mutually exclusive states for each ‘nexus of change’. The ‘nexus’ and their states are presented in the form of a ‘nexus-state array’ as a final part of preparatory activities undertaken to frame the scenarios proper. As in any morphological scenario exercise (see further Coyle and Young, 1996; Johansen, 2018), the ‘nexus-state array’ served as a ‘palette’ of scenario elements and a framework for scenario narrative to be elaborated by case study experts (Figure 7.4).

As they focused not on the intervention but on the locality where this was implemented, the scenarios were framed by combining the most likely states of relevant nexuses as indicated in the nexus-state array illustrated earlier. However, to capture the level of uncertainty and thus the probability of deviation from the most plausible outcome, case study analysts were asked





*Figure 7.4* Overview of the preparatory activities along the second step – factor analysis

*Source:* Own elaboration



to assess the likelihood of each state of every nexus, except for those deemed of limited relevance for their case study area. Triangulating quantitative and qualitative elements for each locality, the scenario elaboration exercise consisted of:

1. rating the relevance of each nexus of change for the area targeted (from 1 = completely irrelevant to 5 = very relevant);
2. rating the likelihood (from 1 = completely unlikely to 5 = very likely) of each state for nexuses deemed of medium-to-high relevance (from 3 to 5);
3. defining, if required, a local nexus, and rating its relevance, as well as the likelihood of its states;
4. describing qualitatively, regarding the case study location, the reasons for the relevance scores chosen, and the reasons for selecting specific states of the nexus;
5. drawing a pen picture of the case study area in 2030.

The third methodological step consisted of reassessing the baseline mechanism map, taking account of the changed external conditions specified in scenarios, and exploring their implications for the underpinning logic of undertaken interventions, and therefore on the ability to deliver their spatial justice goals. Following Williams (2017, 2020), who uses mechanism mapping to assess an intervention logic's validity between different geographic or policy contexts, we applied the same approach between the present and the future as defined by the scenario. Indeed, if the contextual conditions vary when the intervention is transposed to a different time, the internal assumptions can also be affected, and the logical chains in the ToC may begin to alter. For the studied interventions, the mechanism remapping consisted of:

1. reviewing the CC&D and linking each change to one or more nexus of change identified as relevant for a particular locality in the nexus-state array;
2. reviewing the baseline assumptions (inhibitors and promoters) of a particular intervention, followed by reconsidering the intermediate outcomes and the causal links between them;
3. considering whether the long-term spatial justice goal would remain valid in 2030 in its 2018 version, or whether this should be reconsidered (scaled up, scaled down, refocused, or become unachievable).

Mechanism remapping proved to be a 'learning machine' exploring the effectiveness, potential, and limitations of the analysed interventions, and prompting final reflections about the nature of spatial justice and the policy interventions addressing it in different EU member states. There were many feedback loops between the two stages of scenario development and



remapping, as well as between sub-steps, making the overall exercise an iterative learning process (Piras et al., 2022).

Scenario reports prepared by analysts in each of the 33 case studies were subjected to a mixed-methods synthesis. The quantitative analysis presented here relies on the nexus-state arrays and a summary of the changes in the baseline mechanism maps. In particular, the distribution of the relevance and the likelihood scores of the nexuses across case studies, and the correlation between the states of different nexuses in the same case study, were assessed. The changes in the baseline mechanism maps for individual case studies were analysed jointly for all cases within the same category of manifested spatial injustice (territorial disadvantages, neighbourhood effects, disempowered places). This allowed us to identify differences in the directions of changes expected to frame the interventions in the future and the nexuses driving these changes, not only for different typologies of spatial injustice, but also for different welfare regimes across Europe and action types as discussed in Chapter 4 by Schmitt and Weck. The following qualitative overview is based on the comparative reading of the pen picture describing the locality in the future.

## Results

### *Scenarios of case study localities*

The scenario exercise identified three nexuses of change across all case study areas as particularly relevant for framing their future in 2030: (1) demographic changes, with the key trends of shrinking, urbanization, counter-urbanization, and population ageing; (2) governance, with the key trends related to configurations of power and the distribution of influence and decision-making power between various governance levels; and (3) policy, with key trends such as the character of the EU economic policy in the next decade and the local responses. In contrast, the least relevant nexuses include (1) climate change mitigation and adaptation, assessed as the least important from the perspective of areas subject to neighbourhood effects; (2) neighbourhood diversity and segregation, which received the most extensive range of responses, from irrelevant for the areas affected by territorial disadvantage to very relevant for the areas affected by neighbourhood effects; and (3) changes in the centrality of places due to new mobility and digitization (Figure 7.5).

Local contexts were found to be instrumental in shaping the future in the case study areas. This was demonstrated by the fact that a local nexus was added in 29 out of 33 case study scenarios and assessed as very relevant in 15. The local nexus usually allowed analysts to highlight the importance of unique place-based characteristics for promoting spatial justice, and to consider how localities could play to their strengths instead of being targeted for their weaknesses. In many cases, whatever spatial injustice they represented, attention was paid to ‘identity’ as one of two vectors combining a local nexus



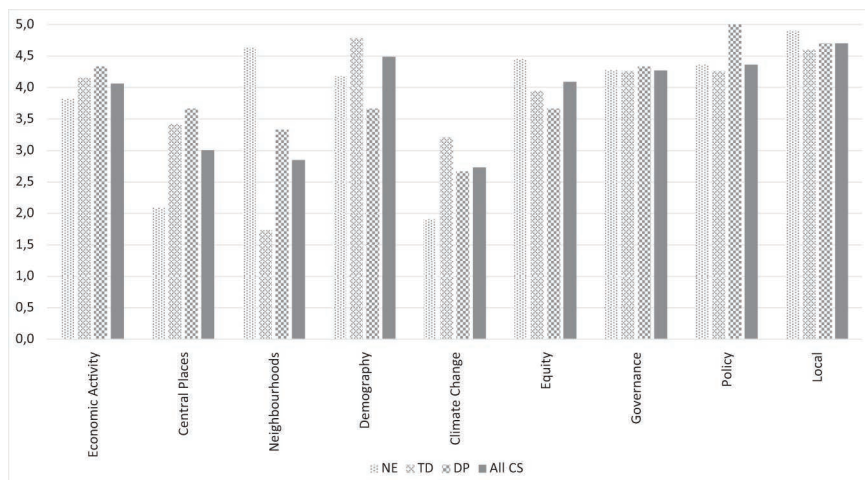


Figure 7.5 Average relevance of the nexus of change for the case study areas

Source: Piras et al. (2020), p. 13

of change. In the scope of the case studies affected by territorial disadvantage special attention was paid to the influence of human capital and social trust on future economic performance. Scenario reports underlined that strengthening local identity would become a crucial factor, as reflected both in the sense of territorial attachment and in its highlighting of unique local assets as a starting point for ‘placemaking’. All this was deemed to contribute to the future success of undertaken interventions. In areas where spatial injustice was manifested as neighbourhood effects the locally defined nexus focused on the future opportunities in terms of civic engagement and support from local, regional, and national authorities, as well as the EU, in funding, policies, formal procedures, and local spatial management. In the three cases affected by place disempowerment the local nexus focused on the issue of identity, defined as a locally driven response to various challenges to future development.

Having indicated each nexus’s relevance over the next ten years, analysts were asked to consider the likelihood of four mutually exclusive states described in the ‘nexus-state array’. The charts in Figures 7.6 and 7.7 illustrate that the studied localities’ 2030 scenarios of the localities were neither explicit nor easy to predict, highlighting the importance of place-specificity for shaping future trends. The bubbles that cluster in the centre of the graph represent neither likely nor unlikely states within each nexus. However, three nexuses are exceptional and may be interpreted as the main determinants of future change. These are (1) demographic change, where demographic depletion is rated as very likely in territorially disadvantaged areas, and a



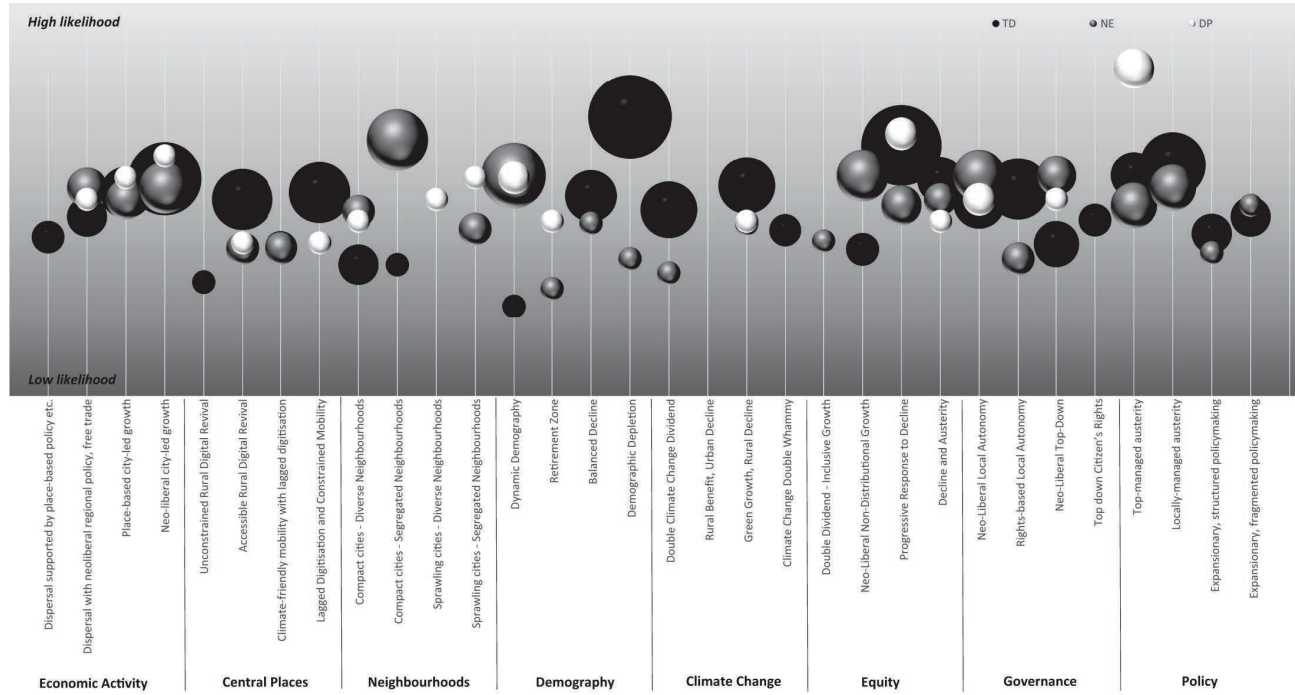


Figure 7.6 Likelihood of each state of each nexus of change for three types of spatial (in)justice

Source: Own elaboration



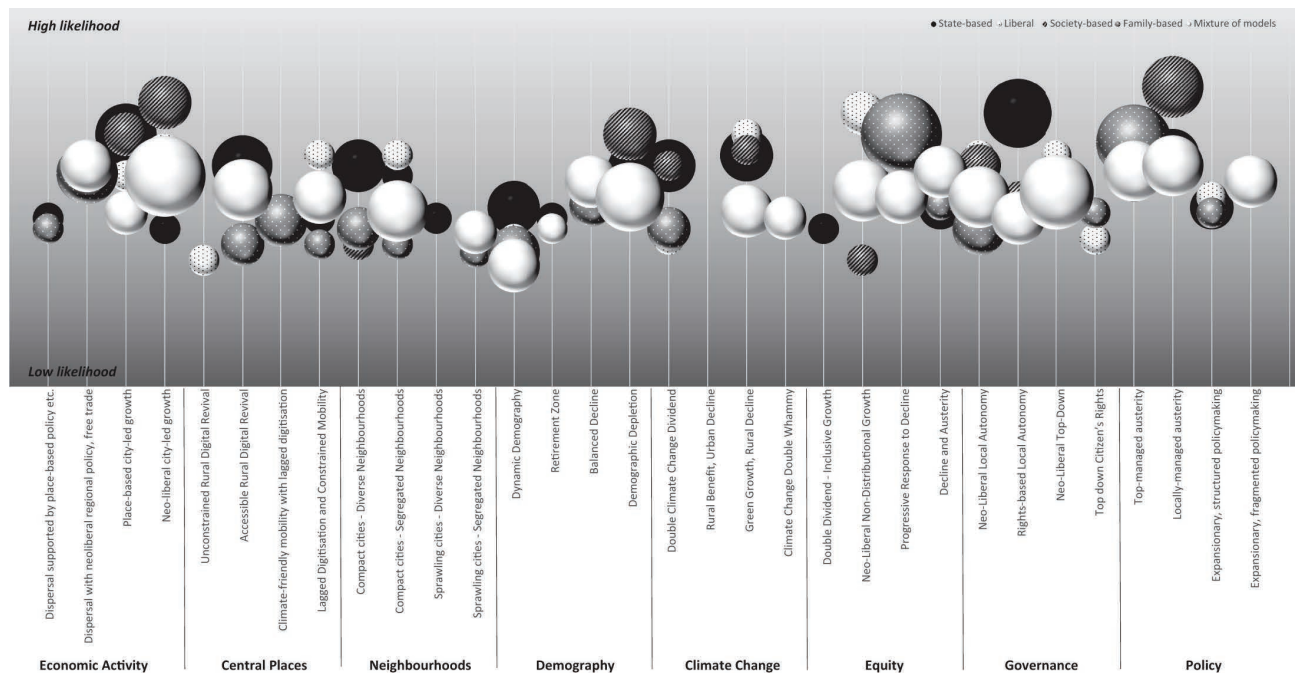


Figure 7.7 Likelihood of each state of each nexus of change for types of welfare regime

Source: Own elaboration



dynamic demography is rated as likely in areas affected by neighbourhood effects; (2) equity, where territorially disadvantaged areas and disempowered places see their future either in the scope of ‘progressive inclusion policies’ or in a negative scenario of ‘non-distributional policies and austerity’; and (3) policy, where analysts of the cases representing disempowered places agree that a state of ‘top-managed austerity’ (with a focus on financial stability and a renewed role of public institutions in elaborating holistic visions for the territory through broad policies) will be the most likely outcome by 2030 (Figure 7.6). Rural areas are clearly identified as losers in a 2030 scenario, while cities are identified as winners. However, the negative effects of overcrowding clearly emerge in the neighbourhood effects case studies. Therefore, by promoting a fairer distribution of the population, interventions promoting spatial justice are likely to generate a double dividend (Piras et al., 2020).

These results, combined with a second bubble chart illustrating the same step in the scenario exercise for different welfare systems in Europe, show that in the areas of mixed welfare regimes (countries undergoing socioeconomic transitions since the 1990s such as Poland, Romania, and Hungary) the directions of future changes are the most difficult to predict. As for the nexuses focusing on changing economic activity, politics, or administrative patterns, which still tend to be unstable in central Eastern Europe, at least three out of four states deriving from the intersection of trends were assessed as neither likely nor unlikely in 2030. In contrast, in areas representing the familiar welfare model, typical of countries in Southern Europe (the Spanish and Greek cases), experts were more confident about the future shape of equity and policymaking. The neoliberal growth paradigm sharpening spatial disparities in socioeconomic terms combined with demographic depletion was seen as likely in the Nordic countries’ society-based welfare models (the Finnish and Swedish cases). In these locations case study analysts were most confident about future policymaking, characterized by locally managed austerity resulting from contractionary fiscal policy, project-led development, and the decisive role of local institutions and NGOs. In state-based welfare systems (the German, Dutch, and French cases) different states within each nexus were rated as highly likely in the future, but in most cases, with some exceptions, there was one main indication. The nexuses where analysts were less sure about future changes were the direction of policymaking, climate change, demography, and neighbourhoods. Scenarios for the cases in the United Kingdom, representing the liberal welfare regime, seem almost certain. Analysts were almost unanimous in their choices of states. Perhaps unsurprisingly, experts often chose a state reflecting some element of neoliberalism, for example, ‘city-led neoliberal growth’ for economic activity, ‘neoliberal non-distributive growth’ for equity, and ‘neoliberal top-down growth’ for governance (Figure 7.7).

A more descriptive, but richer overview from pen pictures (scenario narratives) describing evolutionary paths to spatial justice in every case study area in 2030 reveals both spatial and non-spatial factors as important for



conditioning the development of these localities. These portraits provide a clear understanding of place-based and well-coordinated local development approaches to spatially just localities. Specifically, place-based human capital – exemplified by the demographic balance and the capacity of civil society to organize itself – was present in the great majority of case studies. The communication and coordination of activities between different administrative levels were also widely underlined as governance issues, as divisions of power often suffer from unclear responsibilities. According to these scenario narratives, there is a need for specific mechanisms enabling proper dialogue and coordination to connect local development strategies with strategies at higher governance scales. Regarding effective governance, to unlock development opportunities in areas affected by spatial injustice, there is strong potential for a single agency or intermediary actor (a local or regional leader) to combine and channel relevant resources into the area in pursuit of a long-term vision for its development. Innovative interactions are needed to deal with the non-spatial aspects of spatial injustice.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

The most plausible scenarios for 2030 that were defined for each of the 33 case study localities in 11 EU member states revealed a high degree of uncertainty, and with a few exceptions the outlook of the interventions designed to solve problems of local spatial injustice seems likely to be negatively affected by a neoliberal paradigm in planning strategies across Europe. There seems to be a strong country effect even within regions characterized by the same welfare regime. This reflects the country's economic potential and quality of institutions, confirming the importance of a place-based approach to effectively meet the spatial justice needs of a locality – and this within a coherent, higher-level plan and vision. Equally, top-down interventions seem to be based on assumptions that do not account for CC&D and are thus less effective in the long run. Bottom-up interventions prove more effective because they address specific local problems and are in a certain sense less ambitious, but the local capacity to act from the bottom up is highly dependent on pre-existing endowment, especially in terms of human and social capital. The importance of place-specificity for future trends is confirmed by the fact that a local nexus of change, uncaptured by more general trends, was identified in 29 out of 33 case studies. However, many of the interventions studied seemed to lack a well-considered intervention logic, or their underpinning logic was weak and failed to account for changing contextual conditions and drivers. Future EU projects might address such shortcomings, encouraging a more structured design and long-term strategies with such tools as mechanism mapping and scenario planning.

Three general conclusions arise from the exercise. First, the scenarios reveal a clear, though not universal, pessimism about the ability of place-based, bottom-up interventions to effectively deliver spatial justice within a



broader socioeconomic system shaped by a neoliberal paradigm. The current economic incentives perpetuate inequality of all kinds in terms of winners and losers, especially in rural areas and in locations that cannot benefit from the spill-over effects of wealthy urban centres, as well as in areas stigmatized for various reasons. The general ‘lesson’ is that to mitigate spatial injustices, policy goals must be decoupled from economic growth, especially in the context of population decline. The main mechanism identified through which spatial injustice is perpetuated is the concentration of resources in urban centres to the detriment of smaller settlements. Centralization is antithetical to place-based, bottom-up approaches, starving places of resources and agency. Equally, macrostructural deficiencies like tax differentials between municipalities are highly likely to hinder the effectiveness of local bottom-up initiatives. A radical paradigm shift from neoliberalism does not represent the most likely scenario in any case studies. However, without such a shift, agglomeration effects will continue to drive outward youth migration. The prevailing absence of national redistributive policies will prohibit the effective stabilization of areas affected by decline.

Second, the comparative exercise highlighted the need for a coordinated approach to governance, both vertically, in linking local development programmes with those at the regional, national, and EU levels, and horizontally, between institutions and other stakeholders. An intermediary agency or actor coordinating governance efforts would play an influential role in the longer term. Without this the power imbalances between hierarchies and the lack of joined-up strategy from silo to silo is likely to result in local measures, however promising, failing to be translated into policy, seeing hard-won gains subject to erosion, derailed because of political change, running out of funds, or failing to enrol successors. In some cases, there was optimism where integration was judged effective, and where a scenario of continuing spatial justice enhancement could be plausibly anticipated. However, the synopsis is that the existing interplay between structures is inadequate and ineffective. Third, there are also concerns around paradoxical disadvantages created in which effective measures in one place leave neighbouring villages or districts relatively poorer.

Drawing on the above findings, we can add some nuances to the paradigms identified in Copus et al. (2019):

1. Wellbeing can be improved by focusing on the built environment and open space, but this requires resources that may not be locally available in the most disadvantaged places.
2. Local development and wellbeing are contingent on endogenous processes rooted in community and social capital and are thus seriously threatened by population decline.
3. ‘Identity’ will become increasingly important both in the sense of attachment to a locality, which reinforces commitment and reduces depopulation,



and in the sense that it highlights the unique assets of the locality as a starting point for ‘placemaking’. However, the window of opportunity in this respect is narrowing due to many localities adopting similar strategies.

4. Human capital and the promotion of an entrepreneurial environment and innovation will become the primary strategy to improve local economic performance, but this implies competition between places: the long-term spread effects for surrounding localities are uncertain.
5. Administrative scale economies and cooperation may give greater weight to the voices of smaller localities and their administrations if the new entity is comparatively strong at the regional level. However, there is a risk of reproducing spatial inequalities at a lower level.

The lessons learned from this analysis can help design more effective future interventions addressing spatial injustice, and their planning in terms of integration, longevity, and succession. Coordinated governance approaches appear essential, as well as mutual trust, shared vision, and continued support, for future local development across administrative levels. Instead of viewing localities affected by territorial disadvantage, neighbourhood effects, or disempowered places only from a deficit-oriented perspective, their specific potentials also need some attention. They may be considered laboratories for experimental and innovative cross-sectoral policy interventions, actions promoting capacity building, and testing the potential of digital infrastructures and highly relevant services.

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## 8 The RELOCAL case studies approach

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### Introduction

Qualitative case studies formed the basis for knowledge generation in the RELOCAL project, which investigated relationships between the place-basedness of actions and their contribution to enhanced spatial justice. A total of 33 case studies were conducted, which on the one hand produced standalone and conclusive analytical reports, and on the other were themselves raw material that was processed further in more comprehensive and comparative analyses. This chapter reflects on RELOCAL's rationales and approach to comparative, multiple case-study-based research, offering concrete insights into the conceptual and methodological underpinnings of this major undertaking. We intend to share with the reader how we came to choose our set of particular localities and actions for study, and the solutions we found for balancing the obvious necessity for context sensitivity in our qualitative case studies with the need to compare them with more generalizable conclusions. The authors will also elaborate on RELOCAL's especially reflective and interactive approach, which guided the research process, focusing on how it was achieved, and the benefits it provided. Beyond these methodological aspects, this chapter sheds light on the similarities of and differences between the cases in our sample along various parameters, providing context and orientation for detailed analyses of selected actions in this book's subsequent chapters.

### Conceptual underpinnings and analytical tools of the RELOCAL approach facilitating comparison

In comparative case study research we find a variety of concepts, from concrete empirical findings to more abstract conclusions (Kantor and Savitch, 2005; Nijman, 2007; Ward, 2008). Some approaches 'measure' different cases against predefined categories or hypotheses. In a study of spatial justice, territorial cohesion, and local development this would require a definition of spatial justice, and an explanation of the character and nature of territorial cohesion. As many publications have observed, territorial cohesion is a



somewhat fuzzy concept, and its essentials are difficult to define (Abrahams, 2014; Faludi, 2005). It is easier to describe what it aims for: namely, more balanced territorial development and the reduction of territorial disparities. The same applies to the concept of spatial justice, which can be minimally defined as ‘an intentional and focused emphasis on the spatial or geographical aspects of justice and injustice’ (Soja, 2009: 4), but likewise for which a single normative narrative does not exist (Israel and Frenkel, 2017: 651). Rather than ‘measuring’ cases against (researchers’) predefined concepts of spatial justice, the RELOCAL approach was to analyse and understand the different manifestations of spatial (in)justice in the given contexts, as perceived by various local development stakeholders within and external to the examined localities. The researchers’ aim was therefore to analyse, using a process-oriented approach, the factors behind these interpretations and manifestations of spatial injustice, and assess the local development action’s contribution and impact accordingly.

The conceptual frame for this assessment builds on the work of Madanipour et al. (2017), which targets ‘resituating the local in cohesion and territorial development’, and hence their conceptualization of locality and spatial justice. This is also elaborated in more depth by Schmitt and Weck (in Chapter 4 of this book). Madanipour and his colleagues develop a spatial ontology that situates empirical work on localities in terms of places where the challenges of and responses to spatial justice can be understood. They also provide a relational epistemology, defining justice ‘as a comparative concept: it is a process of judgement on the quality of relations [in a locality] between two or more states of affairs’ (Madanipour et al., this volume). Finally, the authors suggest an analysis of localities as in themselves both heterogeneous and porous in their boundaries, that is, situated ‘at the intersection of vertical, horizontal and transversal forces’ (Madanipour et al., this volume). Such a conceptual framework suggests an inductive research approach to comparative case study work.

RELOCAL’s in-depth and qualitative approach in the investigation of 33 somewhat diverse cases meant that to produce generalizable findings, the project needed to implement a consistent and cohesive methodological framework running across the research process, from selecting cases and gathering data to the composition of individual analytical reports and the production of various comparative syntheses. At the heart of such a methodological solution was a set of key common analytical categories defined early in RELOCAL that arose from the conceptual framework, and to which all case study researchers were to respond with their data collection and eventual analyses of the investigated local development actions. The empirical research was thus from the outset guided by *five analytical dimensions* along which the assessment of the complex relationships and processes between ‘the locality’ and ‘the action’ across a diversity of 33 case studies could be addressed. Additionally, *three synthesizing dimensions* emerged that could



more directly facilitate lesson drawing, broader interpretation, and reflection on the findings concerning the capacities for change to improved spatial justice (see Figure 8.1).

The guidelines for researchers allowed some flexibility in adapting the project’s list of guiding research questions to the specificities of local contexts and situations. Importantly, we avoided predefined concepts or normative assumptions, asking researchers to remain critical in their interpretation of findings. For example, concepts such as ‘vertical policy integration’ and ‘citizen participation’ are culturally bound: their meanings vary from place to place. Instead, we defined such key terms in their characteristics and asked case study researchers for critical analyses and assessments in specific contexts. In a similar vein, the term ‘spatial justice’ may evoke very different connotations and overlaps with a diversity of concepts in different national contexts. In some countries (reported for Hungary and Sweden), spatial justice is perceived as politically loaded and hence even avoided by using more technical terms instead, such as regional inequalities or territorial differences. As no clear ‘functional equivalent’ of spatial justice is easily translatable to different national languages and contexts, the RELOCAL researchers were asked to seek alternative terms to use with their respective research participants and reflect on their meaning.

	Analytical and Synthesizing Dimensions	Analytical Key Categories	
<div><div>The Locality</div><div>The Action</div><div>Capacities for Change</div></div>	Analytical Dimension 1: Perception of spatial (in)justice	Perceived geography ('map') and perceived space ('place')	
		Production of space	
		Social and spatial boundaries (boundary-making)	
		Development trajectory	
		Perception of impact (stakeholders' views on implemented policies/actions)	
	Analytical Dimension 2: Tools and policies for development and cohesion	Stakeholders' perceptions of policy choices	
		Analytical Dimension 3: Coordination and implementation of action	Decision-making capacity
			Distribution power
			Modes of leadership
		Analytical Dimension 4: Autonomy, participation and engagement	Structures of coordination
Analytical Dimension 5: Local knowledge and adaptability	Accountability		
	Legitimacy		
	Scope of participation and engagement		
	Transparency		
	Place-based knowledge		
	Organisation/individual learning		
	Scope of flexibility and adaptability		
	Synthesising Dimension A: Assessment of promoters and inhibitors	Identification and assessment of promoters and inhibitors	
Formal and informal empowerment			
Potential for localised action			
Synthesising Dimension B: Competences and capacities of stakeholders	Achievement over time and across space		
	Synthesising Dimension C: Connecting the action to spatial (in)justice	Evaluation and impact on the locality and factors shaping the impact	

Figure 8.1 Research dimensions and analytical categories.

Source: Authors’ own elaboration based on RELOCAL Case Study Manual; see also Weck and Kamuf, 2020



### The selection of the cases and the implementation of the analytical framework in fieldwork

Our premise was to seek to achieve a good representation of cases, at least with regard to different welfare regimes and various macro-regions across Europe, as well as a diverse mix of urban and rural settings. The selection of cases was then furthered by the work on the aforementioned conceptual-analytical dimensions and key variables for explaining the role of the local in achieving spatial justice. As a result, a RELOCAL case was defined as *an approach or action to deliver spatial justice – embodied by a policy, project, or initiative implemented in a locality that aims to achieve a fairer or more just distribution of goods and services via more equal opportunities and just processes, which ultimately bring about such a fairer distribution*. The chosen action was expected to have an identifiable impact on the locality (in contrast to a purely conceptual idea or short-term action), and possibly be part of a longer-term strategy or vision of stakeholders in the locality to improve living conditions and achieve more balanced and sustainable development. It could be an action initiated by local communities, or a policy-driven action initiated by governmental or non-governmental organizations, but shaped or influenced by the local community.

The final list, comprising 33 cases, is shown in Table 8.1. The RELOCAL project organized several instances of collective learning, critical reflection on the research approach, and thinking across different cases (some of these also engaged research participants, ‘stakeholders’ of the localities – see more

Table 8.1 The RELOCAL cases in predominantly rural/urban regions

<i>Predominantly rural</i>	<i>Close to urban-central regions</i>
(DE 1) Smart Countryside	(EL 4) Alexander Innovation Zone
DE 2) Görlitz Youth Centre	(EL 5) Overcoming Fragmentation
(EL 3) Post-Mining Regional Strategy	(ES 7) Local Strategic Plan
(EL 6) Ecosystem of Collaboration	(ES 8) Llei de Barris
<b>(FI 11) Lieksa Development Strategy</b>	(ES 9) La Mina Transformation Plan
(HU 13) Give Kids a Chance	(ES 10) Association of Municipalities
(HU 15) Producer Organization	(FI 12) Activation of Youth Kotka
<b>(HU 16) Balaton LEADER</b>	(HU 14) Urban Regeneration
(NL 19) Induced Earthquakes	<b>(FR 17) Euralens</b>
(PL 23) Goth Village	<b>(FR 18) EPA Alzette-Belval</b>
(PL 24) Rural Public Spaces	(NL 20) Rotterdam South on Course
<b>(RO 26) Mara-Natur LEADER</b>	(PL 21) Participatory Budget Lodz
<b>(SE 29) Digital Västerbotten</b>	(PL 22) Social Cooperative
<b>(UK 31) NULAG LEADER</b>	(RO 25) Pata Cluj Project
(UK 33) Strengthening Communities	(RO 27) Malin-Codlea Project
	(RO 28) Plumbuita PIDU
	<b>(SE 30) Stockholm Commission</b>
	<b>(UK 32) Homelessness Project</b>

Bold: Actions that are analysed in detail in the book's subsequent chapters.



on this below). This reflective process started with the selection of cases. The RELOCAL consortium developed guidelines for choosing cases in the national context, as described earlier, along a set of minimum criteria. The more than 50 candidate cases for in-depth research that were most promising with regard to the RELOCAL project's overall research question were then jointly discussed among case study researchers to narrow them down to a total of 33 cases. First, eight were launched as pilot case studies to 'test' the guidelines (formed around the aforementioned key analytical dimensions), namely, to see whether and how well the case study reports would respond to our research interests. A mid-term workshop also peer reviewed case study reports within the consortium, which not only helped sharpen the analysis of single cases but also led to some initial insights into singularities and commonalities across cases.

The concrete fieldwork (data collection) methods could be decided by the national case study research teams. This allowed context sensitivity. The formulation of the RELOCAL case study guidelines (the RELOCAL 'Manual') was a joint venture taking up several months, and it offered considerable flexibility for researchers to conduct their fieldwork and adapt their empirical approach to the conditions of their respective cases. The guidelines defined empirical minimum requirements, guiding questions, and a toolbox, but the actual tools of empirical investigation were adapted to the individual contexts.

Thus, instead of relying on a universal fieldwork protocol, a stringent common analytical framework was first co-created and then enforced. It elaborated the analytical dimensions and key categories, for example, for lists of potentially relevant themes and questions to draw from in conducting interviews, focus groups, and so on, which helped ensure comparable insights across multiple cases. This differs markedly from approaches working with standardized questionnaires or standardized toolboxes – whose application we saw as problematic across different cultural or national contexts. Further rationales were RELOCAL's explicit interest in constructing (rather than assuming) the governance/power contexts of place-based actions, its relational understanding of localities and spatial justice, being curious about various perceptions, as well as the focus on explaining processes instead of measuring variation among cases. Obviously, such an approach does bear some risks and pose some challenges in a large and interdisciplinary consortium composed of differently trained researchers, who may need a gentle push to go beyond their own comfort zones and experiment with new things. Yet it ultimately proved to work well in our project due to feedback loops and joint learning processes.

### **Interaction with stakeholders during case study research**

Another key feature of the RELOCAL approach was the inclusion of stakeholders in reflective and learning processes. As we emphasize earlier, the RELOCAL research relied largely on a qualitative methodology to analyse



the *experiences, perceptions, relationships, and processes* concerning spatial justice and actions for its enhancement (framed under the key analytical dimensions and categories mentioned earlier). Interacting with various types of stakeholders at different stages of the research process, and not merely for purposes of data collection, therefore came naturally: for example, concerning key concepts, research objectives, the delineation of cases, and to validate the enquiries and exchange of views about the preliminary findings. Most research participants were regarded as relevant stakeholders, because they represented various segments and interests in local communities, including vulnerable groups themselves in need of improved spatial justice, but also local-, regional-, national-, and EU-level decision-makers, officials, and politicians whose work was linked to implementing cohesion policies. Thus, each of RELOCAL's qualitative case studies involved several formal expert interviews, as well as informal exchanges paired with onsite observation walks and other ethnographic data collection methods. To receive and contrast various perspectives and perceptions, interactions with some of the stakeholders were required to be continuous or recurrent. The case study teams therefore invited some of their expert interviewees to focus group discussions, in which they addressed further questions with them individually and discussed the initial findings. Figure 8.2 shows that the inclusion of stakeholders in the

	Phase 1 'Mutual introduction' and building co-ownership of the research	Phase 2 Data collection, validation of interim results, scenario building	Phase 3 Validation of findings, dissemination and impact maximisation
EUROPEAN stakeholders: Cohesion Policy experts, policy makers, EU-level organisations		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy seminars (two in total)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two thematic policy webinars and a Final Policy Conference, discussing findings with the participation of stakeholders from all policy levels (presenting multi-level policy considerations)</li> </ul>
NATIONAL (REGIONAL) stakeholders: Mainly policy makers, CP experts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mapping action space, valorising questions and approaches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3-4 interviews per national context</li> <li>taking part in relevant national/regional stakeholder events</li> </ul>	
LOCAL (REGIONAL) stakeholders: from all sectors (public, civil and private)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3-5 interviews or a group interview per case study location (mapping the action field and power relations)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On average 20 interviews per case study locality, potentially complemented with surveys</li> <li>Focus group discussions (one per case)</li> <li>Taking part in existing local stakeholder events where possible</li> </ul>	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mixed (cross-sector) stakeholder forums for discussing (draft) case study reports an scenarios (at least one per welfare regime)</li> </ul>	

Figure 8.2 Three phases, scales, tools, and purposes of stakeholder inclusion in RELOCAL

Source: the authors' own elaboration. Note: numbers indicate average situations. The picture is more diverse: for example, the average number of interviews at the local level includes some extremes (two case studies with more than 50 interviews, and five with less than 10). In total, more than 700 expert interviews were conducted in RELOCAL.



research process occurred on a continuous basis, for several purposes, and using a diversity of methods and forums on multiple scales of governance, but most intensively at the local-regional level.

### **The RELOCAL sample**

Table 8.1 shows the RELOCAL case study list. From the outset RELOCAL's basic premise has been that the local is a well-chosen entry point for understanding current challenges of spatial (in)justice in different contexts across Europe, and at the same time for analysing how fairness and spatial justice can be promoted through policies addressing cohesion and spatial justice. Such an emphasis on local needs and local opportunities is very much in line with place-based interventions as a widely discussed policy tool, approach, and philosophy in the reform of European territorial cohesion policy (Barca, 2009; Barca et al., 2012). Place-based policies stand for a new way for local needs and opportunities to be better considered in higher-level development strategies. Policies 'must be tailored to places, since it largely depends on the knowledge and preferences of people living in it' (Barca, 2009: 6) to overcome place-specific problems of equity and efficiency, and promote truly integrated interventions. The overall hypothesis to be tested, based on the empirical and analytical findings in the RELOCAL project, was whether and to what extent a place-based approach would be able to better promote spatial justice in localities and beyond, across time and space.

According to the RELOCAL definition, localities could range from regions to city neighbourhoods and from towns to a set of villages. Importantly, we did not see localities as static territorial units but as multifarious and porous, at the intersection of vertical, horizontal, and transversal forces (Madanipour et al., 2017: 79). Localities were the starting point for our investigation of local perceptions and challenges and the empirical analysis of policies, including the multiple territorial and governance levels they comprise, or in which they are embedded (i.e. European, national, regional, small-area, local community).

### *The degree and type of spatial injustice*

Indeed, the RELOCAL case study sample comprises a diverse set of localities, for example, in terms of the degree and type of spatial injustice (disadvantage) they face. A smaller number of five actions are situated in localities that are not considered or perceived to be disadvantaged in a national context according to overall socioeconomic indicators, such as the Stockholm case (SE30), two of the Hungarian cases (HU15, HU16), and one each of the Spanish and Greek cases (EL4, ES10). Nevertheless, there are large internal disparities within the chosen (city) region (SE30, HU16) or local challenges masked by the average figures for the overall statistical picture.



As intended, most of the localities (N=28) are characterized by obvious challenges of spatial justice, according to the assessment of case study research teams, and are either disadvantaged within a wider underdeveloped region (N=11) or situated in interstitial spaces within a developed region (N=13) or a developed city (N=4) (see Weck et al., 2020: 13–15). In describing these *challenges of spatial justice*, we mainly rely on local knowledge and perceptions arising from interviews and focus group discussions with local stakeholders. The most frequently mentioned local challenges were the following (ibid., p. 35):

- demographic decline and/or the outmigration of mainly young people (19 out of 33, most prevalent for rural regions);
- segregation (14 out of 33, in the urban context, including informal housing);
- the need for administrative cooperation (14 out of 33, named as challenges for towns close to cities, but also in rural regions), as well as
- a negative (external) reputation of the locality, named in 15 out of the 33 cases.

Localities must often deal with multiple challenges, and in many cases, the multifarious nature of spatial injustices requires complex policy responses.

#### *‘Bottom-up’ or ‘top-down’ actions*

Policy interventions may be place-based, regardless of whether they are initiated locally. Thus, concerning the investigated ‘actions’ (as a wider term for a local or localized policy, initiative, or project for achieving more spatial justice in the locality), RELOCAL researchers looked for both locally initiated (bottom-up) and higher policy-level initiated but localized actions (i.e. adapted to local communities’ specific needs and priorities). The aim was to investigate cases which are shaped, influenced, or initiated by local communities. Ultimately, a detailed analysis indicated that some of the actions that had been chosen because of their supposed place-based approach proved to be less so. Eventually, nearly half our sample (16 out of 33) was identified as basically ‘top-down’ actions, initiated by higher policy levels (such as the national government), and with very limited involvement of civil society in their design and implementation (see Figure 8.3). Moreover, a diverse group of cases shows a mixture of top-down and bottom-up elements – for example, featuring top-down aspects that truly enable or involve bottom-up initiative and participation. Nevertheless, a closer examination of the decision-making structures and an analysis of analytical categories such as the action’s leadership, distribution of power, engagement and participation, and accountability (see Figure 6.1) revealed flaws in the level and extent to which local communities could actually have a say in the design and implementation of the actions.



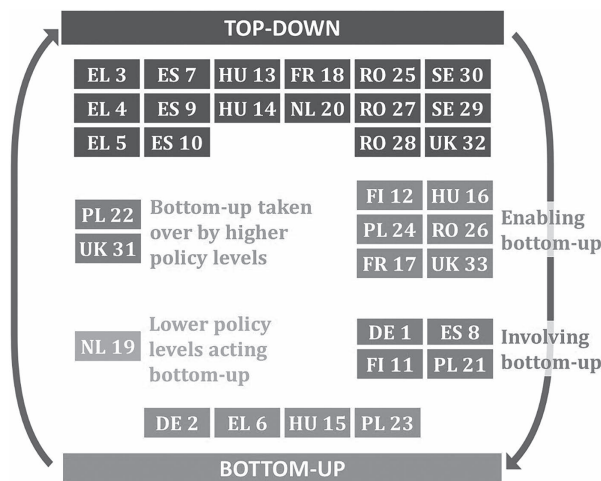


Figure 8.3 Top-down versus bottom-up types of action

Source: Weck et al., 2020: 25

### *The rural-urban dimension*

The previous section emphasized some similarities and distinctions across all the cases. In light of the following chapters, which provide a detailed analysis of selected cases, we now wish to provide some background information about the predominantly rural versus predominantly urban cases in our sample. Rural versus urban is an admittedly simplistic concept in European societies with converging lifestyles and manifold urban-rural flows and interconnections. Nevertheless, some territorial challenges are specific to or more prevalent in rural areas, such as issues of access (to job or qualification opportunities) – and specifically, if rurality meets a low population density or a peripheral location.

Roughly half of our cases, 15 out of 33, are located in predominantly rural regions, as Table 8.1 indicates. Small towns in a wider rural region, such as the Finnish town of Lieksa (FI 11), also fall into this category. Many of the rural case studies, specifically those located peripherally in the national context, face processes of demographic decline, ageing, and the outmigration of young and economically active population groups. Often in close association with these unfavourable tendencies are declining infrastructures and service provision. These processes need to be set in the context of a dominant discourse and political agency in many European countries which favour investments in metropolitan areas as part of the growth and innovation agenda of recent decades. In relation to the increasing attractiveness of metropolitan regions in terms of jobs, networking, qualification opportunities, and cultural amenities, rural places are challenged to maintain stable development.



In some European countries, national rural policies which specifically seek to enhance the quality of life, attractiveness, and opportunities in rural areas (e.g. through digitalization policies) have therefore gained attention in recent years. This is evidenced by the German Federal Commission for the Equivalence of Living Conditions, 2018–2019, and the new Swedish tax resources redistribution and equalization system favouring rural regions, which came into effect in 2020. Furthermore, European funding instruments, and specifically the now long-established LEADER and the related Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) approaches, have helped rural communities develop integrated place-based visions and development strategies, based on territorial assets and potential. Among our sample five of the investigated rural cases are directly financed by LEADER, but the LEADER/CLLD principles have had a wider impact on local development approaches, including on urban development approaches (see the case of Kotka, FI 12). The LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGS) of the Northumberland Uplands (UK), Balaton Uplands (HU), and Mara-Natur (RO) are analysed in more detail in this book.

Although there are commonalities among rural areas, they also differ greatly in their economic and demographic stability. This is visible not only within the sample but also within some case study localities. The Swedish region of Västerbotten (SE 29) is a good example, because on the whole its population has increased in recent years, although there are huge differences between its coastal and inland municipalities. There are thus rural cases with quite a resilient economic and/or population base (DE 1, SE 29, PL 23), and others which are struggling with economic decline and high unemployment (EL 3, RO 26, EL 6, HU 13, PL 23, PL 24).

Expert interviews and focus group discussions provided invaluable insights into the reality on the ground, in parallel with statistical accounts: how local stakeholders see and perceive policy developments in their regions; how they relate the local trajectory to wider developments; and how they perceive the potential and limitations of greater local autonomy. The perception of ‘being left behind’ – a view that one’s locality or region has become politically, but also (and often as a consequence) materially and (re)distributionally, peripheral – is evident in both shrinking rural and deindustrialized urban places, as is the case of Nord-Pas-de-Calais (FR17) and partly the Lorraine region (FR18). This both concerns the unequal distribution of opportunity structures, investment, and infrastructure, as well as power relations and a sense of lacking capacity and opportunity to influence local development agendas, not to mention wider regional or national development discourses. Negative external images may become internalized by the local population and lead to frustration, uncertainty, low trust in established government institutions, lack of self-esteem, and so on (see the debate on ‘geographies of discontent’, Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Dijkstra et al., 2018).

This vicious circle calls for new policy approaches and above all long-term strategies to rebuild trust in governing institutions, and overcome widespread anxiety and frustration. In the urban context segregation and



the concentration of disadvantaged population groups are among the most challenging problems. Approaches targeted at places of concentrated disadvantage and neighbourhood regeneration thus form an important action cluster for the urban cases in the RELOCAL sample. This refers to intra-urban inequalities in metropolitan areas – such as the cases of London (UK 32) and Stockholm (SE 30) analysed in more detail in this book – as well as smaller towns in our sample (see DE 2, ES 8, ES 9, HU 14). Integrated neighbourhood development, in the tradition of the former URBAN programme and the urban dimension in EU structural funds, has become a major political aim in many localities, with detailed accounts from the RELOCAL cases about critical factors shaping a truly integrated development approach, specifically with regard to

- political-administrative settings for integrated, place-based actions and supportive multi-level governance structures backing the local approaches (see DE 2, ES 9, HU 13, HU 14, NL 20, RO 25, RO 27, RO 28, UK 32),
- the importance of flexibility in the implementation of neighbourhood schemes (ES 8, RO 28), and sufficiently long and stable financing for achieving (social) aims (see ES 8, ES 9, HU 13, NL 20, RO 27, RO 28).

## Conclusion

This chapter has explained the RELOCAL conceptual and methodological approach to case study research. In recent years there has been a huge increase in comparative case study research, not least in those projects commissioned by the European Union within the framework of the European research and innovation programmes. In the context of the RELOCAL project – dealing with the future role of localities, places, and communities in contributing to social justice and cohesion in Europe – case study research was a deliberately chosen research strategy to allow for deep and holistic insights into the spatial justice challenges of different localities and the potential of place-based actions to deliver more just outcomes.

The implication was a rather ambitious research design. Fieldwork concerning 33 cases followed a common timetable, and information from them was processed by the individual teams following a shared analytical framework. Data collection was undertaken at various levels of governance, and in-depth interviews were combined with engaging stakeholder interaction processes. Case study research compared and combined external knowledge about the place with internal (community) accounts and local knowledge, and statistical records with often rather diverse perceptions of local stakeholders. Expert interviews, focus group discussions, small user surveys, and ethnographic research methods, alongside document analysis and secondary data analysis, were thus the main empirical sources for understanding the challenges of injustice and exploring place-based capacities to cope with



Table 8.2 Annex: List of RELOCAL case studies and report authors

	<i>Action/Title</i>	<i>Authors</i>
DE 1	Smart Countryside Ostwestfalen-Lippe Digitalization as a Tool to Promote Civic Engagement in Rural Villages, Germany	Felix Leo Matzke, Viktoria Kamuf, Sabine Weck (ILS Dortmund)
DE 2	Local Youth as Urban Development Actors the Establishment of a Centre for Youth and Socioculture in Görlitz, Germany	Viktoria Kamuf, Felix Leo Matzke, Sabine Weck (ILS Dortmund)
EL 3	A Post-Mining Regional Strategy for Western Macedonia, Greece	George Petrakos, Lefteris Topaloglou, Aggeliki Anagnostou, Victor Cupcea (UTH Research Team)
EL 4	The Establishment of the Alexander Innovation Zone in the Metropolitan Area of Thessaloniki, Greece	George Petrakos, Lefteris Topaloglou, Aggeliki Anagnostou, Victor Cupcea (UTH Research Team)
EL 5	Overcoming Fragmentation in Territorial Governance: The Case of Volos, Greece	George Petrakos, Lefteris Topaloglou, Aggeliki Anagnostou, Victor Cupcea, Vasiliki Papadaniil (UTH Research Team)
EL 6	Karditsa's Ecosystem of Collaboration, Greece	George Petrakos, Lefteris Topaloglou, Aggeliki Anagnostou, Victor Cupcea (UTH Research Team)
ES 7	Monistrol 2020. Local Strategic Plan in a Small-Scale Municipality, Spain	Andreu Ulied, Oriol Biosca, Marite Guevara, Laura Noguera (MCRIT – Multicriteria)
ES 8	Transformation Plan for La Mina Neighbourhood in Barcelona Metropolitan Region, Spain	Andreu Ulied, Oriol Biosca, Rafa Rodrigo, Laura Noguera (MCRIT – Multicriteria)
ES 9	Llei de Barris in Premià de Dalt Action Plan for the Promotion of Quality of Life in a Segregated Neighbourhood, Spain	Andreu Ulied, Oriol Biosca, Rafa Rodrigo, Sally Guzmán, Laura Noguera (MCRIT – Multicriteria)
ES 10	Eix de la Riera de Caldes Association of Municipalities for a Coordinated Local Development, Spain	Andreu Ulied, Oriol Biosca, Albert Solé, Laura Noguera (MCRIT – Multicriteria)
FI 11	Liekka Development Strategy 2030, Finland	Matti Fritsch, Patrik Hämäläinen, Petri Kahila, Sarolta Németh (University of Eastern Finland)
FI 12	Civil-Action-Based Local Initiative for the Activation of Youth in the City of Kotka, Finland	Matti Fritsch, Patrik Hämäläinen, Petri Kahila, Sarolta Németh (University of Eastern Finland)

(Continued)



Table 8.2 (Continued)

	<i>Action/Title</i>	<i>Authors</i>
HU 13	Give Kids a Chance: Spatial Injustice of Child Welfare at the Peripheries: The Case of Encs, Hungary	Judit Keller, Tünde Virág (Centre for Economic and Regional Studies HAS Budapest)
HU 14	György-telep. Ten Years of Urban Regeneration in a Poor Neighbourhood, Hungary	Csaba Jelinek, Tünde Virág (Centre for Economic and Regional Studies HAS Budapest)
HU 15	Can a Producer Organization prevent Mass Pauperization? An Example from Hungary	Katalin Kovács, Melinda Mihály, Katalin Rácz, Gábor Velkey (Centre for Economic and Regional Studies HAS Budapest)
HU 16	The Balaton Uplands. LEADER Local Action Group, Hungary	Katalin Kovács and Gusztáv Nemes (Centre for Economic and Regional Studies HAS Budapest)
FR 17	Euralens. An Innovative Local Tool to Redevelop Pas-de-Calais Former Mining Basin? France	Cyril Blondel (University of Luxembourg)
FR 18	The EPA Alzette-Belval. A National Tool to Address Spatial Disparities at the Lorraine-Luxembourg Border, France – Luxembourg	Estelle Evrard (University of Luxembourg)
NL 19	Northeast Groningen. Confronting the Impact of Induced Earthquakes, Netherlands	Jan Jacob Trip, Arie Romein (Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment – Delft University of Technology)
NL 20	National Programme Rotterdam South. Neighbourhood Development in a Large Deprived Urban Area, Netherlands	Kees Dol, Joris Hoekstra, Reinout Kleinhans (Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment – Delft University of Technology)
PL 21	The Participatory Budget for Lodz, Poland	Karolina Dmochowska-Dudek, Tomasz Napierała, Paulina Tobiasz-Lis, Marcin Wójcik (University of Lodz)
PL 22	Communal Service. A Social Cooperative as Part of a Local Revitalization Program in Brzeziny, Poland	Pamela Jeziorska-Biel, Anna Janiszewska, Marcin Wójcik, Karolina-Dmochowska-Dudek, Paulina Tobiasz-Lis, Tomasz Napierała (University of Lodz)
PL 23	A Thematic Village in Maslomecz as an Anchor for New Local Identity and Multifunctional Development of Rural Areas, Poland	Paulina Tobiasz-Lis, Karolina Dmochowska-Dudek, Marcin Wójcik, Pamela Jeziorska-Biel, Tomasz Napierała, Anna Janiszewska (University of Lodz)
PL 24	The Development of Rural Public Places in the Villages of Domachowo, Potarzyce, and Stara Krobia, Poland	Pamela Jeziorska-Biel, Anna Janiszewska, Marcin Wójcik, Karolina-Dmochowska-Dudek, Paulina Tobiasz-Lis, Tomasz Napierała (University of Lodz)



	<i>Action/Title</i>	<i>Authors</i>
RO 25	The Pata Cluj Project Residential Desegregation of the Landfill Area of Cluj-Napoca, Romania	Cristina Elena Bădiță, Enikő Vincze (Foundation Desire for Social Reflection and Openness)
RO 26	Micro-Regional Association Mara-Natur in Maramures County, Romania	George Iulian Zamfir (Foundation Desire for Social Reflection and Openness)
RO 27	Mălin-Codlea Legalization of an Informal Settlement in Braşov County, Romania	Iulia-Elena Hossu, Enikő Vincze (Foundation Desire for Social Reflection and Openness)
RO 28	Plumbuita PIDU: Regenerating a Micro-Urban Area in Bucharest, Romania	Ioana Vrabiescu (Foundation Desire for Social Reflection and Openness)
SE 29	Digital Västerbotten: Promoting Equal Standards of Living for Inland Municipalities through Digital Technologies, Sweden	Linnea Löfving, Gustaf Norlén, Timothy Heleniak (NORDREGIO)
SE 30	The Stockholm Commission. Measures for an Equal and Socially Sustainable City, Sweden	Thomas Borén (University of Stockholm)
UK 31	The Northumberland Uplands Local Action Group (NULAG) LEADER in Sparsely Populated Northern England, United Kingdom	Elizabeth Brooks, Mark Shucksmith, Ali Madanipour (University of Newcastle)
UK 32	Homelessness Project in Lewisham, Borough of London, United Kingdom	Elizabeth Brooks, Ali Madanipour, Mark Shucksmith (University of Newcastle)
UK 33	Strengthening Communities on the Isle of Lewis in the Western Isles, United Kingdom	Margaret Currie, Annabel Pinker, Andrew Copus (The James Hutton Institute)

them. Cumulative learning based on insights from the single cases and gaining a wider knowledge of the research questions were supported by the conceptual foundations and a consistent methodological-analytical framework running through the entire research process.

To accomplish all this, the extensive and diverse international and interdisciplinary research partnership that constituted RELOCAL had to be brought together in a four-year common learning process, based on iterative critical reflection on the approach and methods used and results obtained. Reflectiveness, a necessary and highly beneficial strategy used in RELOCAL, spanned the conceptualization and formulation of analytical tools and the case study sample through their piloting to prepare better for empirical challenges, to the monitoring and evaluation of the methods used during actual fieldwork and the outlining of the analyses. All these critical contemplations involved all the case study research teams, whose feedback and insights were jointly processed



and incorporated to solve problems and eventually improve the quality of research outputs. While the data collection methods listed earlier were offered to more than forced on researchers investigating diverse actions and contexts, a set of minimum criteria was fulfilled in most of the 33 case studies; where some aspects of fieldwork could not be fully realized, alternatives were sought by consulting peers. Coordinating this work meant balancing trust in the researchers' own knowledge and judgement of the cultural, political, and other contexts and fitting methods of investigation on the one hand, and an articulate control mechanism based on peer reviews and the deployment of a relatively strict analytical framework on the other, which ensured the required depth and some comparability of the ensuing analyses. In turn, this could only be achieved through continuous and effectively steered communication and interactions between researchers, as well as with stakeholder groups. Such reflectiveness is not a standard approach in case study research, and we hope that RELOCAL's example will help others in their own positioning and design of comparative and qualitative case study research.

Case study research has allowed the identification of 'generative mechanisms' at work in a variety of European contexts. It has also allowed the identification of generators and inhibitors of place-based approaches (see Chapter 15). It was also revealed that while there were distinctive forms of injustice that were likely to be reported by local stakeholders in urban localities (e.g. segregation) and in rural areas (e.g. issues of access, outmigration, and ageing), there was not necessarily or always a predictable link at the same time between territorial type (urban or rural) and perceived forms of injustice – or between material conditions in a case study locality and reported challenges. In the following chapters, such ambiguities and other interesting observations are shared, while familiarizing the reader with genuine realities of particular local contexts and their actions implemented to combat spatial injustices.

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## Part 3

# Urban case studies





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## 9 Innovation and governance to halt urban fragmentation

### The case of the Commission for a Socially Sustainable Stockholm

*Thomas Borén*

#### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Throughout Europe and beyond, many cities are experiencing the fragmenting effects of social polarization, leading to segregation, substantial pockets of poverty, increased conflict, and social unrest (and in some cases violent protests and riots, see Dikeç, 2017). There is a dire need across cities and countries to find ways out of this situation. Successful examples of how complex organizations like cities can start to address growing inequalities are essential to increase understanding of how urban place-based approaches (cf. Barca, 2009; Barca et al., 2012) may work (or not) in practice. The Commission for a Socially Sustainable Stockholm (hereafter, the Commission), which is analysed in this chapter, may be regarded as an experimental and knowledge-intensive local development project instituted to innovate and develop new governance practices that should empower the city to start addressing these issues. This chapter thus contributes an example and an analysis of how cities can locally mobilize to tackle issues of inequality and spatial justice. In some respects, the Commission must be regarded as a success, especially given its fast and grounded production of suggestions for change that the city could start to implement immediately. Moreover, whereas many of the concrete outcomes of the Commission are place-specific to Stockholm, the general features of how it organized the work may be transferable to other places. The Commission can thus exemplify ‘good practice’ for how a city can start addressing urban inequalities.

Stockholm, the capital of Sweden, is largely known as a prime example of an internationally successful and competitive city, structured around a high-cost, innovation-driven economy. Yet it is also a very socially, economically, and ethnically segregated city, with severe problems around exclusion, the rule of law, and poverty in several neighbourhoods (Polisen, 2017; Stockholms Stad, 2015; Stahre, 2014). As in many capital regions in Europe and beyond, segregation is deepening, but the process ‘is especially fast in Stockholm’ (Andersson, 2017: 3). In 2014, after eight years of centre-right rule, Stockholm city council gained a new leftist majority that decided to



do something about the growing inequalities between people and between neighbourhoods. In 2013, the year before the elections in 2014, the city's experience of unprecedented riots was an important wake-up call and trigger for initiating change to become a more equal city (Ince et al., 2021). Moreover, after the elections, it was stated that one of the city's four directive objectives (*inriktningsmål*) until 2018 was that Stockholm should be an integrated (*sammanhållen*) city.

As one important measure to achieve this goal, the city created the 'Commission for a Socially Sustainable Stockholm' (*Kommissionen för ett socialt hållbart Stockholm*). The work and organization of the Commission are the focus of this chapter. In short, the Commission was a local three-year-long development action carried out by the city between 2015 and 2017 that directly addressed urban inequalities within the city. The actual task of the Commission was to 'analyse differences in life conditions in Stockholm and to propose concrete measures for an equal and socially sustainable city'<sup>2</sup> (Stockholms Stad, 2015: 5). Other initiatives of the new ruling coalition were a social investment fund and developing the role of Local Development Programmes (LDPs)<sup>3</sup> in the 14 city districts, of which the social fund should support initiatives by the Commission, and the LDPs should be a way to both localize and further develop the results and suggestions of the Commission in the city districts.

The aim here is to analyse, describe, and discuss the Commission in a way that goes beyond the idiographic and place-bound. I therefore focus on those aspects of its organization that are important to its success and that may be transferable to other cities, but I also discuss issues that hampered the work of the Commission. This also means that the emphasis is on the overall results rather than the actual output in terms of concrete place-specific changes on the ground.

The chapter's empirical underpinning is made up of document analyses and 15 in-depth semi-structured expert interviews with 22 people in 2018–2019 who in various ways were involved in or had another more or less direct relationship with the Commission's work or the issues at hand.<sup>4</sup> In addition, participation in one workshop and one seminar and several field visits were undertaken to further ground the analyses. The chapter starts with a description of the Commission and its overall results and then delves into its organization and the support structures that made it work. A discussion of the factors that promoted and hampered the Commission follows. The chapter ends with conclusions pointing to the factors important for the transferability of such local development action.

### **The Commission – a knowledge alliance**

What then was the Commission? It was a nexus for academic and practice-related, place-based learning, or a 'knowledge alliance' (Stigendal in Forsemalm, 2019a), aiming to produce suggestions for change in governance practices. The Commission was created for learning based on sources



situated both inside and outside the city administration and was to collect knowledge from them and present it in reports. It was inspired by similar actions in Malmö and Gothenburg, but an important difference was that, in addition to the academic knowledge and the practice-related knowledge on which the suggestions of change were to be based, the Commission was structured so that it included ‘political knowledge’, meaning it was sensitive to what would be *politically possible*. As Forsemalm (2019a) argues, if knowledge projects are to be successful, the actors must also share norms, and as is the case with the Stockholm Commission, one way to try to ensure that differences in norms do not stop or hamper a suggestion for change being passed by the city council is to ensure beforehand that the suggestion is broadly politically acceptable and hence does not present too strong a challenge to political interests.

In this sense, the Commission had found a structure that succeeded in including all these types of knowledge (i.e. academic, practice related, and political) productively and dynamically. This is how a leading politician explained the relations between them:

Because of what we wanted, the reason why the suggestions were made there [in the administrations] was precisely that we wanted to have them in the operations so that they could be implemented. But we also wanted the Malmö advantage – that they should not be party-politically prepared suggestions, but that there should be some kind of independent group that could ‘raise the ceiling’ or whatever you call it. For the same reasons we did this with the research reports, because they would stand completely on their own. And you can’t control what comes up at all. And in the next step the officials [in the administrations] are still more concerned with how the structures work and so on. But they’re not quite as ‘party-locked’, so to say, as we [politicians] might be. So it was therefore important that it was the Commission’s suggestions. . . . Although [the suggestions] were clearly in our direction, it was we who appointed the Commission, and it was we who thought this [segregation] was a huge problem.

In the Stockholm case, the situation was thus that the political leadership had decided they wanted realizable suggestions for change. They were therefore ready to accept suggestions from people outside politics, and instead of emanating from political parties and therefore being ideologically coloured, the suggestions should be grounded in the professional expert experience of working within various administrations on the one hand and academic knowledge on the other. It was thus expected that the suggestions produced should be ‘realistic’ and possible to implement. To get a more mixed city, the leading politician continued, it would for example:

be easy to say it like this: ‘Yes, but you should build a lot of rental apartments in Vasastan [an affluent inner-city district] with cheap rent.’



Everyone agrees with that, but in practice, how's it going to happen?  
So we wanted to get away from that and actually find things we could  
do here and now.

Expressed more formally, the Commission's idea from the outset had been to develop suggestions that would make a practical difference on the ground. The directives for the Commission emphasize that 'the aim of the work is to produce suggestions for measures that decrease the differences in life conditions that will be realized in practical change through ordinary governing and management within Stockholm City' (Stockholms Stad, 2016:98 RI+III: 2).

In general, the overall process started with academic input (in the form of commissioned research) to which the Commission added professional expertise and reworked the suggestions into realizable measures. A 'realistic' measure is something that is realizable within the current administrative structures and other overall constraints (e.g. laws, finances, organizational competence). It was thus important to reduce the influence of party politics, and one way of doing this was to ensure that suggestions were based on external academic research, as well as the experiences and knowledge of apolitical civil servants with the necessary professional expert knowledge of the relevant issues.

### **Starting points and overall results**

Unlike many other projects, programmes, or actions the city has undertaken over the years in relation to segregation and urban fragmentation, the Commission must work more holistically with the whole of Stockholm. Previously, certain neighbourhoods received support in a rather 'fragmented way' (Andersson, 2017; Franzén et al., 2016; Holmqvist, 2017). The Commission thus represents a turn-away from the 'projectification' of urban social development towards a more socio-spatially integrated understanding of social and territorial cohesion. Perhaps illustrative of this change is that 'A city for all' was the motto for the city under the new political coalition.

The Commission should thus have an overarching or holistic perspective of the whole city, not just its underprivileged neighbourhoods, when formulating its suggestions for change. This was later modified to focus the efforts on the districts in most need. However, the initial goal was clearly visible in the Commission's following premises (Stockholm stad, 2017b):

The Commission's analyses and proposals for strategies and actions are based on current research and proven experience and will be informed by the work of other cities and regions in the field of social sustainability.

The Commission will work closely and/or within the city's operations to accelerate change. The ambition is to continuously propose measures. To make this possible, the work is done in close cooperation with the city's administrations and companies.



The Commission strives to find a transparent and communicative way in which business life, the non-profit sector, and Stockholmers are invited to share and conduct dialogue on the Commission's analyses and the formation of strategies and actions.

The Commission's work will take the city's operations into account from an overarching perspective (*helhetsperspektiv*) when it produces analyses and actions.

Thematically, the Commission addressed four broad and interconnected policy fields, or 'fields of development' as they were called: (a) democracy and security/safety; (b) employment and income; (c) housing and urban environment; (d) education and upbringing. These in turn were not fully sectorial but encompassed several 'ordinary' or sectorial policy fields. This means that many of the Commission's suggestions often involved several different administrations. The Commission thus also represents an action that is cross-sectorial.

What then were the results of the Commission? Regarding the overall goal of levelling out differences in the city, and breaking processes of further segregation and fragmentation, one leading politician put it this way:

If you really want to make a difference, then we have to find ways to do it. And I think that on the margin that happened. . . . Then it is clear that, we see now, the great trends continue in the direction they were heading, so that it would also be cheeky to say we succeeded. We didn't, but given what's in our toolbox, I think we did some things that made a difference.

Regarding the overall trends (further segregation and fragmentation) mentioned by the interviewee, these are all largely related to issues and processes over which the city lacks jurisdiction (e.g. labour market relations, population growth, migration, settlement rights), and the city therefore cannot be expected to halt or reverse these processes. The goals were set too high, although it is important to note that the political will was there to really try. Trying locally to fight processes that originate somewhere else and for which local decisions matter little is obviously hard or impossible.

Nevertheless, the city is not powerless and has deep and far-reaching responsibilities in several subject areas (e.g. planning, schooling, and welfare services), and the Commission as a whole is regarded by the interviewees as a success. This is so especially regarding the analyses and reports, not least since at least two parties in the then-ruling coalition wanted the credit for initiating it. Had it been a failure, no one would want to have been associated with it. During its working life (2015–2017), the Commission produced 17 reports (plus research reports and other background materials) with many suggestions for how the city could work to even out the differences between various neighbourhoods. A concrete result is the Comprehensive Plan from



2018 (Stockholm Stad, 2018) that draws heavily on the work of the Commission and its research background reports.

Regarding such results – realistic suggestions that would be possible to implement – the general perception among the concerned experts and politicians is that the Commission was successful in producing well-grounded analyses, reports, and suggestions, and getting them through the political machinery into the annual budget, as well as in placing the responsibility for each suggestion with a named administration for it to start implementing the suggestion immediately. The Commission's organization was key to these successes.

### Organization

The Commission was organized semi-autonomously of the ordinary administrative structures as a 'special development project' at the City Executive Office. It was led by the Chief Officer for Sustainability (*Hållbarhetschef*) at the City Executive Office, and each of the four fields of development had one or two development leaders (*utvecklingsledare*) who could call on further thematic expertise when required. A rather small group of professionals therefore formed the core of the Commission, but it is important to note they were given a fairly broad mandate and were well connected to the steering committee.

The development leaders had large responsibilities in their respective fields of development. They organized the work and wrote the reports with suggestions for change, which was the Commission's core task. The Commission reported to a steering committee (*styrgrupp*) consisting of city directors and other top civil servants, many of whom were political appointees. A political reference group with delegates from all but one of the parties represented in the city council was also connected to the Commission. Moreover, in addition to input from the sectorial administrations, one district administration and a large development project (Focus Skärholmen) were connected to the Commission.<sup>5</sup> The Commission was semi-autonomous in the sense that it was an institution organized outside the established sectorial administrations (see Figure 9.1). Moreover, the Commission had a mandate to work in 'close cooperation' with, across, and within various administrations.

What stands out is the speed at which the Commission worked, and the speed at which the city started to implement its results. The implementation of the suggestions started more or less immediately. A situation report (*lägesbeskrivning*) about the Commission's progress in 2016 states (Stockholms Stad, 2017c:123 RI+III Dnr 159–1936/2016: 7):

[S]everal of the suggestions proposed by the Commission are being implemented, and several of the suggestions contained in previous reports were taken into account in the context of the 2017 budget. That is also the purpose of the Commission. Suggestions that come from



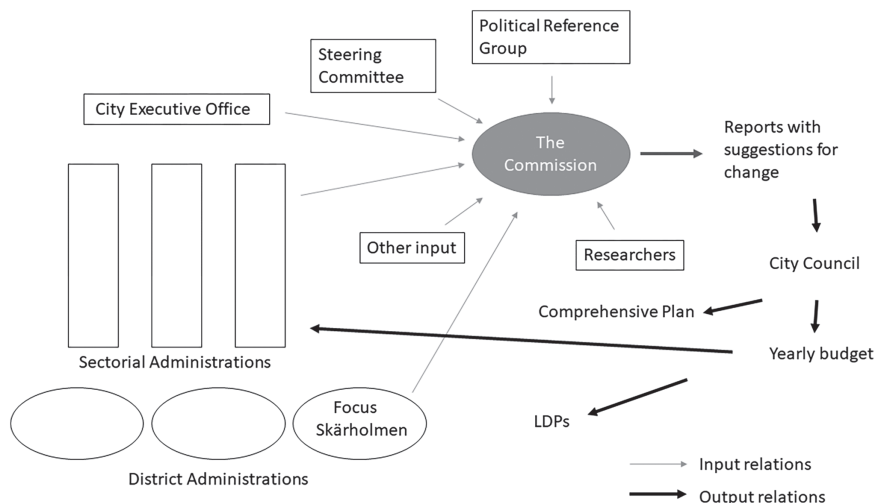


Figure 9.1 Schematic relations and organization of the Commission for a Socially Sustainable Stockholm

Source: Borén, 2019: 14

the Commission should be implemented quickly in the same or slightly revised form by the operations.

*(verksamheter)*

For the next year the story is similar (Stockholms Stad, 2017a: 33):

According to the strategy for implementing the Commission's suggestions, analyses and measures they will be integrated into the city's budget process. It will be found that proposed recommendations from the Commission have been largely taken care of in the city council's 2018 budget.

The speed of implementation was in part motivated by the political cycle, with new elections in September 2018. Interestingly, in relation to the political cycle the Commission reports and suggestions are followed up within the city's regular budgetary process, meaning that funding for various suggestions may be made quickly available. In short, this procedure forms the basis of the fast implementation of the Commission's various suggestions and economically empowers them. This also means the city has given a big mandate to and invested considerable trust in the Commission. Rather than leaving suggestions to float through the regular administrative system, the Commission's suggestions are decided on in the city council and placed in the budget without delay in a process that also includes the assigning of the suggestions for change to various administrations to implement.



The Commission's organization is crucial for this to have developed with (a) a kind of autonomy, (b) devoted development leaders, (c) strong support from the Commission leader, (d) the relationship with external research, and (e) the relationship with the steering committee.

The role of the steering committee was crucial for the Commission. It was chaired by the City Director, that is, the top civil servant in the city, appointed by politicians. The other members of the committee also consisted primarily of directors and top civil servants, many of whom were political appointees.<sup>6</sup> The Commission worked close to the steering committee, which meant the suggestions were processed in relation to a network of actors with substantial authority that is also very close to the political power. One of the development leaders relates:

But it is significant that we have had both this steering group and the cross-political (*blocköverskridande*) reference group. So it has been extremely valuable for all these suggestions and the recommendations we have made in the work of the commission to be processed with the highest management of the city. And then the city council has also rapidly confirmed that they will be included in the city's annual budget, which is our main steering document when it comes to the commissions for the city's committees and companies.

Apart from the speed of processing the suggestions from the Commission, the close relationship with the steering committee included additional organizational benefits. According to another development leader, this meant, first, that the Commission's suggestions were developed to approach what is organizationally *and* politically possible. The suggestions would thus not be dismissed when discussed in the city council, but instead would have a very good chance of being approved. Without this understanding of the organizationally and politically possible, the respondent thinks there is a risk the suggestions will be 'stragglier', whereas now they hold together better. Second, the development leader states it has meant that the Commission and the suggestions have the

mandate to actually challenge. For we have still been able to challenge quite strong interests in the city and have been allowed to pursue issues that we, as individual officers in our administration, normally don't. . . . We may not step into other administrations or city owned companies in that way. Now we have a mandate: 'You can challenge what Stadshuset AB [roughly, City Council Limited] does. You can review what [another] office does.'

However, the first development leader stresses

it is not just because we've had the steering group we've had; we're also based on how the directive has been formulated for the Commission,



in order for the Commission to be relatively autonomous. And to have close cooperation with researchers, who are actually allowed to bring in, for the city, suggestions that may sometimes be uncomfortable and different.

Strong support from the Commission leader and his superiors were also important in the actual work of the Commission. They also participated in the discussions on the production of the reports and suggestions – there was a ‘very tight bouncing back and forth’, discussing what could be suggested, and in practice the leader of the Commission was involved in dialogue with the development leaders that produced the reports throughout. In addition, because the Commission leader sat in the city executive office, whereas the development leaders physically sat in their respective ‘home administrations’, the Commission leader often functioned as a ‘door opener’, the development leaders say. If the Commission leader, placed as he was in the executive office, called one of the city’s companies or administrations, it was likely to smooth further contact for the development leaders in the Commission, who depended on getting access to data, advice, and other information and cooperation from the various parts of the city.

Another organizational strength of the Commission, which was an extra-administrative structure in its own right, seems to have been that its suggestions were then ‘placed’ at one of the ordinary, sectorial administrations. The Commission’s suggestions were thus both financially and organizationally favourable. The follow-up and control were integrated in the ordinary budgetary processes, which ensured the autonomy of the Commission, and that its suggestions were picked up later by the regular administrations. As discussed earlier, the Commission worked both inter-sectorally and inter-scalarly (between decision-making levels), while drawing on the strengths of the established sectorial administrations that were key to achieving citywide change when its suggestions were to be implemented.

The role of the cross-political reference group was more distant from the work of the Commission than the steering committee, as it played no active role in producing the reports, although it could raise issues and initiate discussions. It consisted of eight leading politicians, one from all but one of the parties represented in the city council. According to a leading opposition politician, the role of the cross-political reference group changed over time from first mainly being an arena in which the Commission informed leading politicians across the political spectrum about their work to becoming a place for more interaction between these politicians and the Commission. The overarching idea of having a cross-political reference group connected to the Commission was that all political parties, including opposition parties, should somehow relate to segregation. Getting the opposition on board was not easy, but that all the parties ultimately appointed leading figures to the cross-political reference group suggests they all found the issues at stake, and the Commission, important.



However, even if the Commission's overall setup and organization imbued it with significant power (e.g. the steering committee and the cross-political reference group were staffed with leading directors and politicians), the leading opposition politician said this was not enough to infuse the Commission with the power it would have needed to have a true and direct effect in many of the deciding bodies throughout the city to instigate real change on the ground. The logic is explained by the interviewee as an order that must be understood as an alternative form of power, that could be termed a 'personalized power vertical'. He/she explains that this form of power overlaps with the power inherent in guiding and steering documents, and ultimately even the budget. In short, the various Executive Directors (i.e. the top manager of an administration) listened to and followed the will of their City Commissioner (*borgarråd*), and if the Commissioner never discussed or referred to the Commission's various reports or suggestions, its work was perceived as less important by the Executive Director. From the Executive Director via their Heads of Departments to the professionals in the departments doing the actual implementation work, the Commissioner's will ran down the organization of that administration in an economy of priorities in which people followed the decisions of their superiors. What the Commissioner prioritized to include in 'the various dictums (*tjänsteutlåtanden*), operational plans (*verksamhetsplaner*), four-month reports (*tertiälrapporter*), and so on, is what is almost totally governing', the leading opposition politician explains. Perhaps, he/she continues, if the mayor herself had 'chaired the Commission' (i.e. the steering committee and/or the political reference group), things might have been different, 'because what the mayor says is important for everyone'.

This thinking is supported in other interviews with people at various levels and thus, even if there was great support for the Commission and its work, this would not necessarily mean that its suggestions would be prioritized in practice.

### **Promoters and inhibitors**

The first and most important promoter for developing a more equal city was the political will and the mandate, beyond rhetoric, to do so. Although there had previously been serious initiatives from both political camps, it was only after 2014 and with the budget of 2015 that measures addressing the whole city at the same time were initiated with the aim not only of improving conditions in underprivileged neighbourhoods, but also of trying to break the *processes* leading to severe socio-spatial disparities. While the latter does not seem to be happening in Stockholm – that goal was set too high – the actual will to address the problem of segregation and a fragmented city represents the first and probably most important step on a long journey.

The question is therefore whether an action in the form of the Commission studied here is a relevant and effective tool to realize the political will for change. If it is, what promoted its successes, and what held it back?



Stating first that the successes include delivering on its assignment, that is, to ‘analyse differences in life conditions in Stockholm and propose concrete measures for an equal and socially sustainable city’, the Commission produced one report mapping and discussing the differences between neighbourhoods regarding several life condition criteria, 16 reports with further analyses, and grounded suggestions for change. Most of this was done within its mandate (2015–2017), with one follow-up report – a ‘roadmap’ (Färdplan, 2018) – in 2018 discussing further action. The Commission thus produced a total of 18 reports (four in each field of development, one mapping, and one ‘roadmap’), and a large quantity of research material. Moreover, with slight changes, the Commission’s suggestions for changes were approved by the city council and made their way into the city budget, thus making it possible to start implementing the suggestions. Apart from the necessary political will, what caused this to happen?

Several interrelated factors were key to this success (discussed in detail in Borén, 2019), including the Commission’s (semi-autonomous) organizational form, the directives for how it should work, devoted experts as development leaders for the four different development policy fields, and the support they and the Commission received from the senior high-ranking urban leadership or networks of actors with great authority in the city. These conditions proved beneficial in producing suggestions for change that were not party political (i.e. not primarily based on ideological prepositions) but were based on academic research (to learn something new and to gain academic legitimacy) and professional knowledge (to be feasible and ‘realistic’).

A rich experience during the research, which contributed to the Commission’s success, was the personal engagement shown by the interviewees in the relevant issues, from researchers finding additional funding to write the research reports for the Commission, to senior staff saying their health was compromised in the process of wanting to do a good job (a pressing time schedule did not help), to leading politicians, directors, and managers taking an active and supportive interest (see also Borén, *in progress*; Forsemalm, 2019a). The interviewees stress that trust in the Commission and its mandate, as well as its organizational autonomy, were key to their engagement.

What then inhibited the Commission’s work? If suggestions were already in the budget and in strategic documents of various kinds, should the various administrations not ‘just start to implement them’? Two inhibiting factors stand out as important: organizational learning and the role of a ‘personalized power vertical’. The first concern is that the Commission’s analyses, reports, and suggestions seem not to have penetrated the city’s decision-making bodies. Politicians knew of the Commission, the interviewees say, but had not read its reports. This was especially evident in political committees (both district and sectorial), but civil servants preparing the decisions for politicians also seemed to have had limited knowledge of the suggestions, and what they meant (see further analyses in Borén, 2019). It takes time for



organizations to learn, and even if an administration were assigned to implement a certain suggestion, structures inside it might need to be reorganized to incorporate new routines. Moreover, new routines needed to be carefully tested before being tried throughout the city, which prolonged the wait for any change on the ground to occur.

However, although the political cycle was pertinent to the speed with which the Commission worked, key persons working on actual implementation (in this case on the implementation of the social value analyses of development projects) received no signals from the new (from 2018 green-centre-right) majority that they should stop or rethink; rather, the phrasings differed a little from those of the new city government, but there was little or no practical difference in content. According to a leading politician, if a suggestion or reform worked or was popular, it was unlikely to be rolled back, even if the political majority changed. Some of the Commission's suggestions therefore live on inside the administration, and the entire organization may ultimately adapt and change.

Second, regarding the 'personalized power vertical' discussed earlier, it seems that although several leading politicians and top-ranked civil servants supported the Commission, it would have needed even further support from the top. In an economy of priorities, civil servants understand what is regarded as (most) important, and if the Mayor or City Commissioners do not inspire their directors on the relevant issues, they are in turn unlikely to inspire their respective organizations to act on the suggestions for change. The issues then become subordinate and are not regarded as pertinent to professional success. There may also be conflicts about goals at the various administrations contributing to further diffusion of interest in the relevant issues.

Factors of less relevance can be added to the inhibiting factors discussed earlier: some of the suggestions may not be so new but are refurbished articulations of what has already been done. These are obviously not hard to implement, but do not involve change (since they are already in place). Moreover, some parts of city operations like schools are very independent and decide largely for themselves what to do and how (and thus do not need to consider suggestions for change unless they wish to).

## **Conclusion**

The Commission was an initiative that aimed to 'analyse differences in life conditions in Stockholm and to propose measures for an equal and socially sustainable city'. Its work included the successful production of grounded reports with several suggestions relevant to fighting urban fragmentation. In conclusion, the Commission represented a positive force in developing place-based public policy that addressed the relevant issues. Moreover, suggestions were decided on and started to be implemented swiftly. Over time some will influence processes related to the distribution of life conditions. However,



segregation and exclusion in the city primarily stem from processes over which the city has no or limited jurisdiction (e.g. labour market relations, population growth, migration, settlement rights), and it therefore cannot be expected that the city will be able to halt or reverse these processes. Even if the main drivers of inequalities between neighbourhoods are in effect situated outside the jurisdiction of the city and are primarily related to political, economic, social, and legal developments nationally or beyond, the city as a local actor is not powerless.

In the Stockholm context the Commission therefore helped place these issues on the political agenda, increasing awareness of the situation at large but also mapping in detail the differences between neighbourhoods across the city. The knowledge and suggestions produced by the Commission also represented the city's local and democratic empowerment to act on the topic. However, it would be premature to conclude that this was also the case in practice. Organizational learning takes time, and the study has shown that the reports and suggestions of the Commission are not well known throughout the city administration. The study has also revealed a 'personalized power vertical', and this, with the limited organizational learning, has hampered the intended development. However, it must also be emphasized that the Commission's overall aim – the production of grounded suggestions for change representing innovative ways to work with spatial inequalities – was accomplished.

Turning now to the question of whether the Commission's achievements were solely place-bound or if they could also be achieved across places and times, we conclude that its concrete results were primarily place-bound, because in contrast with the basic policy idea to create a commission they were based on local mapping and local professional expertise. Thus, cities around Europe and beyond which struggle with spatial fragmentation and whose current measures are insufficient may well try the same approach as Stockholm, with a commission tasked to deliver suggestions for how to address these issues in a new way, but would need to base it on their own mapping and professional expertise.

The basic policy idea and organizational form of the Commission would however be transferable in space and time. Similar organizational forms for similar agendas have been tried more or less independently in Gothenburg and Malmö, Sweden's second and third cities. The inherent localized aspects, for example, the mapping or the reliance on local professional experts, of the Commission as a 'knowledge alliance' aiming for organizational learning would be crucial for the transfer of the Commission's idea and organizational form to other places. In short, to localize organizational learning is key to this organizational form to travel successfully. It will ensure out-of-context solutions do not even become suggestions.

A commission in another place would thus include starting from a local empirical mapping of the issues to be addressed. A second step would be to use *both* external and internal city expertise to formulate substantiated



suggestions for change. Moreover, relying on external academic (and thus city-independent) researchers is an important feature of external expertise, bringing academic knowledge (and legitimacy) to the action. A third step would be to organize such a commission semi-autonomously, but with clear links to the very top leadership to include political knowledge, as well as to infuse power, in the work. It is probable that the national context could vary if the locality is autonomous and has some degree of real power – including financial – to address the issues at stake. However, the locality's financial capacity seems not to be the main issue; instead, using existing resources in innovative ways is key.

## Notes

- 1 This chapter is a shortened and slightly revised version of a comprehensive report published in early 2019 (Borén, 2019). The report focused on one of the four fields of development that the Commission worked with and it could be noted that the results of that report are generally supported by research on the Commission made and published since then (Forsemalm, 2019a, 2019b). An early draft of this chapter was presented and discussed at the RELOCAL Policy Webinar 'Governance Innovation in the Spotlight', 26 March 2021, and I would like to thank all the participants and especially discussant Olli Voutilainen (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, Finland) for their comments and questions. The research for this chapter was funded by the Horizon 2020-project 'Relocal: Resituating the Local in Cohesion and Territorial Development' (grant no. 727097) and the Formas-funded project 'Urban Riots' (grant no. 2015–01315).
- 2 All translations from Swedish are made by the author.
- 3 In Swedish: Lokala Utvecklingsprogram (LUP).
- 4 Most of these interviews were carried by the author but two were conducted by Sofia Santesson. For more on the methods, see Borén, 2019.
- 5 In this way, two larger development actions were connected, drawing on insights from each other. This relation is further analysed in Forsemalm, 2019a, see also Borén, 2019.
- 6 The very top civil servants of the city, such as the city director, are not elected as politicians to the post, but are appointed by elected politicians (so the ruling majority get people they trust on leading positions).

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# 10 PLACE/Ladywell housing project, London

A temporary local project with metropolitan impacts

*Ali Madanipour, Elizabeth Brooks and Mark Shucksmith*

## Introduction

This chapter explores the spatial justice impacts of a temporary housing scheme in the London Borough of Lewisham. The focus on spatial justice, as outlined elsewhere in this volume, reflects the concern of an expanded European Union with establishing cohesion between its diverse member states. As a relatively new approach to understanding the geographical aspect of justice, its conceptual value may be gauged through an exploration of the impacts of small-scale local projects and programmes across time and scales.

The interpretation of spatial justice set out in a recent paper issuing from the RELOCAL study (Madanipour et al., 2021) draws out three key components of the concept – spatiality, integration and inclusion – as follows. The spatial component addresses the justice impacts of geographical location. The integrative aspect implies the interdependence of distributive and procedural justice dimensions through this spatial component. Finally, the inclusion aspect spans boundaries and borders, embracing inter-regional justice as well as intra-regional justice (thus breaking down the convention of considering justice impacts as bounded within the nation state). This latter inclusion aspect also relates to inter-generational spatial justice, or the chronological aspect of spatial justice as it unfolds over time. Bringing these three dimensions together, the paper formulates spatial justice as: ‘the democratic process of equitably distributing social and environmental benefits and burdens within and between groups, territories, and generations’ (Madanipour et al., 2022: 812).

Based on its 60-year economic model, and the initial cross-scalar impacts in terms of planned replications at borough and regional levels, the PLACE/Ladywell scheme is ideally placed as a model for examining interwoven inter-generational/chronological issues and territorial/boundary issues in relation to spatial justice. Additionally, in its focus on the cash-strapped social housing sector in London, the case study is able to illustrate the all-importance of the changing political and economic contexts for the ultimate impacts of such place-based interventions.



The chapter is structured as follows: after a thumbnail sketch of the scheme and its location, we first present an account of the neighbourhood, borough-wide and metropolitan justice impacts of the scheme at two time points: its origins (2015–2016) and its initial implementation (2016–2017). We then move on to exploring the scheme's chronological spatial justice impacts at each scale from 2018 to the present day. Finally, we review the longer-term prospects for its intended main beneficiaries, the homeless, as well as for the neighbourhood, borough and region. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the magnification, distortion and contraction of justice impacts of a scheme such as PLACE/Ladywell across space and over time.

### **The scheme**

The architect-designed PLACE/Ladywell modular housing scheme provides (at a minimum) 16 ground floor community business spaces and 24 apartments for homeless and insecurely housed families on a vacant site earmarked for future development in the London Borough of Lewisham. The scheme, which opened to residents in 2016, is planned and built as a temporary structure predicted to stand in sites under development for around four years. It was constructed to be fully demountable both as a whole and in its parts, so that it can be moved across a number of temporary sites as units or as a whole, over a total lifespan of around 60 years. The current site is on council-owned land, the site of a former public leisure centre, on a run-down section of the borough's main retail thoroughfare, Lewisham High Street. The site is nevertheless conveniently placed for bus routes to the borough's two main commercial centres (Catford and Lewisham Shopping Centres, located respectively at the south and north ends of the High Street). No less than seven bus routes, including two night buses (Lewisham Council, 2020a) call at the bus stops near the scheme. It is also around seven minutes' walk from an overground train to central London (Ladywell station).

Additionally to its housing provision, the scheme not only provides a high-quality and eye-catching accent in a run-down section of High Street but also provides a new enterprise and retail hub for the area. It might be said to both mitigate the 'planning blight' impacts of the large vacant plot behind it (that it now conceals from view) and increase the appeal of the extensive land which it fronts to potential developers. The scheme has been enthusiastically championed by the media and policy-makers, winning several industry nominations and prizes (RTPI, 2019; Masker, 2020). This has influenced its planned replications, both in three more sites within the borough of Lewisham (the first, prior to the pandemic, slated for completion by 2021); and across the city of London under the auspices of a dedicated company, PLACE Ltd, coordinated by the London Councils association and part-funded by the regional governance body, the Greater London Authority (with the rest probably deriving from participating Local Authority loans – Interview 5).



## The location

### *London*

The Greater London region and the Southeast region with which it is linked with are the main growth poles for the United Kingdom and their economic activities are seen to be of national importance (UK 2070 Commission, 2019). Greater London is one of the few remaining areas of the United Kingdom to have effective and coordinated regional governance, through the Greater London Authority (GLA), which is led by an elected Mayor and Assembly. The Greater London region has undergone accelerated population increase over the past few decades, a phenomenon which has also been strong within the Lewisham local authority area. Some of the increase has been due to high birth rates, but a significant proportion is due to the relocation to London of new inhabitants from outside the United Kingdom, a factor which is clearly subject to both national factors such as Brexit and external, geo-political factors, such as international mobility in relation to pandemic restrictions.

The London region is an area of exceptionally low housing affordability compared with the rest of the United Kingdom and has the country's highest levels of homelessness. The most important tenure group facing homelessness in London are those who rent in the Private Rented Sector. Both the regional governance body, the Greater London Authority (GLA), and the voluntary collaboration between London's 32 boroughs, London Councils, are committed to tackling the region's exceptional homelessness problem and the linked housing shortage.

### *London borough of Lewisham*

Lewisham is a borough in the south east of London, classed as belonging to the Inner London group of local authorities, although unlike the majority of these, it has only a very small section bordering the River Thames. Lewisham is also unusual for England Local Authorities in being subject to two degrees of local devolution: it has an elected mayor, being one of only four London boroughs to do so; besides, in common with all London boroughs, being subject to regional level governance, through one of the few remaining regional bodies still operating in England (the Greater London Authority). At the lowest level of governance, the Borough of Lewisham is also divided into 18 different wards, each with three local councillors elected by residents (totalling 54 ward councillors). The role of ward councils – such as that for Lewisham Central Ward, where PLACE/Ladywell is situated – is to mediate between Lewisham council and local neighbourhoods, but in common with much metropolitan neighbourhood democracy, representation is an issue due to the impacts on neighbourhood involvement of belonging to a lower income group (e.g. Mendez et al., 2020).



In terms of the policy context for PLACE/Ladywell, it is broadly in line with the kind of cohesion approach that the EU terms spatial justice. Solely left-leaning Mayors have been elected in Lewisham since the post was introduced in 2002; while at the regional level a New London Plan (ratified in March 2020) has been developed under a left-leaning Mayor and Assembly, with a clear emphasis on inclusive growth (termed ‘Good Growth’ in the Plan) (GLA, 2017: XIV).

In terms of planning, Lewisham is a relatively low-rise, green and residential borough. Yet recent and forthcoming development in Lewisham and its environs shows a trend for increasing densification, in higher rise buildings and more infill (Manning et al., 2018), resulting in a more compact urban area. While somewhat dependent upon the way neighbourhood boundaries are drawn, using standard geographies, segregation in the Borough of Lewisham can be shown as marked. For example, Lewisham Central, the administrative ward where PLACE/Ladywell is situated, scores high on Indices of Multiple Deprivation but is sandwiched between two more affluent Lewisham administrative wards, Ladywell and Blackheath. There is also a degree of segregation, likely to increase over time, between the well-linked northern end of the borough and the less-well-connected south. Furthermore, typical of metropolitan areas with a legacy of large social housing estates, highly deprived and prosperous enclaves sit side by side in several of Lewisham’s Wards (London Borough of Lewisham, 2017: 8).

Lewisham is currently not served by any underground lines (plans to extend the Bakerloo line into the borough are likely to be further delayed by the economic consequences of the pandemic), and this, along with its bisection by the South Circular road, the former London orbital prior to the M25, has impacted its housing and rent prices, which are relatively moderate for an Inner London borough, the latter averaging around £1,275 per month at the time of the research (Valuation Office Agency, 2019). This may also be a factor in its young demographic profile. In common with the Greater London region as a whole, the London Borough of Lewisham is very young in demographic terms (20% of the population were under 16 in 2015 – London Data Store, 2018). It is also the second most ethnically diverse borough of London, and more than a third of its population at the last Census were born outside the United Kingdom. Related to the youth of its inhabitants and the lack of durable local connections of many, the Borough has considerable churning of population and residents who stay only a short period of time before moving on elsewhere. The affordability of housing in Lewisham is only relative: Greater London has the lowest level of housing affordability of the whole of the United Kingdom and the highest level of homelessness. Lewisham is the council with the twelfth highest level of homelessness in the United Kingdom and also has a low average income compared to other parts of London (Shelter, 2018).



*Lewisham central ward – former Leisure Centre site*

The strategic location of the former Leisure Centre site points to possibilities for gentrification: not only is it sandwiched between the two less deprived Lewisham wards of Ladywell and Blackheath, but it is also opposite a conservation area that features several listed buildings. These include an elegant 18th-century church with medieval tower set in extensive grounds, now a community garden that is linked by a riverside walk to Ladywell Fields park, near the overground Lewisham train station and location of well-designed modern office complexes, retail, cafes and pubs.

**Justice impacts from origins to implementation**

As the following section will explore, the origins and first two years of PLACE/Ladywell's existence saw hopes raised for largely positive spatial justice impacts from the scheme across scales. As the following account will demonstrate, however, a focus on symbolic, rather than effective, distributive and participatory justice is evident from the scheme's inception.

*Neighbourhood level: scheme origins*

In the case of PLACE/Ladywell, the neighbourhood scale was only partly taken into consideration by the council at the level of procedural justice. There seem to be two likely reasons for this: the first is that the original use of the site was an amenity of Borough-wide rather than merely neighbourhood benefit (a subsidized leisure centre, with use mainly open to residents of the borough). The second reason will become clearer in the next section: the Local Authority had strong motivations to deploy the site for economic benefits, even while vacant; neighbourhood voices would be unlikely to endorse this instrumental use of the site.

Yet Lewisham Leisure Centre's relocation to the top of Lewisham High Street, leaving a large footprint of vacant, council-owned land potentially presented an opportunity to substitute an amenity open to all residents of the borough for something of more immediate neighbourhood value. As noted earlier, Lewisham has a youthful demographic and a high proportion of young families. After the decision to relocate the Leisure Centre, various proposals were put forward for its redeployment, with local residents said to prefer a school in the location (Interview 1). Some expressed a hope that any new use for the site would not include high-rise developments, as these were becoming a feature of infill at the north of Lewisham High Street, based on urban densification policies. The low-rise nature of the scheme may be the reason it ultimately received only one planning objection (Interview 1). Nevertheless, despite the existence of ward-level councils representing residents' views and preferences, the Local Authority's plans for the scheme seem to have been largely imposed in a top-down and non-participative manner.



In line with the former use of the land, as a resource of borough-wide benefit, Lewisham Council exercised top-down control of the redevelopment of the old Leisure Centre site for benefit of the borough rather than the neighbourhood, putting in its place a resource for the borough's homeless (or about to become homeless) families, which would also partly subsidize the cost of housing them through their rent, mainly paid through unemployment benefits. The longer-term goal was to find a developer for the site, which forms part of a larger area designated for mixed-use, residential-led development in Lewisham's plans. In line with the estate regeneration approach used in other sites in the borough, this would create a mixed private and public housing scheme, so as to generate revenue to cross-subsidize the borough's estate regeneration elsewhere.

At a later stage, when the scheme was already in process, a concession was made to neighbourhood participation, in terms of a large-scale neighbourhood consultation about the use of the ground floor space (see next section). However, this feature of the scheme appears to have been almost incidental, relating to the planning requirements for new development along a retail strip such as Lewisham High Street; and indeed, a ground floor enterprise hub is not a feature of either the borough or city-level replication models.

#### *Neighbourhood level: scheme implementation*

Under the terms of Lewisham's most recent plan at the time, while new retail development and housing is designated for the existing shopping centre areas to the north and south of the High Street, the middle of the high street is classed as a secondary retail zone which may only be developed in ways that do not compete with the main shopping provision in the primary areas (Lewisham Council, 2014). Within these constraints, the use of the ground floor retail strip in PLACE/Ladywell was put to a single, costly and extensive local consultation once the scheme had been given the go-ahead, but before it was built, over five days in September 2015. It involved nearly 600 local residents and businesses, asking them what use they would like to see in the ground floor retail strip of the new building.

it wasn't necessarily, 'How big do you think it should be?' or 'What colour do you think it should be?' like that's all set, but 'What should we do with it once it's finished because we're going to have a whole floor and it's available to the public and community and what would you like it to be?' That was very successful for us, and I think that did create a positive sentiment around the development.

(Interview 1, 2018, Housing Strategy, Lewisham Council)

The Council's regeneration webpages note of the consultation results: 'The five most popular ideas were a cinema, a creative workspace, sports facilities, a community event space and a support centre'. Additionally, 30% of



local business owners said they wanted ‘a space for networking, alongside their other business needs’ (Lewisham Council, 2016). The initial uses of the ground floor premises responded to these neighbourhood aspirations to a considerable extent, including a maker’s market, cinema and spacious NGO-run café with a dual function as a place of safety for young people encountering threat on the streets. At least in its first year or two of operation, therefore, it might be said that the scheme made a concession to participatory justice at the neighbourhood level.

### *Borough level – scheme origins*

At the borough scale, Lewisham has a history of pioneering housing innovation, yet mainly at a small, niche-innovation scale. Perhaps its best-known project was the self-build social housing scheme, Walter’s Way, in the 1970s and 1980s (Wainright, 2016), where people could obtain a plot of council land on land too small or sloping for the council’s own housing programme. Here they could create their own design of social housing and the value of their labours was deducted from future rent paid to the council. A latter-day Community Land Trust scheme, long in the planning, finally launched in 2019 in Church Road, a road opposite Place/Ladywell leading to Ladywell station. The scheme, run by the Rural Urban Synthesis Society (RUSS) will provide 33 homes with a mix of affordable tenures that unlike Walter’s Way will remain in the hands of the Trust and thus retain affordability in perpetuity (ibid.).

‘Pre-fab’ housing has tended to be associated in the United Kingdom with shabby appearance and poor quality and comfort, while later modular construction methods, such as ‘system-built’ permanent council homes, were very unpopular with tenants in the 1970s and 1980s due to structural flaws (Boughton, 2018). Lewisham had substantial numbers of pre-fabricated homes, built to house those displaced by bomb damage in World War II, which was by contrast, beloved by many inhabitants, a few properties enduring well into the 21st century before being replaced by a mixed public-private regeneration scheme (Lewisham Council, 2021a). In another London borough, Ealing, at about the same time as PLACE/Ladywell, transport containers were repurposed to provide housing for the homeless; here cramped conditions as well as thermal comfort were to emerge as major issues for tenants (Butler, 2019).

A housing strategy officer at Lewisham council noted the council’s current mixed programme of newbuild, estate regeneration and innovation: ‘the other thing that we’ve been doing in the last three or four years is I would say sort of demonstrator and niche projects that try and point towards how things might be done differently’ (Interview 1). At niche-innovation level, Place/Ladywell aimed to take pre-fabricated housing to a new level in terms of both interior and exterior quality. With its aesthetically appealing design and appearance of permanence, PLACE/Ladywell



was intended to transform the image of temporary modular housing in a way that not only benefits the tenants but also transforms the image of the locations where it is sited. A borough-wide benefit envisaged for Place/Ladywell was to develop the precision-built, factory-made modular housing industry.

It's an alternative to the current contracting arrangements where there's a very small number of contractors, developers, they use traditional skills that haven't changed in 100 years. The employment market for those skills is hugely based on European labour, which is a massive risk under Brexit. It's very difficult to see through the supply chain on construction, so people outsource all the way down, subcontract all the way down to individual small packages and it's very hard to get quality control, it's very hard to scale, it's really . . . it's very hard to do anything really imaginative or interesting with it, whereas if you're automating in a factory you get the benefits of scale.

(Interview 1)

The intention was to create demountable housing modules that meet or exceed regional (i.e. Greater London) design standards, including better thermal comfort and energy efficiency, and that visually enhance the area where they are located. Furthermore, while vacant urban sites have found temporary uses for retail, sports and leisure uses (e.g. the Art Park in the neighbouring Borough of Southwark), making such sites available for residential accommodation is a relatively new and untested use. Another innovation of PLACE/Ladywell was therefore to develop planning tools for the temporary residential use of vacant sites.

It might also be argued that by creating rental value from the vacant Leisure Centre site, the Borough has put its public land ownership to good use in generating an income while providing new public facilities. However, the picture looks more complex when the financing of the scheme is considered – the larger part of which is derived from the council's prior sale of public land (Interview 1; Harris et al., 2019). In terms of this site alone, there has so far been no net loss of public amenity, because the Leisure Centre has been reconstructed in the regeneration zone in the north of the Borough ('Barratt had built us a new swimming pool as part of the town centre development so we no longer needed this one.' (Interview 1)). Despite the apparent origin of the move in 'planning gain' the new location has a higher footfall and is arguably more accessible and amenable to public transport – thus can benefit more of the Borough's residents. It is not clear, however, whether the new Leisure Centre disposes of an equivalent amount of land as the large site now fronted by PLACE/Ladywell.

Another borough-wide benefit is for Lewisham families categorized as homeless or under threat of homelessness, who are drawn from across the Borough by the agency that manages the apartments, Lewisham Homes.



While the scheme houses only 24 such families at any one time, tenure is expected to be around 18 months on average, the time the council expects to take to find these families permanent social housing. Thus, if the scheme is expected to stay in each location for around four years, then about 48 families will be supported to stay in the Borough for this time.

However, at present, tenants will mainly be rehoused outside of Borough, due to the scarcity of social housing in London (and in spite of 80% of social housing becoming available in Lewisham being prioritized for homeless families – Interview 1). Some Lewisham homeless families have been rehoused in converted office blocks in cities such as Bristol and Harlow (Butler, 2019). Thus, the justice benefits for tenants of being able to stay connected to their original borough of residence are currently strictly temporary.

#### *Scheme implementation: cross-borough replication plans*

Very much in the manner envisaged for a niche-innovation model, PLACE/Ladywell has triggered plans for Borough-wide replication in at least three other sites of council-owned vacant land in Lewisham. The first of these is in Edward Street, Lewisham, a former council-owned sports field in a disadvantaged residential area of Deptford.

The plans for the Edward Street scheme as published in the local press demonstrate strong aesthetic and architectural qualities, although in a more sober style than PLACE/Ladywell, one more in keeping with the mainly residential surroundings (Lewisham Council, 2021b). The plans for the ground floor spaces in this scheme have been discussed in terms of a community centre or communal nursery with some neighbourhood-level consultation on the best use of the space: this implies the possibility of some direct neighbourhood benefits for the scheme at the local level. Ultimately, should the three PLACE/Ladywell replication projects come to fruition, both borough-level and neighbourhood-level benefits are likely to result from the PLACE/Ladywell niche-innovation. But the nature of the benefits may be more narrow and temporary than appears at face value, as discussed in the section below on ‘intra-regional’ benefits.

#### *Metropolitan level – scheme origins*

The idea of replacing the Lewisham Leisure Centre with a temporary use that draws attention to the site and raises its value for development may have been inspired by the burgeoning of ‘meanwhile’ projects taking place in neighbouring boroughs, for example, the well-regarded ‘Art Park’ in nearby Southwark (Interview 4; The Artworks, 2019). A more direct genealogy can be traced to the 2014 Y-Cube project for single homeless people in the Mitcham district in south west London (Merton Local Authority), a permanent modular scheme by the same architects (YMCA, 2014; RIBA Journal, 2016).



However, prior to PLACE/Ladywell, it appears that temporary residential use had not been considered for vacant sites, outside of accommodation for construction workers. New planning legislation that allows commercial premises to be converted to homes came into force in the United Kingdom temporarily in 2013 and was made permanent in 2016 and expanded in 2020. There is now no obstacle to housing homeless people in former offices; this option has been taken up by some Local Authorities in England, and notably provides accommodation for homeless Londoners in places like Harlow and Bristol, when, as is frequently the case, their Local Authority is unable to rehouse them in the city (Butler, 2019). The lack of ‘meanwhile’ residential uses before PLACE/Ladywell is thus likely to be related to a generally more restrictive and regulated context for the provision of residential accommodation prior to deregulation in 2013/2016.

A further disincentive might be the cost of providing additional infrastructure for residential utilities such as waste, water and power; perhaps on a scale greater than the preceding land use required, but unlikely to be on an adequate scale for future development; something which the larger PLACE Ltd replication was in the course of working out at the time of the interview in 2019 (Interview 5). In the case of a small scheme like PLACE/Ladywell, however, it seems unlikely that the infrastructure needs of the flats and offices would exceed the infrastructure in place from the former leisure centre, although, no doubt, adaptations were required. Thus, in addition to innovation in terms of its demountable modular building, PLACE/Ladywell provides an opportunity to explore the infrastructural and economic implications of ‘meanwhile’ residential use, with the potential to create rent from many vacant sites across the wider London region.

Part of the original £5 million funding for PLACE/Ladywell (£400,000) was derived from the regional authority: this was specifically for the ground floor commercial space (Harris et al., 2019: 50). Modular offsite housing was promoted in both the draft new Greater London Plan (GLA, 2017), where it is termed ‘precision manufacturing’, and in central government guidance promoting offsite manufacturing as a solution to the housing crisis (UK Government, 2017a, 2017b) and customized modules built offsite for difficult sites in the city (Homes England, 2018). In line with this positive policy context, the London Councils group soon made moves to draw back regional benefits from the GLA’s initial investment, as explained in the next section.

### *Scheme implementation: roll out*

In 2018, the London Councils group came to the decision to add the PLACE/Ladywell strategy to its varied raft of interventions to mitigate the city’s homelessness crisis by setting up a dedicated company called PLACE Ltd. The purpose of this organization is to improve the region’s provision for homeless individuals and families, by rolling out its own version of the PLACE/Ladywell model across a number of participating London Boroughs,



thus producing a potential regional-level distributional justice benefit for the scheme. The initial model at the time of launch was to acquire a number of modules (around 200 initially) and lease them out to London local authorities as and when they have vacant sites (Interview 1, 5).

coincidentally I was working at Lewisham when the scheme in Ladywell was procured. I wasn't actually on the procurement team for that one, but I was in daily contact with [Interviewee 1] and his team, and I was doing other housing development work in Lewisham at the time. So for me personally I was certainly very aware of that product and what had been achieved, and, so I would say that was quite an inspiration. And also lessons learned, because it wasn't . . . didn't go perfectly.  
[Interview 5]

Although a different architect and contractor will be used for the wider London replication, and it will take place only in a small number of signatory boroughs in the foreseeable future, it has the potential to amplify at the regional level the spatial justice impacts of introducing temporary residential accommodation for the homeless onto vacant sites in the metropolis. It is doing this by developing its own specifications, organizing a bid process for the contractor, and developing the planning tools required for temporary residential uses on vacant plots. Importantly, the PLACE Ltd replications will not only use local authority land, as in Lewisham, but may extend to leasing land in private ownership or owned by other local authorities (Interviews 5 and 6).

The precision-built, factory-made housing industry is relatively undeveloped in the United Kingdom, compared with other European countries, but promises improvements in terms of lower costs and construction times, adaptability to different sites and scales, and with equal or better space, comfort and aesthetic standards as standard on-site construction. Part of the purpose of the roll-out of the action at both the local and regional levels is to develop the industry so that it can refine models for more permanent housing. This is in line with central government policy to promote flexible modular approaches to creating infill, building extensions and newbuild blocks (GLA, 2017; HE, 2018).

### **Justice impacts from 2018 to the present**

#### *Neighbourhood level – emerging problems for tenants, enterprises and community*

The neighbourhood consultation described in the previous part of this chapter may have resulted in the consultees' desired mix of amenities and business types in PLACE/Ladywell's ground floor enterprise hub – a makers' market,



cinema and community café. But these were not of long duration and all were closed or replaced by late 2018, the longest-lived of them being the café. In all the consultation-inspired enterprises lasted just over half of the scheme's anticipated four-year life in this location.

Diverse reasons were adduced by enterprises and management organization interviewees for the failure of most of the initial uses, most of which indicate that the ground floor enterprise hub was not fully integrated into the strategy and budget for the scheme. These included: the inexperience of the traders; the lack of footfall in this part of the High Street; the lack of parking for the scheme and neighbourhood; the ineffective management of the building, split between three different, disconnected organizations; the unsuitability of the building for the purpose; and a lack of promotion budget, due to the high cost of the initial consultation (Interviews 1, 10 and 12). Poor security was also an issue, and by the beginning of 2019, keypad access to all businesses, as well as gated security for the flats, had been introduced.

The withdrawal of these enterprises left a few voids, alongside a somewhat isolated and disparate group of small traders, NGOs and two different rented desk space areas remaining on the ground floor of the scheme; these latter were said to be successful by two interviewees (10 and 12). Two of the NGOs that endured in the hub can be said to have been of direct neighbourhood benefit: the DEK enterprise agency and the Rushey Green Time Bank. The former, funded by the European Regional Development Fund, operates one of the two deskspace rental schemes in PLACE/Ladywell and helped small businesses to upskill and grow. The Time Bank provides a range of mutual support and co-teaching activities, social opportunities and local reward schemes for volunteers (mainly older people) and helps to combat isolation. Other businesses surviving in the ground floor, however, did their main trade through the Internet and seemed to have chosen the scheme for its provision of a photogenic backdrop for their displays, and as a place to meet with wholesalers.

What we have instead are businesses that could run anywhere, because they do most of their trade online, but that can also at the same time put together a really decent shop front and have a showroom, so they might as well have it at Ladywell as anywhere else. So they don't depend on trade there to make it happen but they can be there and they activate the space.

(Interview 1, 2018, Housing Strategy, Lewisham Council)

More 'niche' enterprises such as a specialist tailor for older ethnic minority women, there from the start of the scheme, had been moved back from the façade window space, although a large haberdasher was permitted a prominent street front window.



The general lack of promotion of the enterprise hub extended to links with neighbouring businesses (Interview 12) which did not feel connected with or informed about the scheme and its future. Once the café closed at the end of 2018, its former space was given over to sporadic exhibitions and events; paradoxically, the organizers' using the pub opposite for their meetings was the first time the pub manager considered the scheme's potential as a community facility for the neighbourhood (Interview 11). The fact that the 'enterprise hub' at PLACE/Ladywell did not make any economic contribution to the scheme's cost recovery model (Interview 1) may also be behind its ultimate neglect and abandonment.

Neither the managing organization nor the Local Authority responded to requests for access to interview residential tenants; this was following an early research study of tenant's experience, reporting mixed experiences, in that the space allocation and quality of the apartments were appreciated while the open-plan interior design, use of white surfaces and precarity of the placement were found problematic, particularly in relation to the needs of families with young children (Harris et al., 2019). It became clear from interviews for this study that at no point had homeless families or homelessness organizations been consulted on the layout of the interior or external design aesthetic (which was also problematic for some tenants, as calling too much attention to their situation). Two ground-floor enterprise interviewees thought that the block could stay in place for longer than projected (Interview 2); as a permanent feature on the high street, it would have a role in separating traffic and shoppers from the new housing development that was planned for the extensive plot of land behind it. As seen in the next section, this may yet turn out to be its ultimate destiny.

*Borough level – decreasing direct benefits for the local authority and its residents*

The case study took place in a context where the local authority was looking for ways to deal with its homeless families in a cost-neutral way, or at least to reduce their impact on its annual expenditure. In line with Coalition and Conservative government policies in response to the financial crisis, there has been a greater than 40% cut to the local authority's budget since 2010.

While for an Inner London borough, Lewisham's average private rents are lower than the Inner London average, they have risen rapidly in the last decade (by 53% between 2011 and 2019 – Valuation Office Agency, 2019). The Local Authority is obliged by law to find temporary housing for homeless families and where the rent is not covered by Housing Benefit (for the unemployed), the Local Authority must top up the deficit. In practice this is a major expense for London Local authorities, to the extent that even a £5 million pound scheme such as PLACE/Ladywell can be portrayed as cost neutral. The timeline envisaged for cost neutrality is either in the first ten years of the scheme (Harris et al., 2019) or, somewhat less feasibly given the



increasing unpredictability of post-Brexit, post-pandemic economic futures, half-way through the scheme's 60-year time span (Interview 1). The Local Authority calculated that it would make a saving not only because it would remove the requirement to top up tenants' housing benefit, but because rents will be indirectly paid to the Local Authority for all the flats via the Unemployment Benefit, provided at the level of Broad Rental Market Area (BRMA)<sup>1</sup> Local Housing Allowance (in 2018, this raised £220,000 for the Council per year, while rehousing families in the private rented sector would be expected to cost around £100,000 per year, meaning a total of £320,000 benefit per year, although no net income was generated from the ground floor retail area – Interview 1) which also might be expected to rise over the course of the scheme's lifespan.

At the time when the Local Authority was interviewed about the scheme in 2018, the future of the economic model was already looking uncertain, perhaps due to the absorption of the original building contractor, SIG, into an organization with a very different remit, Urban Splash. Various alternatives to maintaining it as housing for the homeless were considered:

I've always had this idea in my head that we should just take it apart and lease it to Kensington and Chelsea where they could put it on the Fulham Road or something and we make an absolute fortune out of it for five years, because the standard's good, the space standards are good, the fit out quality is good, it's nice quality housing and you just put it in a 'nice location' and get your money back that way.

(Interview 1, Housing Strategy, Lewisham Council)

While rents in central London have fallen during the pandemic, in other parts of London they have risen as people re-locate from central areas, perhaps for health and security as much as for economic reasons. However, at the same time, it is predicted that many overseas workers and economic migrants have left the city due to the loss of work during the series of lockdowns that took place between 2020 and 2021, thus reducing rental demand over the city. Whatever the extent of the post-lockdown bounce-back, it is likely that Lewisham rents will not continue to rise at the pace seen in the preceding decade. The recent (May 2021) re-election of Labour Mayor Sadiq Khan for another four-year term implies greater protections of tenants' rights, in particular the right to contest eviction, will be upheld in the capital – potentially somewhat reducing numbers of families at risk of homelessness. A further contextual change relates to the impact of the pandemic on plans for linking Lewisham with the London underground system, initially to take place by 2030 (Transport for London, 2021) but now suspended as the cost of the pandemic diverts funds from new infrastructure projects.

But perhaps most importantly there has been some internal re-assessment of the model, probably based on initial higher-than-anticipated costs of



creating the onsite components linking the modules, including the entrances and common parts (Interview 1). Maintenance costs may also be higher than expected: various structural flaws emerged during the first 30 months of the scheme's operation (Interviews 2, 9, 12). The scheme's builder, SIG had been subsumed into another company, Urban Splash by 2018, so were no longer available to undertake the move (Interview 1). These may be the reasons that a local news story in 2021 proposes that council officers consider the scheme may simply be 'too costly to move' (Cuffe, 2021). Substantiating this, the scheme is still in situ on Lewisham High Street more than a year after its projected relocation. And it remains unclear whether any progress has been made on the first Borough-located replication scheme, on Edward Street in the Deptford district of Lewisham. As, according to the Lewisham council interviewee (Interview 1) Edward Street's financing depended on loans, rather than cash receipts (which the council used to fund PLACE/Ladywell), the far more restrictive lending of the post-pandemic era may reduce the likelihood of the replication taking place.

#### *Regional level – niche-innovation or warning beacon?*

The regional-level impacts of the scheme began in 2018, with the setting up of PLACE Ltd by London Councils. Although at the regional, Greater London level, PLACE Ltd had appointed a contractor and begun plans for the first roll-out of the initiative outside Lewisham in late 2019, the emergence of the pandemic in early 2020 appears to have led plans to be suspended. In the meantime, London Councils has focused on the other strands of its homelessness policy such as a collaboration between London Local Authorities to procure good quality housing that enables its homeless families to stay within their borough (London Councils, undated; Interview 5).

The regional PLACE scheme tests both what is now termed 'precision manufacturing' (the preferred term for off-site fabrication) and procurement at scale, on a collaborative basis, by cooperating Local Authorities (Interview 8). It is intended to increase the appeal of the temporary modular housing to boroughs because it removes the pressure on them to find the next site in their local authority area – the modules can be transferred to any of the collaborating boroughs (Interview 7). Because of the variety of sites considered, it uses an accommodation-only model and it was considered unlikely that any of the proposed vacant sites under development would include a street-level retail requirement (Interviews 5 and 6), thus the problems encountered with PLACE/Ladywell's enterprise hub would be unlikely to feature in the Greater London roll-out scheme. Additionally, in terms of timing, the regional scheme was well-placed to learn from and avoid the pitfalls that have emerged from the PLACE/Ladywell pilot – including perhaps the flaws in the initial cost of relocating the modules.

At the time of interviews with PLACE Ltd a lot of work was going into developing a planning practice note for participating Local Authorities



(Interview 7). They were also working up financial models for the scaled-up model – this time over a predicted 40-year lifespan – including whether local authorities or PLACE paid for site improvements and infrastructure (Interviews 5, 6 and 7), and whether cross-subsidy between schemes might be possible, given the variation in Local Housing Allowance (housing benefit) at sub-borough levels (BRMA) (Interviews 5, 6 and 7). At the time of the interviews in 2019, due to the design of the funding, the first 200 units for PLACE Ltd needed to be on site by March 2021 (Interview 7); it is possible the timeline has been extended due to the pandemic. However, it seems equally possible that the volatility and uncertainty of the London rental market in the foreseeable future could baffle attempts to create reliable economic models and lead to longer-term suspension of the project.

### The mid-term and long-term impacts of the scheme after 2021

#### *Homeless families*

The long-term *intra-regional* spatial justice contribution of the scheme goes beyond its impacts on neighbourhoods, council taxpayers or London citizens, to its capacity finally to further the longer-term housing needs of homeless families; in most cases, this implies finding permanent housing within the borough, so as to maintain social networks and continuity of employment and schooling. As we have seen, at present on its own, the scheme cannot assure this long-term outcome due to the dearth of permanent social housing available within the borough. But since about 2014, the Local Authority began constructing new social housing again, as easing of regulatory and funding constraints began to make this possible for the first time in many years. By late 2018, around 500 new homes had begun building with another 500 targeted within the next five years (Interview 1). The question would then arise about the current estate tenants displaced by the rebuilding programme.

The PLACE/Ladywell scheme itself aims to provide part of the solution to this in the mid-term. One of the multiple, borough-wide benefits for the scheme envisaged by the council is that the tenants of these estates might in future be housed in demountable modular buildings on-site while their homes are redeveloped (ASBP, 2018: Slide 27). To what extent, however, can it be assumed that the council's housing initiatives – such as that planned to take place on the larger PLACE/Ladywell site, whether or not the modules are relocated – and other regeneration taking place on Lewisham's major estates, will have the net impact of increasing local social housing availability? Whether there is enough alternative housing to support Lewisham families in need at social rents will depend upon a number of policy and fiscal factors that are difficult to predict with certainty.

The 2011 Localism Act has empowered Local Authorities to act as developers in generating income from their estate that can be used to support their services. In Lewisham and elsewhere in London, this has meant that council



land is redeveloped with a mix of public and private housing, the latter being used to cross-subsidize the former (Minton, 2017). The new private provision is likely to result in a reduction in the number of homes at social rents on each estate site; and may equally lead to an erosion of genuinely affordable social rents (see UK Government, 2021) in favour of so-called ‘affordable’ (80% market rate) rents (see Witton, 2019). While Lewisham’s own estate regeneration has (at least in the more recent schemes) densified land use, resulting in 2,000 homes, only 50% of these are classed as ‘affordable’ (Interview 1); and the majority of those classed as affordable will not be at social rents (see later).

Another factor is the continued erosion of the available pool of social housing due to the continuation of the 1980s ‘right to buy’ policy, which means that even if Local Authorities use new powers to increase their supply of social housing, tenants have the right to buy it for lower than market rates and thus remove it from the available pool of social housing. Ironically, some of the £5 million cost of PLACE/Ladywell came from Right to Buy revenues received by Lewisham (Interview 1; Harris et al., 2019). Thus, public money used to construct permanent homes at social rents has effectively been diverted to generate highly temporary ones, largely unsuitable for families and with unknown properties of durability and viability, over time and space.

One longer-term aspect of regional and local spatial justice has been overlooked in the foregoing account: the aspect whereby, in transitioning to a development rather than a redistribution role, Local Authorities may have managed to wrest back some long-term control of their finances and housing portfolios from central government. Once estates such as that projected for the site behind the PLACE/Ladywell building are up and running, the council will be less dependent on the political orientation or ideology of central government for its housing finance and can make more autonomous decisions about future development and the breakdown between its provision of social rent, affordable rent, market rent and shared ownership provision. This is the argument explored in a book on the impact on housing of the new municipal entrepreneurialism (Morphet and Clifford, 2021). This might appear at face value to deliver a spatial justice dividend, allowing more local control of housing policy, especially crucial in a very centralized governance system such as the United Kingdom (see, e.g. Ladner et al., 2015).

The effects of redeveloping the great London social housing estates under the new cross-subsidizing model whereby some sales and private rents provide the funding for social housing creation and maintenance are after all likely to mitigate the mosaic of deprivation in the Borough and generate neighbourhoods of mixed tenure which might ultimately have an impact on intra-regional segregation. But, as pointed out by a housing activist in a neighbouring borough interviewed for the case study, there are more losers than winners in estate regeneration – including more recent



tenants with insecure tenancies (which may make up around a fifth of tenancies), right-to-buy leaseholders the value of whose homes may exclude them from the local market, those who have bought from the right-to-buy owners, or those renting from them (Interview 4). While public-private partnerships and development schemes may be seen by councils as essential due to the huge reduction in government housing grant (Interview 7) or ‘the only game in town’ (Interview 4), the cost of such policies in terms of distributional justice are high: councils such as Lewisham and neighbouring Southwark increasingly describe their housing strategy in terms of ‘we will provide homes for people on all incomes’. In practice, this means that they cannot provide all the housing that those on the lowest incomes need (Interview 4). Increasingly much of the benefit of publicly funded housing schemes is falling to those with better levels of earnings and prospects including students, keyworkers, and even young professionals (Interviews 1, 4). The London Tenants Federation collected proportions of social to other kinds of housing built by councils in 2018/2019. Just 16% of the new housing built in Lewisham was at social rents (making it somewhat higher than the London average of just 5 %) (London Tenants’ Federation, 2021).

Lewisham, the Lewisham Gateway, the renaissance quarter as they call it, . . . it’s got 800 new homes, it’s giving 35% affordable housing. Seventy percent of that is social rented, that’s about 140/150 units, but it did entail the demolition of the Sundermead Estate, and I don’t know how many units that had on it, it might not have had that many, but even leaving that aside you know, 146 units out of 800 is something that you wrest - getting back to local authorities - they’ve wrested that from the developers, Barratt’s. And really we should be looking at these huge big developments for the solution of our housing crisis.

(Interview 4, 2019, Housing Activist)

### *Neighbourhood, borough and region*

Visiting the scheme in a rainy late February in 2019, water-staining of the concrete parts and unattractive securitization of tenants’ entrance had reduced the initial visual appeal of the building, first encountered in the previous year. This raises a cross-scale issue that affects both the original scheme and its borough and regional replications (should the latter materialize). While future sites for the modules may be less visible and high profile in terms of their location, there is an implicit assumption that the modules will nevertheless enhance these sites. In other words, it must be assumed that the modular housing manufacturing industry and construction industry and the local authority had a sufficient long-term stake in the durability of the building



facades. There appeared to have been much thought applied to making temporary homes look permanent, in both the original and regional replications:

we also have to be able to move it without spending a long time taking off all the façade that's been used to make sure it doesn't look like it's modular. So you're kind of asking for these two paradoxical things; it's got to look permanent, but it's got to be really easy to move. But the designers we're working with are coming up with some great ideas, so it is doable.  
(Interview 5)

It does seem that at the planning stage of PLACE Ltd, the regional scheme, the potential for costing in re-cladding the modules at points in their future existence was considered (Interview 8), not only on the grounds of the appearance of the modules after a move, but so that the look and feel of them can be adjusted to fit into the new site. It is not clear to what extent this was incorporated into the final business plan for the larger scheme.

According to an interviewee at Lewisham Council, 'so it's been guaranteed for five moves as part of the warranty for five moves, but the proof will be in the moving' (Interview 1). Should the buildings significantly and visibly deteriorate between moves, and over four or five site relocations envisaged to take place over the course of their 60-year lifetime, an important element of their supposed mitigation of the planning blight of vacant lots for the communities where they are located – in terms of both improving the appearance of the area and attracting new development to it – will be forfeited.

Should the urban design contribution of the scheme prove durable, however, the development of the off-site, precision-built modular housing through experiments such as PLACE/Ladywell has the capacity to lower the costs of creating new social housing without forfeiting civic and human dignity, thus potentially allowing more families to be housed permanently at lower cost, either through the public or the private sector. An interviewee from the GLA pinpointed the main benefits of the PLACE Ltd scheme for the region:

But the main one [i.e. rationale] is the scale of house building that we need to see now and in the future. So already now we have a very constrained labour market in terms of construction skills, a very low productivity sector and issues like an aging workforce in the construction sector, a very heavily EU migrant . . . I think it's about 50% of London's home building construction workforce is from the EU, and I think for the rest of the country it's about 15% or something, so really quite heavily skewed in London. All those pose additional challenges to the existing issues that are present now. Added to that, speed of construction, quality of construction.

(Interview 8)



There may yet be a substantial intra-regional benefit for the scheme; but, as the various iterations of the model appear to be in the process of exposing, this may be further into the future than was originally hoped.

### **Conclusion: the image of justice**

For a housing scheme that appears to present a heady combination of social objectives, high-quality urban design values and construction process innovations, PLACE/Ladywell, in existence since 2016, has yet to prove its value on any of these dimensions. Its initial provision of needed facilities and opportunities for the neighbourhood largely fizzled out within the first two years; at Borough and regional level, its positive contributions to spatial justice remain largely in the to-be-hoped-for future – be they through supporting homeless families to transition to secure local housing, supporting tenants to stay on-site through the estate regeneration process or increasing confidence in off-site construction as a solution to metropolitan housing needs.

In common with other urban case studies in the RELOCAL project, however, its symbolic power is undeniable: it appears to achieve the impossible – to attach glamour and energy to the desperate human situation of homelessness, at the same time as cutting the public costs of keeping families off the streets. This might go some way to explaining its appeal, and why it was taken up locally and regionally with such enthusiasm, but hindsight shows the extent to which any justice impacts of the model were dependent upon a uniquely complex mix of policy and economic factors pertaining in Lewisham and London. The measured words of a national homelessness agency about the scheme show the high level of context dependency:

given the constraints on Lewisham's ability to build new housing for social rent, or to intervene more fully in the private rental market to sort out the problems in the PRS [private rented sector], then it's a positive way to square the circle.

(Interview 3, 2019, officer at national homelessness organization)

The impacts of Brexit, followed by the fall-out from the global pandemic, have revealed the model's fragility and contestability, at least over the short to mid term.

### **Note**

- 1 This level is set at sub-local authority level, so will vary between different areas of Lewisham and is subject to change when factors such as transport infrastructure or school assessment ratings improve.



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# 11 Incomplete justice is no justice

## Learning from the neoliberal and elitist planning experiences of Euralens and EPA Alzette-Belval

*Cyril Blondel and Estelle Evrard*

### Introduction

For those interested in spatial injustice in France, analysing Pas-de-Calais' former mining basin and the Pays Haut Val d'Alzette (in northern Lorraine) comes as an unsurprising choice. Symbolizing the decline of French industry, these regional localities are challenged to address a number of economic and societal challenges. Mainly agrarian until the nineteenth century, the local economies of these two areas were transformed by a rapid rise of the coal and iron mining industry until the mid-twentieth century. Industrial companies steered not only economic growth but also urbanization and provided most of the amenities in a form of "industrial paternalism" (see Reid, 1985). Municipalities were institutionally weak. After more than a century of "industrial glory", the progressive and almost total collapse of industrial activity in our two case study areas provoked a crisis in the 1970s, which remains visible today. In fact, the mining basin of Pas-de-Calais receives the lowest scores for social, economic, health or educational indicators in all of France.

In addition to economic decline, local authorities have faced successive waves of state decentralization since the 1980s and an increased application of neoliberal ideology. While gaining an increasing share of power (particularly in planning) but with limited financial resources, local authorities are urged to reorganize and merge in order to supposedly consolidate their capacities for action. Meanwhile, as in most of European countries, strategic planning has been gradually replaced by project-led planning. Consequently, local authorities have been increasingly expected to shape and implement a territorial strategy in support of their (re)development. Northern Lorraine and Pas-de-Calais are no exceptions. Firstly, and in both regions alike, the local authorities understand their geographic proximity to growing European metropolises as a possible advantage. In these two cases, it is largely proximity to Lille, Brussels and Luxembourg that matters. Secondly, arguing that they are facing particularly adverse circumstances, elected representatives in both areas have demanded compensatory intervention from the state. The state's responses have been twofold. In the 2000s, the French state decided to decentralize the two national museums, with mainly cultural goals in mind



(Baudelle and Krauss, 2014). A branch of the Pompidou Museum opened in Metz, a few kilometres south of the former Lorraine steel valley, as did a branch of the Louvre Museum in Lens (and later the conservation centre of the Louvre Museum in Liévin) in the centre of the Pas-de-Calais mining basin. In the latter, the then Nord Pas-de-Calais Region brought together local actors to create the association “Euralens” which, at that time, was dedicated to supporting and maximizing the arrival of the museum in that territory. In the following decade, the French state set up two specific institutional mechanisms targeting the renewal of housing:

- In northern Lorraine, the public planning establishment EPA Alzette-Belval (EPA AB, EPA standing for *Etablissement Public d'Aménagement*) was commissioned to build housing, thus taking advantage of the high demand resulting from rapid economic growth in Luxembourg;
- In the Pas-de-Calais mining basin, the Commitment for the Renewal of the Mining Basin (*Engagement pour le Renouveau du Bassin Minier*) concentrated the state's efforts on the renewal of particularly degraded and impoverished neighbourhoods that formerly housed workers.<sup>1</sup>

Our chapter examines whether these rather top-down interventions support local governance structures and enable them to drive local development according to their own needs and interests. We examine in particular the extent to which local authorities have been able to initiate local development actions by themselves without oversight from other tiers of governance. We also assess the contribution of these new institutions to fairer decision-making processes by including disadvantaged groups, supposedly the addressees of community development policy. We will first focus on the deep socioeconomic transformations faced by the localities and outline the rationales for action led by the organizations we have identified as the most influential actors in the two case studies. We then question the local authorities' supposed increase in power in the context of increased decentralization, in particular their capacity to develop their own territorial development strategies. Finally, we assess the contributions these actions have made in terms of procedural justice, critically examining the legitimacy of decision-making processes and how the participation of the less powerful and poorest inhabitants is (or is not) organized.

### **Nord Pas-de-Calais and northern Lorraine: two localities, two approaches to fighting spatial injustice**

The former Pas-de-Calais mining basin and northern Lorraine are examples of French localities targeted by public redevelopment policies.<sup>2</sup> Their rapid development, driven by the coal mining and iron mining and metallurgy industries, respectively, until the mid-twentieth century, profoundly affected their respective environments and transformed the landscape. Towns



gradually grew up around the industrial activities, producing diffuse urbanization patterns. All aspects of the workers' lives were organized around the factories and their administration, which managed everything from work to leisure. After the Second World War, the state took over most of the activities in both localities. From the 1970s to the 1990s, they faced a progressive and almost total collapse of their industrial activities, on which local economies were almost exclusively based. Since then, the state along with newly empowered actors – local authorities – has attempted to implement new, sometimes alternative, territorial development strategies.

In their recent strategic documents, policymakers identified the proximity to two emerging European metropolises (Lille and Luxembourg, and, more broadly, the “blue banana”) as potential levers for redevelopment. The major difference between the two cases today is that Pas-de-Calais' socioeconomic situation is still complicated, whereas the socioeconomic indicators for northern Lorraine have gradually improved. The latter region has continued to lose a large number of jobs while paradoxically increasing in population in the form of workers employed in Luxembourg. Since late 1990s, Lorraine's local economy has gradually shifted from a productive economy to a “residential” economy, reaching the symbolic threshold of 100,000 daily commuters from Lorraine to Luxembourg in 2019 (Helfer and Pigeron-Piroth, 2019). Local authorities are still struggling to cope with these transformations, as Luxembourg's job market does not match the skills of the former industrial employees, and requires specific services (e.g., childcare, healthcare services) and public infrastructure that are suited to commuters' needs. The Pas-de-Calais mining basin has faced a more difficult situation. The regional context is less favourable, as Lille, itself facing industrial crisis for several decades, could not appear as an economic driver as strong as Luxembourg. The scale of the crisis was also greater because the end of coal mining has been synonymous with job losses in the several hundreds of thousands. As a result, it still attracts amongst the weakest scores for social, economic, health or educational indicators in France.<sup>3</sup> Its reputation was gradually tainted, contributing to a stigmatization of the region and its inhabitants as a whole, also repelling investors, thus establishing a negative dynamic. In this difficult socioeconomic context, the traditionally very leftist region has seen the far-right party grow stronger, especially in the last decade. At the 2017 parliamentary elections, the four elected MPs from the territory were members of the far-right party – the Rassemblement National (National Rally), or RN – including their leader Marine Le Pen. They have campaigned heavily on immigration and social exclusion issues. Following the local elections of 2020, two of the six most important towns (i.e., Hénin-Beaumont, Bruay-la-Buissière) elected representatives from the National Rally party and in fact Pas-de-Calais has become one of the territories (along with the South-East of France) where National Rally has become firmly anchored. The situation is not quite the same in the north of Lorraine. RN's ratings are admittedly on the rise. One of the most populated municipalities (Hayange) elected a



far-right party representative in 2014 and 2020. Nevertheless, most of the MPs from the territory are members of the Liberal Party (President Macron's political party).

This difference in terms of socioeconomic environment has consequences in terms of local government. While in northern Lorraine, the state still is the main actor in local development in order to steer the Luxembourgish boom in the region, the local actors in Pas-de-Calais have had to organize themselves, as their situation appeared to be less strategic from the state's point of view.

*Euralens, seeking procedural justice through valorization and the cooperation of local actors*

Although profoundly different in nature and implementation, the initiatives under scrutiny aim to support the localities' long-term (re-)development and to reinforce the local governments. Our first case, Euralens, covers the territory of the Pas-de-Calais mining basin. This association was created in 2009 by the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region and brings together regional and local actors. Their intention was to use the establishment of the Louvre museum satellite in Lens as a catalyst, firstly for cultural development and then also for economic and social development. On its website, Euralens presents itself as supporting "the transition from the *black archipelago* [the past of the territory: the coal mines] to the *green archipelago* [supposedly the future of the territory based on green transition and sustainable development]". Citing the examples of Bilbao and Emscher Park, the website states that the ambition is to take "inspiration from great European examples that managed the transformation from industrial legacy into culture and innovation". In 2021, it has two main missions: to prepare and facilitate the emergence of a metropole<sup>4</sup> (positioning itself as a "metropolisation laboratory"); and to foster local development by supporting innovative local initiatives (positioning itself as a "local project incubator").

In formal terms, Euralens is an association involving (1) elected representatives and public officers, (2) public agencies, (3) members of the civil society and (4) business actors. Relatively small, with only four permanent positions, the Euralens team is supported by two renowned landscape and urban planning firms: Jean-Louis Subileau (urban planner, head of the firm "*la fabrique de la ville*") and Michel Desvigne (landscape planner, head of a firm that bears his name), both holders of the "*Grand Prix de l'urbanisme*" awarded annually by the French state. Euralens' main originality lies in its very nature: not being a local institution, it has no decision-making powers. Nevertheless, by hosting and facilitating the discussion between the main public and private actors in the territory (who for decades have had difficulty in communicating), it has become a crucial governance tool. This authority rests partly on its capacity to stimulate strategic discussions and prepare strategic documents (e.g., annual general territorial assessment supporting the



development plan for the mining basin; see the section about development with/without the locality). It also rests on its ability to influence local governments. The constitution of the Artois Metropolitan Pole (PMA) in 2014 is one of Euralens' achievements on the "metropolisation laboratory" side. It is understood as the embryonic form of the future urban community at the scale of the Pas-de-Calais mining basin.

With regard to the local project incubator objective, Euralens has also set up a labelling process for local initiatives. Inspired by the Emscher Park IBA,<sup>5</sup> the Euralens label aims to "support the emergence and the strengthening of high-quality environmental, architectural, social and cultural initiatives that contribute to building a collective identity in a sustainable metropolis". At the beginning of 2021, the Euralens label has been awarded to 58 local initiatives in a wide range of fields (e.g., social and solidarity economy, tourism, culture and sustainable development, logistics and supply chain). According to Euralens employees, these two pillars are instrumental for Euralens to foster both procedural (integrating local development actors in formal territorial policy forums) and distributive (supporting local development) aspects of justice.

*EPA Alzette-Belval, seeking distributive justice by locally exploiting the proximity of the booming Luxembourg economy*

Our second case study, the EPA Alzette-Belval (EPA AB), is a public-led authority mandated by the French state to coordinate the territorial development of eight municipalities located in northern Lorraine, along the border with Luxembourg. Setting up this EPA is the French state's reaction to the redevelopment of the former Belval steel site initiated in the 2000s in the south of Luxembourg. Since then, Belval has become "the science city of Luxembourg" (Leick et al., 2020), hosting most of the country's research centres, higher education institutions, and several national administrations. Facing this extraordinary development just across the border, since the mid-2010s Lorraine's local, regional and national representatives have held the need to define a dedicated strategy to deal with the dependence on economic dynamics in neighbouring Luxembourg and the resulting imbalances as a priority:

On one side of the border, wealth and job creation and, on the other, support functions (e.g. housing, transport, social services – childcare, schools), the cost of which is essentially borne by the French budget, evolves with the call for labour from Luxembourg.

(EPA, 2019: 7)

Furthermore, the mining and steel industry left several wastelands in northern Lorraine, and the soils require decontamination and sanitation on such a scale that local authorities alone would not have been able to cope. The EPA



AB is one answer to deal both with the need to redevelop former industrial sites and with the pressure on land along the border.

In formal terms, the EPA AB is one of the 19 territories in France subject to an Operation of National Interest (OIN). In the arsenal of development tools, the *Etablissement Public d'Aménagement* is the strongest instrument in French planning law. Within its perimeter, it is endowed with legal and technical skills as well as financial resources to implement land strategies and contribute to the development of economic activities (art. L.321–1 of the French urban planning code). The development competences of the municipalities concerned are taken over from them, and for 20–30 years they are exercised by a Public Development Establishment (EPA). The state's taking over of municipalities' planning powers must be justified by "the general interest in terms of planning and sustainable development" within a given perimeter (art. L.321–1 of the town planning code). The day-to-day technical work is undertaken by an operational team of 12 people and directed by a managing director appointed at national level. The EPA AB's main territorial strategy (Strategic Operational Plan, PSO) is periodically revised by the operational team using in-house resources and additional outside counsel. EPA structures are conceived primarily as planning instruments. Routes for the participation of citizens and even local authorities are defined in law.

EPA AB's main missions consist in processing and redeveloping former steel sites, as well as building and marketing housing and commercial spaces. They are usually set up in metropolitan contexts and not, as in Alzette-Belval, in a peri-urban context (29,000 inhabitants, eight municipalities spread over two departments). The reason for such a state intervention is as much the lack of means of the local territory as the significant pressure it is under: more than 70% of the territory's working population is employed in Luxembourg and 20,000 new inhabitants are expected in the territory between 2014 and 2034 (EPA, 2014: 8; EPA, 2019: 4). Summing up, the EPA AB presents itself as an initiative aiming at fostering spatial justice, and in particular redistributive justice, since it coordinates investments supporting the locality's development.

To better understand how these actions are perceived by local actors within the localities, and to determine to what extent they contribute to enhancing their capacities, if at all, we review the broader institutional framework in which they are framed in the next section.

### **Beyond decentralization: justice with or without the state**

Since the 1980s, the French state has increased decentralization. In parallel, it has encouraged small municipalities to merge into intercommunal groupings, in order, supposedly, to improve the quality of their services and reduce their administration costs. As they have been challenged to deal with the social and infrastructural costs connected to the decline of the industry and by their



peripheral location, less well-off localities such as the Pas-de-Calais mining basin and Northern Lorraine accept territorial groupings only reluctantly, while appealing to the state for dedicated support.

*At the local level: historically weak inter-municipality cooperation or a way to keep control?*

The neoliberal ideology behind decentralization in France is quite similar to that of other places in Europe. Epstein and Pinson describe the French situation as being less one of a strong state but rather that of a “regime of multiple governmentalities” within which the local level would progressively gain a reinforced autonomy (2021). Arguing that the French state has become less and less legitimate and efficient in a globalized world, governments have led successive decentralization reforms since 1983, at the same time inviting local municipalities to merge and giving more competences and means to new intercommunal institutions. The main arguments behind such a move are the alleged reduction of costs, the so-called pooling of skills in territorial engineering, but also a view that democracy would be accomplished more at the local level, a “reading tinged with evolutionism”, warned Desage (2020). Regarding all those arguments, recent research has indeed called for caution: “a democratic presupposition is spontaneously attached to the local, conceived as the ‘natural’ home of democracy and citizen participation . . . this assimilation between ‘local’ and ‘democracy’ is far from obvious” (Douillet and Lefebvre, 2017: 237).

Faced with this invitation to merge, which looks more and more like a forced march towards inter-municipality cooperation, local politicians in our two case studies have resisted it for several reasons. Beyond traditional political divides, our interviews show that some local politicians fear that their ability to influence decision-making could be reduced. Rather than the idealistic view that political groupings could be made by choice around a common territorial project, municipalities have engaged in avoidance: to resist joining with a poor territory with which sharing financial means would have been required, or to avoid being associated with communities that are too large.

The local planners’ views are less kind to local politicians, as they point mainly to the lack of a tradition of cooperation. Most of them have described a territory undermined by political divisions, between political parties or within the same political party. Whereas such a situation is part of the political realm, the consequences have been tragic, according to some interviewees in Pas-de-Calais: “Acting like this, the territory has been reproducing its own peripherality” (A1, 2018<sup>6</sup>). A quick look at the distribution of power – here, official responsibilities – in recent times shows a tradition of political lineages: “Here, politicians are still in the Middle Ages, each one of them at the head of what he thinks to be his own barony, in perpetual competition with the neighbouring baronies” (N9, 2018). This conception of power also affects the mode of leadership: “As soon as someone is responsible for something,



the neighbour is jealous and wants some kind of power too. [They] rarely serve the common good, they serve their own interests" (ibid.).

In the Pas-de-Calais context, the emergence of Euralens in 2009 is thus striking. It covers three conurbations (Béthune-Bruay, Hénin-Carvin and Lens-Liévin), whose merger (sometimes envisaged between them, sometimes also with neighbouring territories such as Arras and Douai) is constantly being put off by local politicians. According to most of the local planners interviewed, local cooperation is still "unnatural" to them since "the territory has been externally run for two centuries by private companies and then by the state" (A1). Another explanation advanced for this lack of cooperation is sometimes that of political morphology: the scattered urban form is presented as an insurmountable difficulty since "in comparison to most French metropolitan areas, there is no big city, and no *natural leader* that can position him- or herself as the main centre of the urban area" (ibid.). In this context, before the existence of Euralens, political cooperation at the level of the mining basin was presented as practically non-existent, and even today it still seems rather weak and difficult.

A similar conclusion can be drawn for the EPA AB, whose perimeter corresponds to the territory of the CCPHVA (standing for "Community of Municipalities of the Pays Haut Val d'Alzette"). Created in 2005, the CCPHVA is one of the smallest groupings of municipalities in France. The logic of avoidance applies here too, as local politicians created it to avoid joining two larger groupings (led by the municipalities of Thionville and Longwy) and to keep as many responsibilities as possible at the municipal level. Yet divergences of political views are numerous between the eight local mayors. It was even on the brink of dissolving in 2019. Historical reasons are sometimes invoked to justify claimed incompatibilities. The former French-German border crossing its territory remains in people's minds, affecting daily habits, and explain some societal differences (e.g., Moselle law, architectural and sociocultural differences) between two municipalities located in Meurthe-et-Moselle and the six others in Moselle. To explain such limited cooperation, local planners also point to political tensions (although the political leaders of the two main towns Villerupt and Audun-le-Tiche have, in recent decades, almost always have been from the same left-wing party) and more importantly the lack of a prospective territorial vision.

Thus, in both cases, inter-municipality cooperation is still associated with political complexity and does not allow the emergence of strategic visions and the reinforcing of territorial engineering as it was supposed to. We do not mean to imply that the problem is only technical. This is not just a question of finding a "good" scale of cooperation, as we share the view expressed in the literature that there is no good scale *per se* (Douillet and Lefebvre, 2017). From our point of view, there is rather a need to re-politicise the political debate around decentralization to better understand why democracy at the local level does not work so well and why some local politicians are resisting cooperation. Desage and Guéranger claim that the weak results



of decentralization in France come mainly from the difficulty of mayors sharing local power that they have concentrated in their hands for decades, which is expressed by their (growing) will to separate places of deliberation and places of decision-making (2014). We will see in the next two sections that our results tend to confirm such an assertion. But before that, we will explore what may appear to be a contradictory claim (but is not) in times of decentralization in our two case studies: the local demand for more state involvement.

### *Longing for state support*

Some of the interviewees in both case studies shared a common view of the state: it is not sufficiently present, albeit very much needed. In the Pas-de-Calais mining basin for instance, one of the interviewees says: “In this territory, we need a Jacobin state, because only the state has the capacity to look at the bigger picture and impose a more collaborative approach of territorial development on local politicians” (N15, 2018). This interviewee and some others argue that the state’s presence in the territory is not up to the enormous task at stake, in particular the two state-devolved instruments in the mining basin, the assistant Prefect in Lens and the new state political tool for the mining basin mentioned before, the ERBM (which is an inter-ministerial tool). When we interviewed them, those two state representatives agreed with such a statement and endorsed it, justifying the state’s weak involvement by its lack of means (limited human and financial resources) and its lack of political willingness to endorse such a Jacobin positioning. According to them, this call for the state is somehow a way for local authorities to refuse to endorse their own responsibility in planning territorial development, a tendency they explain by the so-called historical centralization of power in France. From our point of view, it is nothing less than an ideological take on the situation on both sides. When the neoliberal agenda supports the state’s disengagement (and the state’s public servants justify it), for the local leftist politicians that are still the majority at the local level, the state is the only entity to lead public action, as it is perceived as being in the best position to guarantee distributive justice.

This perception is also clearly discernible in the EPA AB case study. A majority of the local representatives, public servants and inhabitants interviewed share the feeling that only the state has the necessary financial resources, leadership and adequate tools to steer local development. The challenges they point out are indeed numerous and large: the “attractiveness needs to be boosted”, “brownfields need to be sanitised and decontaminated” and “infrastructure should be upgraded to welcome a growing population” (2019). For this reason, most of the local representatives welcome the implementation of the EPA in the region: “we think that [without] what’s going on [EPA’s activities], we wouldn’t have been able to do it on our own. If there had not been the OIN, development would still be taking place,



but in an uncontrolled manner” (PI24, 2018). Given the persistence of the economic boom in Luxembourg, most of the local politicians declared to us that the state appears to them to be the only authority able to foster territorial development at a level to match the Luxemburgish economy.

Yet the way the EPA operates leaves very little room for municipalities to be part of the deliberation – or even of the decision-making processes. The EPA AB is managed by a board of directors, bringing together its financial contributors from the national, regional and departmental authorities (5 representatives of the state, 5 of the region Grand Est, 3 for each of the *départements* Moselle and Meurthe-et-Moselle and 2 for the CCPHVA). Representatives of the municipalities have been given only two seats (one with voting rights, one as an observer) since the creation of the EPA. This situation seems paradoxical, since the EPA AB’s mission is the territorial development of these municipalities and given that CCPHVA is politically contested by several municipalities.

From the state’s point of view, its role is only to “seek a consensus around the project and promote the national interest while taking into account local issues”.<sup>7</sup> What is more questionable is what is meant by “local issues” and, more precisely, if it is legitimate for local politicians to have an opinion on them. But what is even more striking is that despite this strong imbalance, elected representatives have overwhelmingly welcomed the cooperation with EPA AB:

When the OIN arrived, I took it very well, even if there were still concerns for the elected representatives: who will decide, will we lose our ability to decide, etc. Today, we realise that this is not the case. [. . .] They [the EPA AB] didn’t go anywhere to impose anything. (Interview with a local public servant, in Lens, 14. 06. 2018. Interview key P24)

It seems that for them, the feeling of having been forgotten by the French state for decades during and after the industrial crisis overtook the need to be closely associated to the decision-making and the deliberation. To counterbalance their lack of a deliberating process, most of the local representatives we met have developed a specific strategy: they organize bilateral meetings with the EPA-AB. In terms of procedural justice, this seems to us problematic, since the arena for representative democracy, the CCPHVA, is thus bypassed and weakened, whereas by contrast, the technical and less democratic state agency is legitimized and reinforced. What we mean by less democratic is the fact that inhabitants of the CCPHVA have no direct control over the decisions taken.

Our assertion is also confirmed by the observation that some inhabitants have contested the EPA AB projects but also the incapacity of their elected representatives to represent them. They also complain that planning projects are thought mainly to accommodate the consequences of Luxembourg’s



booming economy. In their eyes (and the figures do not prove them wrong), the EPA is more about the construction of new housing for future inhabitants rather than the renovation of old mining neighbourhoods occupied by actual inhabitants, while nothing is done about the increase of the costs of living. This rising local discontent not only resulted in the EPA AB withdrawing some projects, but also eventually provoked some political change, as new representatives were elected at the local elections in 2020 in several municipalities in the territory (see the section on procedural justice).

Beyond the *cliché* that local authorities continue to request Paris' approval despite decentralization, our case studies demonstrate contrasting situations. In both territories, the state continues to appear in the eyes of most of the local politicians, civil servants and inhabitants as the only actor able to act in their complicated post-industrial situation and to re-establish some distributive justice. Nevertheless, the EPA AB case shows that inhabitants demonstrate an increasing will to have their say in the planning of their territory, to make sure that their interests are taken into consideration beyond those of the state and of the local politicians. The next section will show that such a claim is also made in the Euralens context, although the structure is supposedly more in the local hands.

### **Can development without the locality be just? And what does “with the locality” mean?**

At a first glance, Euralens and EPA AB seem quite opposite in their nature. Euralens is a forum aiming at renewing strategic territorial thinking. As an association without power or dedicated competence, its capacity for action is limited. EPA AB, by contrast, has the capacity to elaborate and to implement a territorial strategy, but it drives local development *in* the locality, rather than *with* it. We will see in this section that these two structures have more in common than it seems at first sight.

#### *Euralens, (performing) the “success-story” of a forum of local actors*

The very existence of an initiative such as Euralens fills a gap in territorial governance: “*Euralens would not exist if a proper adapted territorial governance tool were already in place in this region*” (N13, 2018). As imperfect and chaotic as some interviewees say it appears, it expresses an alternative vision: “*With Euralens, the idea is not to create a territorial strategy out of nothing, but to create the conditions for the territory to create one of its own by itself*” (A1, 2018). On the basis of the observation that the territory does not have a tradition of political cooperation, rather than creating yet another supra-municipal structure, Euralens employees see themselves as facilitators. Taking their lack of resources as a starting point, their approach is rather pragmatic: instead of developing a territorial strategy that their structure



or others would not have the means to carry, Euralens attempts to bring the existing structures to build and foster the convergence of existing strategies. It intends to demonstrate that cooperation can strengthen the territory: *“Euralens aims at creating a relationship between local actors and tries to demonstrate that all would win by working together, by cooperating”* (N15, 2018).

Euralens aims at being exemplary and reproduces most of the current urban planning buzz concepts: it promotes participatory processes, presenting them as tools for legitimizing and anchoring the territorial action; it involves international experts and develops private-public partnerships to feed territorial reflection. Their action is not only pragmatic but also strategic; they aspire to be seen as the “model pupil” of regeneration and resilience at the local, regional, national and even European level. But by following the flow and wanting to “catch up” from the region’s supposed backwardness, Euralens runs the risk of reproducing recipes from elsewhere that are not necessarily adapted to local needs.

Despite its limits, Euralens’ action appears to be effective for most of the local planners, especially in its consistent production of strategic thinking. Over the last decade, three kinds of documents have been produced. Firstly, Euralens supports the yearly ex-post evaluation of the Louvre-Lens museum. Even if “a museum cannot save a territory alone” (P21, 2018), most of the interviewees (politicians, planners and inhabitants alike) consider its installation as a success. It welcomes more visitors than expected and it develops strategies to empower its inhabitants, including the most modest ones. Euralens also created a board of experts called the “quality circle”, which consists of the two private urban planning agencies and about ten award-winning international experts in urban and regional planning. The “quality circle” publishes yearly spatial planning recommendations, either project-centred reflections on strategic infrastructure or on future planning documents. The “Chain of Parks” plan has, for example, become the first ecological vision for the Pas-de-Calais mining basin. Euralens thirdly initiates participative forums bringing together institutional actors, representatives from the civil society and inhabitants to collectively discuss strategic subjects chosen bottom-up during its general assemblies (e.g., 2016: participation of inhabitants, 2017: energy, 2018: Youth and Citizens’ Engagement).

Participatory observations confirm that the quality circle stimulates an exchange of best practice. As they value the knowledge of inhabitants, forums can be the place for lively debate with large groups (exceeding 200 in 2018). In a politically fragmented locality, this is a major accomplishment in terms of procedural justice. More importantly, Euralens attempts to change as much the dynamics of exchange and action at the local level as the image of the territory (breaking with territorial stigmatization). A substantial part of the budget is used to implement and to communicate this change at the same time. For the 10th anniversary of Euralens in 2019, for instance,



it launched “*Odyssée*, the story of a territory that is reinventing itself and revealing itself in a new light”. This eventful year was set up to narrate local “success stories” and to demonstrate the territory’s transformations. This progressive change of image inside and outside the locality is perceived as crucial by local planners in order to make it more attractive, but may also be interpreted as quite cynical as it concentrates more on the storytelling of the change than on the structural change in itself.

Thus, although Euralens is indeed a forum of local actors that tries to develop its own territorial development strategy, our work has shown that the association has difficulty in producing its own thinking. It is still very much influenced by the major current buzzwords of urban planning and claims to be actively benchmarking, setting the great European success stories (Bilbao, Emscher Park) as a model to be achieved. This implicitly means accepting the idea that the Pas-de-Calais coalfield has a “backlog” to “catch up” rather than simply its own path to follow. The functioning of Euralens is then less “autonomous” than expected, in the sense that if the territory has equipped itself with a tool allowing it to deliberate locally, for the moment it has difficulties in developing a line of thinking anchored in local knowledge, and in particular its inhabitants who remain left aside (we explore this further in the following section on procedural justice). Moreover, due to lack of resources, the association focuses its action on procedural injustices by multiplying places of deliberation, without having the means to tackle structural inequalities or, to put it another way, to address the redistributive dimension of spatial injustice.

*The EPA AB, a massive but anchorless action: what roots does it produce locally?*

Differently to Euralens in its form and intention, the EPA AB acts rather as a satellite implementing a national development strategy in a locality. On the EPA AB website, the structural goal is spelled out as “[the creation] of an eco-agglomeration and a sustainable development centre serving the whole of Lorraine and the CCPHVA in particular, a genuine area of cooperation on economic development with Luxembourg”. Initially, the state conceived the creation of the EPA as the institutional ground allowing ambitious territorial development projects to develop, that is, the construction of a cross-border health centre, a centre for information and communication technologies (e.g., datacentres) (Salmon, 2011). But no political consensus between public and private actors from Luxembourg and France has been found so far on this implementation of cross-border services, each side of the border blaming the other for this failure. Against this background, EPA AB refocused its action to currently support the development of residential activities (e.g., real estate, hospitality sector) which are the usual core focus of action of the EPA tool in France, but also to promote local food networks and community activities services on the French side of the border (EPA



AB, 2019). Concerned with the major demographic growth that is foreseen (i.e., a doubling of the population between 2009 and 2030), the EPA AB has decided to concentrate on the building of housing for the future population and on the adaptation of related infrastructure (e.g., transport). By constructing 400 new units a year, it aims mostly to tackle the current pressure on land and to limit any increase in real estate prices. The main impact in terms of distributive justice seems to us to lie in the coordination of land recycling, planning activities and the imposition of strict specifications in respect of (in particular ecological) norms; this engagement in decontamination and construction of housing is up to a level that municipalities could never have afforded without the technical, financial and conceptual support of the state. It would appear that the EPA AB does not try to promote a more localized and varied model of territorial development, but simply seeks to adapt its development to neighbouring Luxembourg's strategy. This strategic reorientation is likely to perpetuate the economic dependency of northern Lorraine on one activity (here: Luxembourg's market) over which it has no control, instead of supporting the emergence of endogenous development.

If the way in which Euralens builds its territorial thinking has limits, Euralens tries nonetheless to create public debate, building on local and external knowledge. In contrast, the EPA AB structure is so conceived that its expertise remains mostly shared with planning experts in nationwide networks rather than shared locally or internationally. The EPA AB strategic vision and spatial imaginary is largely shaped by its participation in networks steered by the state (with other 13 EPAs, with about 30 other EcoCités and other national agencies, i.e., the national agency for territorial cohesion, ANCT). Even when the state establishes localized branches, it does so without opening a space for exchange of ideas and for deliberation, not to mention shared or co-constructed decision-making. Exchanges with the locality essentially involve local planners and consist of consultations about the practicalities of the implementation of the EPA AB's projects.

Whereas Euralens serves as a platform coordinating local actors towards strategic planning and changing the image of the territory, its limited mandate and resources make it difficult to measure its impact on the ground. In contrast, the EPA AB is a heavier and more effective tool, steering massive housing construction, thus avoiding scattered urbanization. Both initiatives are imperfect in terms of procedural justice, albeit to widely differing degrees. The EPA AB is poorly permeable and receptive to local input from other public authorities or civil society, at least when the fieldwork was conducted. If Euralens as a forum of local actors performs better in this domain, it still does not value local inhabitants' and civil society knowledge (in particular of the poor, as we will see in the section on procedural justice). Thus, it functions as a circle of planners, admittedly local, but just as much in a position of knowledgeable experts.



Both initiatives are primarily thought of as planning endeavours in a rather restricted sense. They fail to actively consider the societal significance of their action within their respective localities, making a limited contribution for Euralens, and no contribution at all for the EPA, in terms of procedural justice. And because they both have limited impact on enabling local authorities to steer their own development, they may have a limited impact in terms of distributive justice. And again, the “EPA AB model” seems to a certain extent the most limited one in terms of distributive justice, as it does not break with the ideology of dependency on an externally led mono-activity. What possible resilience for tomorrow is there if the intervention does not strengthen the locality in its capacity to imagine, discuss and implement several possible futures?

### **Procedural justice without the (disadvantaged) local inhabitants is not procedural justice**

In both cases, forms of participative and deliberative democracy (here conceived as the public participation in the decision-making process in any form, Blondiaux and Fournau, 2011), if not simply absent, is still very imperfectly implemented. In two post-industrial disadvantaged regions, what is most striking to us is that the (numerous) poor, and the inhabitants more generally, are still considered as objects upon which a territorial development strategy is implemented rather than subjects who may have a say in a territorial development strategy in which they have a primary interest.

#### *Euralens: ignoring and reproducing discrimination in the decision-making process*

In the case of Euralens, some interviewees point out the conceptual and methodological flaws of participation as it is implemented.

It is too easy to say that we ought to set up a real participatory approach but in the end not do it, by pretending that we do not know how to do it; as much as it is too easy to say that we should not organise participation because anyway inhabitants know nothing and it is just a waste of time.

Most of the interviewees point out that political decisions are taken, in closed circles, amongst only heads of services and, for them, this limits the reflection: “They do not know everything. They actually know a great deal about their middle-class habits, but they know very little about the others. And since they are all the same, they usually agree with one another” (P16, 2018).

Despite its forum, Euralens has not yet turned its decision-making process from a consultative to a participative form of democracy. P16 suspects that



the value added by participation is not understood or even valued: “Do we really listen? And do we really want to listen? I think we do not have the right answer simply because we do not ask the right questions”. The desire to stick with the institutional way of making public policy is problematic because it produces projects that refuse to engage with people’s aspirations, thus producing overhanging projects in the locality. This contributes to reproducing public action centred on policymakers rather than on “policy receivers”.

In the context of Euralens, local institutions have set up similar policies seeking to (1) demonstrate their own success, (2) legitimize their existence in a context of institutional reorganization, (3) prove the relevance of their jobs that are constantly at risk while services are merged, and (4) claim their political soundness in a highly volatile political context. For instance, between 2012 and 2020, Euralens (a public institution), the Foundation of France (private) and the Pas-de-Calais department (public) developed their own programme in support of local development. While some provide technical support, others provide financial support. They work in different yet congruent perimeters, either targeting local public institutions or civil society-based actions. They also have their own approach towards practice learning and ensuring synergies between projects. Those three policies are at the same time (very) similar and (slightly) different. Even though these myriads of initiatives provide several opportunities for support, these also mean greater administrative work that “comes on top of the regional, national and European administrative burden” (N20, 2018). These are rather restrained, in terms of both funding and the technical support they provide. In terms of public action efficiency, this scattering of human and financial resources is questionable, especially as the success of the three policies creates jealousies between institutions and politicians, to the extent that other territories, other scales want to reproduce (even more) such a policy of support for local initiatives. For policy recipients, it is quite unlikely that these frameworks represent additional funding opportunities for them since the same public institutions are directly or indirectly funding bodies behind them.

Beyond participation in decision-making, power relationships is another issue that is almost never addressed or questioned. Let us take here the example of the Euralens “label” as a supporter of local development initiatives. The Euralens technical committee is composed of a majority of institutional actors that have similar sociological profiles (e.g., old, white, upper middle-class, educated, heterosexual male, that live outside of the territory, i.e., Lille, Paris). Local initiative holders we interviewed were often younger, less educated, deprived women born in the territory. This power imbalance can create rather uncomfortable situations (including sometimes sexual harassment), as it is informally expected that project leaders maintain their professional network with in-person meetings. Gender and age balance are not proactively taken as criteria for the composition of Euralens committees. Yet, as pointed out by feminist literature, such criteria could be gatekeepers for



better accountability. This matter is a reflection of a still very patriarchal territory. Although this goes beyond Euralens' responsibility, it is also inconsistent with its claim to build a laboratory for future local government. As the locality does not offer an accountable and transparent decision-making process, public engagement is highly volatile. Despite being the locus of encounters and negotiations for local initiative holders, Euralens is not yet a forum for open debates and shared deliberations that would allow the development of more consistent local public action. But is such a thing achievable?

*EPA AB: when procedural injustice leads to political opposition*

The main difference between the EPA AB and Euralens in terms of participation is that the EPA AB objective is not to reinforce dialogue locally. And the participation of the local (inhabitants, political representatives, planners) is kept to a minimum, performed to comply with planning regulation. Some inhabitants point out their disillusionment about such meetings and other forms of consultation: "Our ideas are not at all what is currently carried out. We simply let it happen, we observe. We tried, we did believe in it. But no, these meetings are illusory, that is to say, they are just ways to validate what has been decided" (Field visit 19.07.2018). Fundamental decisions are taken by the EPA AB planners when defining the planning strategy (PSO) and are validated by a board with a majority of representatives from the state and the region. The installation of an EPA structure shows that from the point of view of the state, national strategic issues are superior to local desires.

In a very similar way to the Euralens case, local politicians do not see a problem in not consulting (as a minimum) the population. And to justify it, Pas-de-Calais (and most French) politicians argue that public participation is not effective and does not "work", whereas most of the time they have never actively tried to implement participation. We argue that they rather do not want or know how to run participatory and deliberative democracy. As for Euralens again, local politicians valorize informal decision-making processes precisely because these are faster, less cumbersome and require no involvement of the population, no transparency of the decision-making process and no accountability. This is precisely what causes inhabitants' dissatisfaction. The decisions about the territorial strategy of northern Lorraine are not publicly discussed and remain the prerogative of an elitist techno-political inner circle disconnected from the local population that is affected most directly.

This rather "old-fashioned" way of planning has driven local rejection of an EPA AB-led project. Dissatisfied with those information meetings, movements of opposition have grown outside institutional channels. For instance, "*Boulangeois solidaire*" emerged in Boulange (approximately 2,500 inhabitants) to oppose to the EPA AB housing project in the municipality (the construction of 350 new housing units). They have two main arguments: the refusal to become a dormitory for new rich commuters working in Luxembourg and concerns about seeing local taxes increase to cope with the expense



linked to the adaptation of public infrastructure. At first glance, it would be easy to see in this resistance not much more than a NIMBY phenomenon in one rural municipality in which the inhabitants reject urbanization. But one may also see in this reaction class struggles as actual (often disadvantaged) inhabitants resist the arrival of a new richer population of commuters or, in other words, the gentrification of this popular neighbourhood. Opposition movements have emerged in several municipalities covered by the EPA, including the more urban ones such as Audun-le-Tiche (approximately 7,000 inhabitants) and Villerupt (approximately 9,500 inhabitants). In the three municipalities we mentioned here, civil society movements have transformed into political platforms and ran for the 2020 municipal elections. And they won. All mentioned their opposition to the way the EPA AB operates in the territory, and all called for more participatory forms of democracy to be implemented (at the level of the municipality in general and in relation to the EPA AB planning projects in particular). One of their key arguments is that urbanization is not an obligation. Former brownfield sites have, since the end of mining, slowly evolved into green areas that represent for them a more precious amenity for the actual inhabitants than the arrival of commuters to/from Luxembourg. Some local associations insist on the necessity to educate people about the history of these places (and the former mining activity), the sensitivity of fauna and flora in these sites and the need to protect them: “Instead of a new neighbourhood, a magnificent natural area . . . should be promoted. But who will take care of that, if not us?”

## Conclusion

As Desage and Guéranger (2011) observed in similar situations to the ones we describe in northern Lorraine and in Pas-de-Calais, there is a need to reinvent public action and to open decision-making processes to representatives of civil society. In a subsequent article Desage and Guéranger (2014: 156) were even more adamant in their formulation: “To get back what has been taken from them, activist groups and citizens will have to take up local issues themselves, hold their elected representatives to account [for their acts, their decisions], and disturb the quiet of discreet arrangements”. It seems they have been heard in northern Lorraine, where inhabitants and civil society have politicized their struggle in the attempt to regain control over the planning of their territory. In this context, it seems that resistance arose from procedural injustice (understood as the lack of participation of the population and civil society in the deliberation and decision-making procedures of EPA AB). It also seems that what is perceived as an act of distributive justice from a national perspective (an attempt to draw Luxembourg’s development towards the French territory) is perceived as distributive injustice at the local level, as it would lead to the gentrification of the territory and to the erasure of its history and of its ecological interest.



Paradoxically, the situation is more blurred in Pas-de-Calais. To a certain extent, Euralens has made part of the task implementing forums of actors at different levels that partially valorized local knowledge and partially integrated some representatives of the civil society in the deliberation-making process. It appears to us an incomplete move, as we show that the decision-making process has not been opened by even an inch to civil society and the inhabitants. As for the EPA AB, the main decisions are still taken by local patriarchal figures (e.g., political and technical leaders), without the involvement of and control by the citizens. This incomplete procedural justice risks threatening Euralens' progress, as the rejection of the political class and its methods is expressed more and more through abstention (at a record level in the last local elections<sup>8</sup>) and the persistence of voting for the right-wing Rassemblement National (National Rally) party. In terms of distributive justice, the action of Euralens is also more difficult to isolate in comparison to the EPA AB action, essentially because Euralens is just a forum of actors and does not hold formal competences. It attempts to influence the planning practices of the existing association of municipalities' planners and political representatives, mainly through benchmarking and the change in the representation of the territory. But here again, and as for the EPA AB case, what change can really be accomplished if the ambition to transform the territory is conceived, decided and performed mostly without its population? If Euralens takes seriously the valorization of local development initiatives, as it pretends through its labelling process, then why not be more ambitious about that too? To have a real impact on the territory, shouldn't Euralens seek to strengthen and simplify the technical and financial support given to project leaders that are currently weak and scattered? To what extent does the multiplication of labelling processes that put project leaders in competition with one another each year for modest sums not rather lead to them being exhausted and frustrated by the political control? To what extent is a label just more than free use of their images for marketing purposes? Or in other words, to what extent is spatial justice incompatible with local agendas that remain very much inspired by neoliberalism and its managerial techniques? Indeed, the Euralens case is paradoxical, undeniably pursuing spatial justice goals, but through spatially unjust means, thus resistance is more difficult.

## Notes

- 1 These were one part of the larger area of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais mining basin classified on the UNESCO World Heritage list as a "remarkable cultural landscape". For more details, see: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1360/>.
- 2 Detailed analysis of individual cases is available in Blondel (2019) and Evrard (2019), while a systematic comparison of them is available in Evrard and Blondel (2019).
- 3 For a comparison of key statistics between the two case studies, see Evrard and Blondel (2019: 33).



- 4 New local public authority (Etablissement public de coopération intercommunale) established in French law in 2015 to support the metropolitan functions of secondary cities in France.
- 5 “Internationale Bauausstellung”: Universal Exhibition in Architecture and Urbanism.
- 6 Full references of interview quotes relating to Euralens case study are available in Blondel (2019), and in Evrard (2019) for EPA AB case study.
- 7 Ministry in charge of spatial planning’s webpage: [www.cohesion-territoires.gouv.fr/](http://www.cohesion-territoires.gouv.fr/).
- 8 In Pas-de-Calais, the turnout in the first round of the departmental elections was 35.2% in 2021, 35.0% in the first round of the regional elections the same year, and 47.8% in the first round of the municipal elections in 2020.

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## Part 4

# Rural case studies





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# 12 Polarization, centralization, and place-based policies in Greece

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## Introduction

The available evidence in the EU indicates that inequalities have been increasing over the last two decades due to agglomeration economies, geography, and integration dynamics that mainly favour metropolitan areas (OECD, 2019; Petrakos et al., 2022; Iammarino et al., 2019). Most lagging regions show a parallel inability to implement effective policies that will shrink the development gap with more advanced regions. In Greece especially regional inequalities persist despite the implementation of development or EU cohesion policies for more than 30 years. The general picture is that regional policies have failed to deter the forces that drive further concentration of economic activities in the advanced areas of the country to reduce inequalities and spatial injustice. The most important political and historical factors explaining these inequalities are associated with the Greek administrative system, which is (a) highly bureaucratic, (b) highly centralized, and (c) has never had an action plan to reduce regional inequalities.

At the same time, an unprecedented scientific debate took place during the economic crisis, focusing on place-based versus place-neutral strategies. Within the same period, three major reports addressed these different approaches of regional development policies by the World Bank (2008), the EU, for example, the ‘Barca Report’ (2009), and the OECD (2009). The place-based approach, promoted by the prominent Barca Report, refers to the idea that public policies should embed strategies that consider a place’s uniqueness. Furthermore, such policies ought to empower local entities and make them responsible for the development strategy by directly acquiring the ‘ownership’ of the strategy’s planning and implementation. In this respect, ‘place’ reflects a multilevel governance model in which horizontal, vertical, or transversal relationships coexist (Madanipour et al., 2017). The latter approach has questioned the capacity of the pre-existing top-down policy paradigm to deal with these new challenges (Pike et al., 2016).

The recent economic crisis in Greece wiped out a quarter of its GDP and more than one million jobs due to EU and domestic policy failures (Petrakos,



2014). Additionally, the economy currently faces the global challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, the second crisis for Greece in a decade. In this context the enormous task of restoring a sustainable growth path for the regions is associated with the spatial footprint of development policy and the spatial organization of the state (Petrakos et al., 2022). A critical issue is not only the level and evolution of inequalities in the spatial allocation of resources and activities, and how this affects national growth performance, but also the prospects of the lagging regions and their ability to generate employment and income. Efficiency and equity issues are closely related here, to the extent that policy options and responses or the spatial organization of the state should produce sustainable and inclusive growth. Addressing spatial imbalances and seeking policies and contexts that will allow a better allocation and utilization of existing resources at a local level is necessary to achieve both equity and efficiency goals.

This chapter attempts to examine the capacity and conditioning factors of local initiatives to implement effective development policies in Greece. Given the polarized character of the Greek economy and the centralized structure of the state, can place-based endeavours generate spatial justice? The chapter is structured as follows. We first briefly outline the relevant literature. Secondly, we discuss the spatial evolution of inequalities and, thirdly, present the characteristics of regional development policy in Greece. The empirical part of the chapter presents and discusses the findings of an initiative of a social economy ecosystem in the rural region of Karditsa. Finally, we offer conclusions and policy recommendations.

### **Spatial trends in Greece**

A critical issue regarding the spatial organization of the Greek economy is the level and evolution of inequalities in the geographical allocation of resources and activities, and how this affects national growth performance, the prospects of the lagging regions and their ability to generate employment and income. Whether policy options and responses, as well as the spatial organization of the state, can produce sustainable and inclusive growth is a question of efficiency and equity. The analysis of the regional structure of the Greek economy reveals serious and persistent imbalances in GDP per capita, population, and welfare. The Greek economic space is dominated by the metropolitan area of Athens, which is part of the Attica Region but functionally extends beyond it, embracing clusters of significant industrial activity a short distance beyond its borders in the neighbouring regions (Petrakos and Psycharis, 2016a). Table 12.1, which provides the most recent information for the Greek NUTS II regions, shows that the country's level of development has declined dramatically from nearly 80 per cent of the EU average a decade ago to 59 per cent. The financial crisis effectively transformed Greece from a rapidly converging economy in the 1990s and early 2000s to a dramatically diverging economy during the last decade. The data also shows



that Greece maintained significant spatial inequalities during the crisis. The Attica metropolitan region, in which 36 per cent of the population and 48 per cent of the national GDP are concentrated (more than 50 per cent if satellite industrial establishments in the surrounding regions are included), has a GDP per capita 136 per cent higher than the national average. It is also one of the largest and most densely populated cities in Europe, with 990 inhabitants per square kilometre, a figure twelve times higher than the national average. It has almost doubled its population, experiencing strong migration inflows between the 1960s and the 1980s that drained the peripheral regions of human resources and contributed significantly to strong sustained growth, but also to the environmental and social problems of the metropolis.

Central Macedonia in the north, which includes Thessaloniki, Greece's second largest metropolitan region, has a significantly lower GDP per capita of 77 per cent of the national average. In general, the regions with relatively higher GDP per capita are the island regions of South Aegean, Ionia, and Crete (with 109%, 93%, and 84% of the national average, respectively), the region of Central Greece, which hosts the satellite industrial areas of Attica (90% of the national average), and the energy-supplying region of Western Macedonia (87% of the national average). The regions with the lowest GDP per capita are the border region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, and Epirus (70% and 72% of the national average, respectively). Most regions have a GDP per capita that is less than 50 per cent of the EU average.

Table 12.1 indicates differences in the level of development between the NUTS II regions. If the energy-rich region of Western Macedonia, which has a modest level of development but is expected to face severe challenges in the post-lignite period, is excluded, the larger part of the border zone and the western area of Greece are characterized by low levels of development. In contrast, the neighbouring region of Attica in Central Greece and the islands (except the North Aegean) have a higher level of development. This pattern, in which the metropolitan region (with its satellite extensions) and most islands have higher levels of development, while most of the remaining mainland regions (especially in the northern border area and the west) have lower levels, illustrates a significant difference in the regions' productive structures.

The metropolitan region of Athens has a productive structure that combines scale, externalities, variety, and openness, as well as a mix of tradeable and sheltered activities that have allowed it to maintain its dominant position in the economy (Petrakos and Psycharis, 2016b). The islands have developed a strong specialization in tourism based on some domestic but mostly international demand and have managed to take advantage of their unique geographical built and cultural environments. Some islands are top international destinations and have developed a somewhat monocultural economy, while others (especially Crete) have managed to connect tourism with the food and agricultural sector. In both cases the driving force behind their success is mainly international tourism, which makes their performance conditional



Table 12.1 Basic regional indicators of Greece, NUTS II level

Region	Population (2018)	Density (2018)	GDP regional share (2016)	GDP annual change (2008–16)	GDP per capita (2016)	
					GR=100	EU=100
<b>Greece</b>	<b>10,741,165</b>	<b>81.4</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>–3.6</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>59.2</b>
Attica	3,756,453	986.5	47.5	–3.7	135.6	80.3
Central Macedonia	1,875,996	98.0	13.7	–3.6	78.6	46.6
Thessaly	722,065	51.4	5.2	–3.1	77.3	45.8
Western Greece	659,470	58.1	4.6	–3.9	73.6	43.6
Crete	633,506	76.0	4.9	–3.4	84.3	49.9
East Macedonia – Thrace	601,175	42.5	3.9	–3.5	69.8	41.3
Peloponnese	576,749	37.2	4.5	–2.7	82.9	49.1
Central Greece	555,623	35.7	4.6	–3.2	89.9	53.2
South Aegean	340,870	64.5	3.4	–3.5	108.5	64.2
Epirus	334,337	36.3	2.2	–2.9	72.0	42.6
Western Macedonia	269,222	28.5	2.2	–2.2	87.7	51.9
North Aegean	211,137	55.0	1.4	–4.1	74.9	44.3
Ionian Islands	204,562	88.7	1.8	–4.2	92.7	54.9

a: Number of NACE2 sectors with weak/modest or strong specialization in the region (the number of sectors is 38). Bold indicates strong specialization; italics indicate specialization in tradeable sectors. Sources: *ELSTAT (2018)*, *Eurostat*

on external factors beyond national or regional control. On the other hand, most of the mainland regions face several constraints in their economic performance, related to little variety in their productive base, accessibility, scale, and quality of production, the lack of infrastructure and services, and difficulties in competing with European markets (Petrakos and Saratsis, 2000; Petrakos et al., 2012; Petrakos and Psycharis, 2016b).

Figure 12.2 shows the evolution of regional GDP per capita at the NUTS II (13 regions) level during the 2000–2016 period. The Attica region (top line) has maintained its top position and its distance from the national average (dashed black line) throughout the crisis. All other regions have followed a similar pattern of growth and decline, although the speed of adjustment may vary depending on their characteristics. We can also see that the lagging regions share the same positions, both at the beginning and at the end of the crisis period; while the crisis has dramatically affected the size and the structure of the economy, it does not seem to have influenced regional hierarchies.

Although Attica has maintained its dominant position in the economy during the crisis, this should not hide the serious internal divides within the metropolis, as many inner-city areas and large parts of the working-class districts have all suffered from massive lockouts, job losses, and widespread poverty. The picture is very different in the northern and southern suburbs of the city, where the upper and upper-middle classes appear to have been



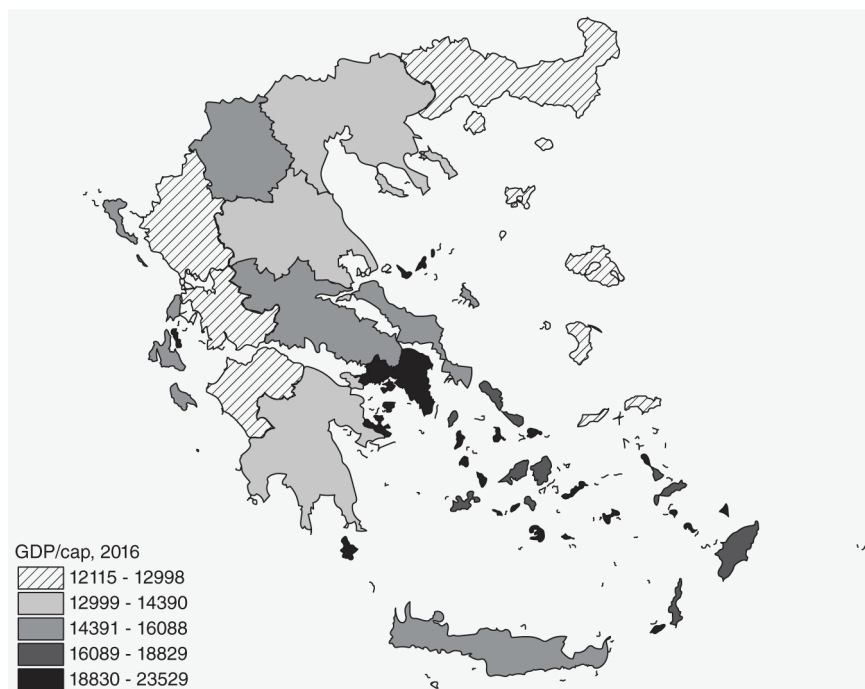


Figure 12.1 GDP per capita in the Greek NUTS II regions, 2016, based on Table 12.1

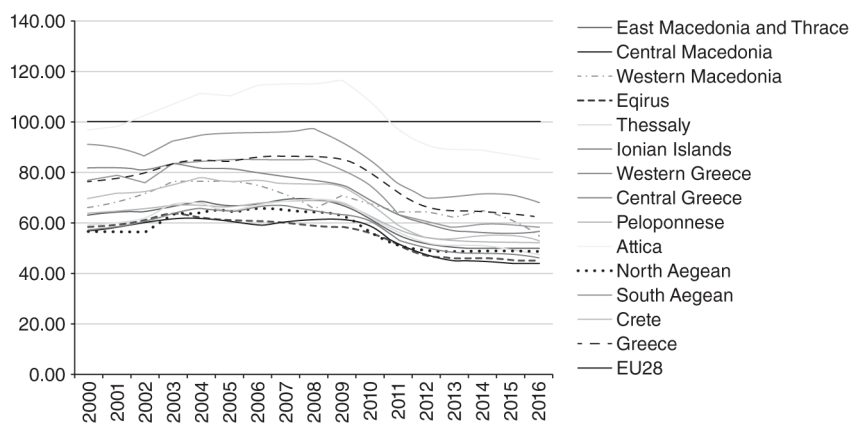


Figure 12.2 NUTS II regional GDP per capita, 2000–2016 (€/inh, const. 2010 prices, EU28=100)

Source: Own estimations from ELSTAT database



relatively immune to the crisis, revealing a serious spatial polarization in welfare levels (Maloutas, 2014; Artelaris and Kandyliis, 2014).

The available evidence indicates that spatial inequalities are greater when measured in terms of more composite indices of competitiveness and welfare or at lower levels of aggregation (OECD, 2020; EC, 2019; Petrakos and Psycharis, 2016b). Intraregional inequalities are also significant (Artelaris and Petrakos, 2016), as rural and mountainous or remote areas perform significantly more poorly than regional urban centres. The general pattern of spatial imbalances in Greece therefore includes a dominant core–periphery component (Athens vs. the regions), a south–north component (the islands vs. the border regions), an east–west component (the main national transport corridor vs. the mountainous range of Pindos), and a regional urban–rural component. These divisions, evident at various levels of aggregation, construct a map of significant spatial inequality driven by both market dynamics and policy choices (Psycharis et al., 2020; Petrakos and Psycharis, 2016a).

### **Regional policy and spatial justice**

Regional development policy is mainly the responsibility of the central government, which controls the national budget and the public investment programme. At the regional level policy is the responsibility of regional councils and governors, while at the local level it is the responsibility of city councils and mayors. The most significant source of funding for regional development has been EU Structural Funds. Since the late 1980s it is estimated that more than 80 billion euros in EU contributions and 30 billion euros of national contributions in six consecutive framework programmes have supported these policies. Their impact is clearly evident in the case of infrastructure, education, and environmental protection programmes but less visible in investment and the creation of new firms (Petrakos et al., 2019; OECD, 2020). In the same period there have also been significant reforms in local and regional administrations through the ‘Kapodistrias’ and ‘Kalikratis’ programmes, which have aimed to increase the scale of the municipalities through the merging of small communities with larger administrative units and provide self-government at the regional level (Kalimeri, 2018).

The use and allocation of development funds is mostly controlled by the central government in the case of the public investment programme, while about 30 per cent of structural funds are planned and implemented by the regional authorities. The allocation of funds to major thematic priorities shows that most resources are allocated to infrastructure projects (45–50%), while human capital policies (20–25%) and policies supporting the productive environment (25–30%) have received a lower share of funds over time (Petrakos et al., 2019). Although development policies clearly have a positive impact on the Greek economy and society, it is not equally clear if they have succeeded in fulfilling the basic regional policy objective of reducing regional disparities. Judging by the evolution of spatial inequalities over the



last 30 years, this does not seem to be the case. Although structural funds tend to have positive effects on regional growth, they have been less successful at reducing spatial inequalities, which depend on planning, allocation of resources, and implementation, as well as on the characteristics of the weaker regions and the institutional policy context (Lolos, 2009; Sotiriou and Tsiapa, 2015; Psycharis et al., 2020).

The National Report of the RELOCAL project in Greece (Petrakos et al., 2019) revealed several difficulties and constraints, and deficiencies have been reported that affect the delivery and effectiveness of development policy in Greece. First, the whole process is very bureaucratic. This causes serious delays in public investment, which in turn affects the low multiplier effect of the funds. Delays arise from cumbersome policy design processes; the complexity of the allocation of responsibilities among line ministries; bottlenecks in the supporting information systems; the legal framework and delays in the judicial system; delays in issuing environmental and archaeological permits; the structure of the procurement system; and the capacity of beneficiaries. Despite many efforts to simplify the process, development policy remains overloaded with convoluted procedures that are both time and effort consuming and checks and requirements that have little to do with the essence, quality, or impact of programmes or actions (Petrakos, 2014; OECD, 2020).

Second, the whole setting of the design and delivery of development policy is highly centralized, a fact that affects the performance of development policy (Petrakos et al., 2019). About 75 per cent of the public investment programme, which includes structural and domestic funds for development policies, is run by the central government, 12 per cent is run by the regional administrations, and the remaining 13 per cent by local administrations (Petrakos and Psycharis, 2016a). Greece is an outlier in the EU with respect to the allocation of power and resources among the three levels of administration (central, regional, and local) and has a long way to go to meet the ‘place-based’ approach in policies promoted by the EC and implemented by most countries. A recent policy report suggests significant reforms that will promote the decentralization of public administration and provide greater sub-national fiscal autonomy and a better multilevel governance system (OECD, 2020).

Third, as Figure 12.3 shows, regional convergence and the faster growth of the weaker regions was never a clearly declared priority of the development policy. Indeed, the regional allocation of the per capita public investment funds does not seem to support the goal of convergence. Policy priorities were mostly horizontal (e.g. infrastructure and environment), while the large-scale emblematic projects in Athens (Airport, Ring Road, Metro, etc.) did not always have matching projects in the periphery. This is partly due to the absence of a well-defined territorial development policy that would align regional, urban, and rural development with economy-wide policies and create a national place-based policy with a long-term perspective (OECD, 2020).



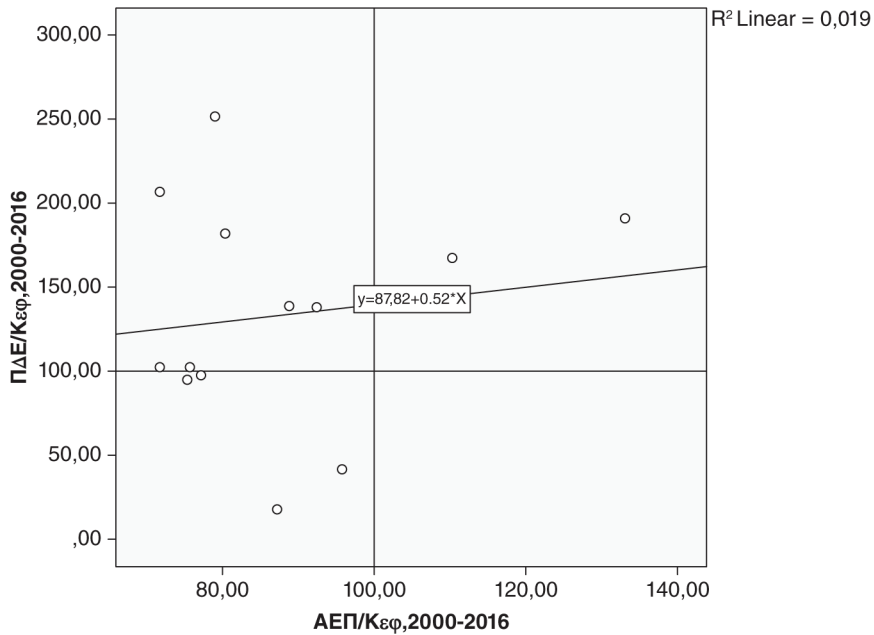


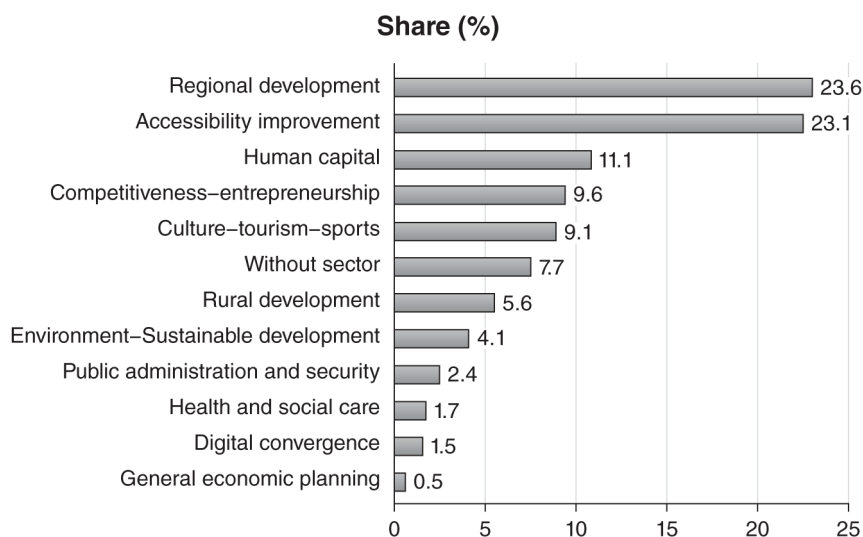
Figure 12.3 Public investment per capita at the regional NUTS II level, 2000–2016

Source: Own estimations from public investment data.

Fourth, diachronically, from the perspective of the political system but also of ordinary people, it was considered that development policy was primarily about infrastructure projects. In the decade before the crisis, almost half the public investment programme and the structural funds have been directed at infrastructure, with much smaller amounts of the total budget going to new private investment, which for long periods has been a residual policy (Figure 12.4). This mentality, although deeply embedded, is gradually changing, as the gap in private investment (some 10% of GDP) and the unemployment rate – that is still close to 20 per cent – requires stronger and more effective support through new private investment activity.

Fifth, the effectiveness of state aid policies in support of private investment has been less than required. Over the last 30 years, through various support schemes, the Greek state has subsidized (laws of state) 23,200 business plans with a total budget of 25.2 billion euros and a total public contribution of 9.4 billion euros (Table 12.2). These investment plans have generated 184,000 jobs. The average rate of support is relatively high, reaching 37.5 per cent. It is observed that the average investment amount needed over time to create an employment position (I/E) has leapt from 24,000 euros in 1982 to more than 500,000 euros in 2005–2010<sup>1</sup>. In the same period the





*Figure 12.4* The allocation of the public investment programme to main expenditure types, 2000–2010

*Source:* Ministry of Economy and Development

*Table 12.2* Synoptic figures for the investment incentive laws and their results 1982–2011

<i>Legal basis</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>G</i>	<i>G/I</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>I/E</i>	<i>E/N</i>	<i>I/N</i>
L.1262/82	12.06	2.28	0.78	34.4	92,799	24,587	7.7	189,161
L.1892/90	4.89	3.73	1.45	39.0	39,676	94,083	8.1	763,209
L.2601/98	2.31	2.55	0.84	33.1	19,239	132,906	8.3	1,102,624
L.3299/04*	3.61	15.54	6.13	39.4	31,109	499,646	8.6	4,297,346
L.3908/11*	0.31	1.10	0.23	20.9	1,311	839,207	4.2	3,515,017
Total	23.20	25.21	9.44	37.5	184,134	318,086	7.4	1,973,471

\* = ex-ante evaluation figures

N = value of investment projects (in thousands)

I = investment budget (in billion euros)

G = public subsidy (in billion euros)

G/I = average rate of subsidy (%)

E = employment positions

I/E = average investment per employment position (in euros)

E/N = average number of new employment positions by investment

I/N = average size of investment (in euros)

average investment size (I/N) increased more than 20 times, partly indicating the increasing capital intensity and modernization of new investments.

It is also noteworthy that the average number of new employment positions per investment (E/N) remains almost constant over time at a low figure



of approximately eight positions, indicating the failure of the investment policy to generate larger projects and increase the size of Greek firms. Overall, it seems that the impact of investment policy on the level of development in Greece has been positive but small. Over 30 years 23,000 new investments in an economy with one million firms is not a figure that will make a real difference. Bureaucracy (the long period for an investment from application to implementation to take effect) and a small budget allocated to the public investment programme to support private investment policy partly explain this poor performance. Even more disappointing is the impact of the investment policy on regional convergence. Thirty years ago, Attica accounted for a third of the national GDP; today its share is closer to 50 per cent. This indicates that the regional differentiation of the investment schemes (gradually replaced by horizontal measures) has been insufficient to direct more investment to the weaker regions.

Sixth, policy initiatives have been limited by the regions' structural characteristics, particularly their specializations and their inability to generate value chains in their productive systems. The specialization of the regions and the lack of diversity of their productive base are one of the factors affecting their performance and their prospects for growth and convergence. Some regions have limited specialization in tradeable and outward-looking sectors and are dominated by inward-looking sectors primarily serving local demand. These regions will have to develop new specializations or improve existing ones through a painful process of restructuring.

However, even where a region has a strong specialization in a sector with a comparative advantage, the increase in demand for this sector in many cases does not result in an increase in demand for other local sectors, because local and regional productive systems are fragmented. Critical forwards and backwards linkages are missing at the regional level, and an increase in demand for one sector therefore does not lead to an increase in demand (and production) for another local sector. Rather, it is directed to other regions or countries. A classic example is tourism. Its dramatic increase in many regions because of the millions of visitors every year has not resulted in an equal increase in the local agro-food sector but in imports, because the two sectors are not connected locally. This inability to form local and regional value chains affects the size of regional multipliers and the ability of the regions to leverage their comparative advantages and expand and diversify their productive base.

### **Place-based policies and spatial justice**

Place-based policies rely on local knowledge that is verifiable and subject to continuous scrutiny through consultation, supplemented by institutional changes. This approach challenges the 'one-size-fits-all' logic, whilst at the same time it considers linkages among places (Barca Report, 2009). To this end a place-based policy appreciates the characteristics of a regional ecosystem, aiming to facilitate development in a spatial context (Giuliani, 2007;



Becattini, 1990; Cooke and Morgan, 1998). In contrast, a place-neutral approach argues for horizontal interventions with critical size applied equally to all regions, emphasizing the ‘space of flows’ rather than on the ‘space of places’ (Castells, 2007; World Bank, 2008; OECD, 2009; Gorzelak, 2011). An interesting debate has taken place in recent years around these two different approaches. Ball et al. (2011) claim that although policies at the strategic level should be formulated horizontally, the implementation of such policies cannot ignore local specificities. Similarly, Rodríguez-Pose (2010) points out that ‘spatially blind’ policies are not ultimately ‘blind’ in practice, because they are usually implemented in core areas, favouring the centre over the periphery.

In the area of EU policymaking a noteworthy shift from conventional spatially blind approaches to more place-sensitive and place-based approaches has taken place (Petrakos et al., 2022). This trend is clearly reflected in the new Territorial Agenda 2030, which connects place-based policies with territorial cohesion and Just Europe’s overarching goal of improving prospects for all places and people (Weck et al., 2022). In the same light the ministers responsible for Spatial Planning and Territorial Development in the New Leipzig Charter in 2020 agreed that the place-based approach was a key element to transform Just Europe in practice. In this respect place-based initiatives could enable localities to develop strategic capacity by utilizing their territorial capital, as well as local and place-based knowledge (Borén and Schmitt, 2022; Härmäläinen and Nemeth, 2022; Keller and Virág, 2022). Likewise, McCann (2015) argues that emphasizing local assets and capacities can stimulate innovation and economic development through smart specialization.

From another perspective, Weck et al. (2022: 795), drawing on findings from the RELOCAL project, argue that ‘the shift towards place-based approaches runs the risk of undermining the redistributive top-down logic of policy interventions intended to enhance spatial justice’. Evidence from the same project suggests that critical scrutiny is required to identify local assets and capacities and to determine how strategic priorities are set at the local level (Härmäläinen and Németh, 2022; Keller and Virág, 2022; Petrakos et al., 2022; Shucksmith et al., 2021). The parallel development of the relationship between the geographical distribution of resources and social justice has been inspired by the studies of Davies (1968), Lefebvre (1991), Smith (1994), and Johnston et al. (1994). The theorizations on this topic – including territorial social justice – owe much to Rawls’s (1999) normative formulation of spatial justice. In recent years several scholars in the social sciences working on issues of justice, equity, and inequality have become aware of the geographical aspects of injustice and have started to explore the place-based approach as one of the basic elements of spatial justice (Heynen et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2019). The question of fairness and justice has generally spawned a growing literature that spatially theorizes justice (Fainstein, 2009; Smith, 2000).



Nowadays, the notion of spatial justice is one of the most compelling themes in spatial studies. According to Soja (2009: 2), spatial justice can be seen as both an outcome and a process and refers to ‘an intentional and focused emphasis on the spatial or geographical aspects of justice and injustice [and] involves the fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them’. In other words, spatial justice consists of a form of social justice providing all people with equal access and/or use of spatial resources (Miller, 1999). Such statements underscore the normative nature of the concept, indicating that ‘*society*’, or more likely the ‘*state*’, should intervene to achieve social justice. Hence, as Madanipour et al. (2017: 12) argue, ‘social justice is a form of the broader concept of justice, a concept that has been a cornerstone of claims to legitimacy for almost all forms of power in societies’.

The spatial justice literature identifies two main types of justice – distributive and procedural. Distributive justice focuses on patterns of exclusion and unfairness; procedural justice is concerned with actions and institutional arrangements that can combat spatial injustice (Allen et al., 2003). Through the distributive lens an equal distribution of goods, services, and opportunities is the basic prescription for justice. From the procedural angle what matters are the just institutions and procedures necessary to create a just society (Madanipour et al., 2017; Soja, 2010). However, meaningful elements of justice can be found in both paradigms. Although just procedures are necessary, they are insufficient for just outcomes. Meanwhile, if too much attention is paid to the outcome, the injustices of the process within a specific locality may be overlooked (Soja, 2010).

Based on the above discussion, the critical question that arises is whether inequality can be tackled with a place-based development policy instead of financial transfers (redistributive justice) from the central state to the periphery. In this respect, regional development policies could be exercised either through a redistributive logic, in which the emphasis is on ensuring a better balance in access to resources and opportunities across space or on localities, based on the endogenous competitive potential of each territory (Madanipour et al., 2017). In contrast with this approach the ‘aggregate efficiency’ approach calls for national and mainly institutional intervention with no concern for territorial specificities (Mendez-Guerra, 2017).

It should be noted that despite common elements, spatial justice and place-based approaches do not stem from a common theoretical context (Petrakos et al., 2022). Place-based strategies are derived from the theoretical school of ‘endogenous development’, which emphasizes locally available resources, especially knowledge, innovation, and learning (Asheim, 2012; Pike et al., 2016). Grounded in this perspective, ‘territorial capital’ represents a key notion that may include, in parallel with markets and the economy, non-economic factors such as ‘cooperative culture’ and ‘institutional thickness’ (Cooke and Morgan, 1998). Interestingly, Weck et al. (2022), on the basis of



empirical evidence, claim that distributive justice and place-based interventions in their current form cannot tackle regional inequalities across space and time. In practice, the uncontroversial goal to ‘*unleash unique territorial potential related to place-based territorial capital, knowledge, and assets*’ as promulgated in the New Leipzig Charter (2020), has proved unrealistic, because at local, regional, and national levels there are very different environments and settings. Place-based approaches and spatial justice are therefore not necessarily similar.

### **The case of the social economy ecosystem in Karditsa**

In recent years the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) has received increasing attention from policymakers and academia around the globe for its potential to address major local challenges such as poverty, unemployment, inequality, and social exclusion (see the Mondragon Case in Spain, the Québec Case in Canada, and the Kerala case in India). The Social and Solidarity Economy is also considered a tool for social justice (UN, 2014). Given the polarization of the Greek economy and the centralized structure of the Greek state, as previously discussed, the research question examined in this section is whether place-based policy-driven actions such as the social economy ecosystem in Karditsa (hereinafter, *Ecosystem*) can generate spatial justice and reduce spatial imbalances.

Karditsa is a small, largely rural region in the centre of Greece, with a GDP per capita that ranks 55th among the country’s 57 subregional units (see summary information in Table 12.3). The locality is faced with the challenges of high unemployment, an ageing population, a brain drain, and a high dependence on agriculture, but has potential for innovation in the agro-food and agro-tourism industries (Petrakos et al., 2019). The *Ecosystem* has established a network of local collectives and social enterprises by local stakeholders, aiming to benefit from positive externalities related to clustering and promoting the embeddedness and resilience of local firms.

The empirical research was conducted within the framework of the RELOCAL project. The ‘locality’ is defined in this paper as diverse and porous, at the intersection of vertical, horizontal, and transversal forces (Madanipour et al., 2017). Localities face obvious spatial justice challenges and cope with strategies that promote more balanced and sustainable development (Weck, Madanipour and Schmitt, 2022). The selected actions are policy-driven initiatives with an identifiable impact on the locality. To analyse the articulation between action and locality, the process-tracing technique was applied with the use of fieldwork interviews, focus group meetings, text analysis, and participant observations (Yazan, 2015). The interviews and subsequent informal discussions with stakeholders and a focus group meeting explored narratives of injustice, expectations, hidden interests, and the local elites’ leadership modes through methodological triangulation (Hennink et al., 2011). In this



Table 12.3 Basic information of the locality & ‘*Ecosystem*’

<i>The ‘Ecosystem’ of Karditsa</i>	
The locality	A largely rural region that is investing in local networks of social economy
Administrative level	Subregional administration
Policy-driven action	The Ecosystem of Collaboration – a network of 41 local collective organizations
Major spatial justice challenge	Low GDP per capita, high unemployment, brain drain, high dependence on agriculture
Population dynamics	–4.0%
2001–2011	–8.1%
2011–2018	
GDP growth 2010–2018	–17.2%
GDP per cap 2017	34%
(%) EU average	60%
(%) National average	

Source: ELSTAT & *Own elaboration*

framework we explore the local experiences and the disabling or enabling factors of the successful mobilization of local assets and resources to deal with injustice, marginalization, or development gaps.

### *The Ecosystem*

The *Ecosystem* stands as a purely bottom-up initiative, because the central government is completely absent. Leadership is provided by the local Development Agency ANKA (though discretely), and local actors have made remarkable progress in securing wide participation and consensus and a long-term plan for the development of the *Ecosystem*. The *Ecosystem*, which has been established to generate synergies, enriches the local value chains, incubates new economic activities, crafts helical collaboration networks, and promotes an inclusive development strategy (Petrakos et al., 2019). The result of this strategy is an *Ecosystem* of Collaboration – a network of 41 local collective organizations based on several activities, procedures, rules, and support mechanisms. Based on the RELOCAL rationale, the *Ecosystem* represents a place-based approach to deliver/improve spatial justice.

In aiming to address the spatial, economic, and social injustices that the region of Karditsa faces, the Local Development Agency (ANKA) and other local stakeholders created a long-term strategy of development and inclusion. The first step was the creation of an ‘incubator’, whose task was both to support the existing innovative systems and to host all the innovative collective initiatives. The collective entrepreneurship project and entrepreneurship in general were seen as important ingredients to improve the economic landscape. Next, several important projects were undertaken, including the



design and support of alternative tourism in the mountainous area. In this context the *Ecosystem* supported new types of collective structure such as women's cooperatives and the Local Quality Agreement. At the same time many projects within the framework of the LEADER and LIFE programmes have been designed and implemented.

Another significant project was the valorization of a local resource – savings. A Credit Cooperative was established, which has today grown into the Cooperative Bank of Karditsa with 9,000 members, playing a dominant role in the local economy. During the crisis it was the only bank in the area that doubled lending to businesses, farms, and households. This is evidence that this type of bank plays a distinctive role in enhancing local economic performance – particularly income, employment, and the shoring up of birth rates – and that their presence is sometimes more effective than that of conventional banks (Coccorese and Shaffer, 2018).

The *Ecosystem* has also aimed at organizing the small, weak, and family-run businesses into networks and clusters. Over the last two decades the 'cluster model' has been used as a tool for promoting competitiveness, innovation, and growth at all levels. Three networks were formed in the food and beverage, building materials, and tourism sectors. This long-term strategy resulted in many collective endeavours, as well as a system of collaboration between them. Today, the *Ecosystem* directly and indirectly involves more than 16,000 residents, representing more than 23 per cent of the local population aged between 20 and 69. According to data gathered by ANKA, the *Ecosystem* turned over at least 65 million euros in 2016, accounting for 6 per cent of the local GDP. In relation to the Social and Solidarity Economy (British Council, 2017), these are among the most significant numbers that can be observed in Greece, although they are small compared with countries such as the Netherlands and Belgium (European Economic and Social Committee, 2017).

Spatial justice challenges this strategy to deal with low GDP per capita, high unemployment, a brain drain, and high dependence on the agricultural sector. The strategy succeeded in creating many entrepreneurial initiatives in the area, several of which were collective and inclusive. It also succeeded in attenuating (at least slightly) local dependence on the agricultural sector. Today, this area is one of Greece's rural regions with local services and primary activities and with the potential for innovation in the agro-food industry linked to tourism (OECD, 2020).

### **Lessons learned and questions readdressed**

It is uncontroversial that the Ecosystem of Collaboration has achieved impressive results compared with other areas in Greece. The findings suggest that the *Ecosystem* has been a successful place-based case that has mobilized local actors and local assets and provided access to opportunities and the just distribution of resources. The cluster model strategy has succeeded



in creating promising local entrepreneurial activities and reducing some of the local economy's dependence on the agricultural sector. Several new firms created during the crisis have managed to produce unique and competitive products (e.g. super-foods, stevia products) in the national market, while at the same time a profitable energy cooperative has been established (Petrakos et al., 2019). It seems Karditsa's Social and Solidarity Economy *Ecosystem* affects many aspects of the locality, including the level of business activity, services, living conditions, human resources, and demographic trends. The *Ecosystem* can thus be credited with mitigating some of the area's spatial injustices.

The above evidence shows that the emerging *Ecosystem* of the Social and Solidarity Economy generates a high level of procedural and distributive justice, because it is based on the values of wide participation, access to opportunities, and fair distribution of resources (Barkin and Lemus, 2014). Furthermore, the inclusive and resilient approach in the activities of the *Ecosystem* is directly aligned with the European Territorial Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda (Villalba-Eguiluz et al., 2020).

At the same time, however, several compelling questions arise related to the extent to which this locally driven endeavour ultimately makes a substantial contribution to the region's development trajectory. The critical issue here is whether the *Ecosystem's* activities can effectively reduce the development gap in the Karditsa region. The answer for the time being is that this is not visible yet. The results are clearly positive, but the strength and scope of local action is relatively limited given the magnitude of the spatial justice challenges the region faces. Despite the significant contribution to the cooperative economy at the local level, the impact of the *Ecosystem* on the real economy remains small, because local dependence on agriculture remains considerably higher than the national levels.

Although the *Ecosystem* is considered a 'best place-based practice' by Greek standards, it is unrealistic to consider it a panacea for all the area's development problems. Yet its effective operation has encouraged the creation of new collective schemes that complement and enrich the area's productive system. Many of the new firms established during the economic crisis (super-foods, energy cooperatives, and stevia extraction units) are nationally unique. Despite several success stories, the impact of the *Ecosystem* on the differentiation of the local productive base is quite weak, because the bulk of participants are cooperatives involved in agriculture and the agro-food processing business. Other sectors such as industry, construction, retail, and finance that could offer a much higher value-added to the regional GDP either are missing or have a small presence. In other words, the *Ecosystem* has failed to expand across sectors and become an engine of local economic growth. Moreover, the evidence suggests that such initiatives need a more supportive institutional framework to be more independent and flexible. Currently, legal obstacles do not allow the establishment of a management



body that could lead and operate the whole *Ecosystem*. The people running *Ecosystem* therefore do so voluntarily.

One of the constraints in the efforts of the *Ecosystem* to transform and diversify the local economy is the low presence of knowledge economy characteristics, because local R&D expenditure in the business sector and employment in knowledge-intensive activities is very low. The locality therefore lags in many of the features that would transform it into a learning region or an emerging regional innovation system, even though significant development coalitions and organizational innovations are present (Asheim, 2012). Despite its limitations, the *Ecosystem* will have the opportunity in future to improve the innovation potential of this rural region in areas such as the digital social economy, circular economy, green social entrepreneurs, agro-industry, and agro-tourism. To do this, institutional arrangements and resources will be critical.

## Conclusion

This chapter gives an account of regional inequalities in Greece and attempts to explain their persistence despite the implementation of significant cohesion policies for more than 30 years. It shows that regional policies have failed to deter the further concentration of activities in the advanced areas of the country and reduce inequalities. Initial conditions (with respect to development levels), geography (in the sense of accessibility to markets and services), stronger market dynamics, and weaker policy responses (at the European, national, and regional levels) have maintained or even increased spatial inequality. The efficiency of the policies has also been undermined by bureaucracy and overregulation, while the delivery mechanisms remain highly centralized and largely space blind.

The empirical evidence in the case of the Karditsa Ecosystem suggests that local actors have made remarkable progress in securing wide participation in and consensus about the initiative. The wide participation has also been achieved with the aim of crafting long-term plans and strategies for the area, with discrete leadership exercised by the local Development Agency. The results are clearly positive and enduring, but the relative footprint of this local action remains rather weak given the development gap or spatial justice challenges the region faces. The impact of the *Ecosystem* in the real economy from the regional development perspective has been conditioned by the unfavourable effects of structure, geography, and initial conditions. Indeed, Karditsa is located far from major transport corridors and metropolitan centres, displaying a huge exposure to the primary sector and its associated risks and fluctuations. In addition, its weak economic base combined with the lack of diversity and critical size and a poor innovative performance does not create a favourable environment for major investment that will elevate and transform the local economy.



Despite these barriers and obstacles, the *Ecosystem* succeeded in developing governance practices and local capacities with a visionary leadership that was able to partly overcome short-sighted practices that were typically anchored to the political cycle. This mainly happened because of the vital and leading role of the Local Development Agency (ANKA), which successfully mobilized and inspired critical local actors around a common goal. The experience of Karditsa indicates that a place-based approach, when based on a participatory governance system and a feasible strategy, may expand local capabilities and strengthen competitive tangible and intangible assets, making a positive contribution to spatial justice. This suggests that even in unfavourable environments scope remains for bottom-up policymaking that will mobilize endogenous resources towards a promising development trajectory.

However, the spatial dynamics of the Greek economy and the centralized character of the state have been and will continue to be a weakening force and a real obstacle to most place-based initiatives in peripheral and weaker regions and localities. The overconcentration of the production system primarily in the metropolitan region of Athens (and its satellites) and in the Athens–Thessaloniki transport and development corridor has set in motion centripetal forces that limit the attraction of peripheral areas for investment and human resources. At the same time a top-down administrative system that has proved bureaucratic, overregulating, inefficient, and sluggish discourages creative activities everywhere, but especially in places with limited proximity to its highest levels, and the places that need them most.

Although the core–periphery model of the economy and the centralized model of administration do not allow enough room for place-based initiatives to have a greater impact in lagging areas, the experience of the *Ecosystem* in Karditsa has shown that local resources and knowledge may eventually find their way to improve real conditions in weaker places when local actors succeed in cooperating, providing leadership, and developing inclusive institutions that are effective at developing capacities, identifying local advantages, and mobilizing resources in the pursuit of spatial justice. However, the activity of local initiatives in left-behind places will not be sufficient to substantially reduce their development gap without the support of an effective regional policy at the national level that allocates resources in space according to relative needs, and a more decentralized governance system that empowers place-based approaches.

## Note

1 This period includes many wind farms that create limited employment positions.

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# 13 The struggle against territorial disadvantage in a peripheral Finnish town

Balancing effectiveness and accountability in local government

*Matti Fritsch, Sarolta Németh and Petri Kahila*

## Rationale, inquires, and empirical approach

In her paper on responsiveness – the ability to listen and engage in dialogue – in public administration, Camilla Stivers (1994: 1) draws attention to the tension between the aims of effective administration on the one hand and democratic accountability on the other in government/governance at various levels (for another treatment of the tension between the two, see Behn, 1998). In a similar vein, Vetter and Kersting (2003) distinguish between the two paths of ‘efficiency’ and ‘democracy’ which, in a variety of combinations, can lead to legitimacy in local government. Local government, in most cases in Europe the municipalities, can be regarded as one of the most important arenas in which this tension is played out due to their functioning as ‘an important link between the political-administrative system and the citizens’ (ibid., p. 12). Obviously, both the aims and approaches of administrative effectiveness and democratic accountability can cross-fertilize and are not mutually exclusive. They are often combined in various ways, despite the obvious potential for tension.

The field of tension identified earlier has attracted growing academic interest mainly as a result of the growing popularity of New Public Management practices on the one hand and the simultaneously increasing concerns about the various manifestations and consequences of the ‘democratic deficit’ on the other. Reformed approaches to public management practices, often as part of a neoliberal agenda and grouped under the label of New Public Management, emphasize administrative effectiveness through leaner bureaucracy, cost-effectiveness, and better overall performance in public service provision and management (see Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). New Public Management practices became popular in the 1980s, and in its more neoliberal manifestations included the privatization and marketization of public services. However, in Finland and the other Nordic countries the aim was generally not to dismantle the welfare state through excessive privatization but to make public services more efficient and flexible (Montin, 2000; Temmes, 1998). The apparent limitations of applying NPM principles in the organization



and provision of public services and its disregard for the relevance of policy process and interorganizational relations led to the emergence of another approach to public administration. The New Public Governance (NPG) paradigm (Klijn, 2012; Osborne, 2006) and the literature on throughput, or procedural legitimacy (Schmidt, 2013, 2019), emphasize the importance of interorganizational cooperation and the inclusion of a variety of stakeholders, including citizens and societal actors, in policymaking and implementation processes in increasingly complex conditions and pluralist societies. This quest for horizontal collaboration also draws attention to the question of democratic accountability.

In democratic accountability, the municipal level is a nexus for the convergence of representative, deliberative, and participatory practices (Elstubb and Escobar, 2019). The engagement of communities, especially in decisions with direct local implications, is frequently presented as a principal precondition for a functioning system of European multilevel governance and sustainable (local) development (in line with the subsidiarity principle, Article 5(3) of the Treaty on the European Union). Participatory and deliberative procedures have flourished worldwide in various formats (mini-publics, citizens' juries, town hall meetings, participatory budgeting, etc.), with the aim of addressing existing legitimacy gaps in democracies. Especially in the last decade the field of 'democratic innovation' has become the objective of interdisciplinary scholarly investigation and heated academic debate. It is also important that it has been observed that even when deliberative procedures create participatory spaces, the latter do not necessarily feed into institutional decision-making (Strandberg and Grönlund, 2018; Jonsson and Åström, 2014).

There has in any case been a proliferation of various collaborative, participatory, and deliberative processes and the importance attached to them, including direct democracy experiments. This highlights the importance of democratic accountability and legitimacy being seen to be achieved through genuinely reciprocal communication with citizens and stakeholders to facilitate their integration into decision-making processes. Behn (1998: 159) aptly remarks here that 'any accountability mechanism ought to permit the citizens to participate in the debate over the choice of goals, and in the monitoring and evaluation of the achievement of these goals'. Moreover, giving citizens and civil society a stronger role in governance processes and empowering them as active agents in collaborative decision-making is increasingly seen as a way forward to solve the increasingly complex situations and problems in public management (Sørensen and Torfing, 2018; Ansell and Gash, 2007). The empowerment and inclusion of citizens and civil society would also facilitate and enhance the utilization of both local and place-based knowledge in decision-making processes, which may in turn promote greater efficiency and effectiveness in local municipal management.

Inspired by the above, this study explores how the tension between effective administration and democratic accountability is manifested in



government/governance processes in Lieksa, a peripheral town in eastern Finland, which has been hit hard by economic and financial distress as a result of a combination of structural change and territorial disadvantage. In addition, financial constraints at the national level have resulted in increasing tasks and responsibilities despite declining financial transfers. Consequently, municipal leaders and public managers in Lieksa have found themselves in a situation all too common in European municipalities, described by Sørensen and Torfing (2018: 389) as a ‘crossfire between dire fiscal constraints and a growing number of complex problems and unmet social needs’. This ‘perfect storm’ prompted local decision-makers in Lieksa to thoroughly change how the municipality was run.

Against this background our aim is to explain

- 1) how managerial and processual change has happened in Lieksa against the background of financial and economic upheaval in the municipality and
- 2) the balancing act between achieving effective administration on the one hand and democratic accountability on the other.

Regarding both issues, local agency, in our case the autonomy of the municipal level, plays a fundamental role. Consequently, we also investigate

- 3) the extent to which the local level has the capacity to fix their perceived spatial injustice, and how this capacity is conditioned by internal and external circumstances and trends that are beyond the ability of the local authorities to change.

This chapter is the result of research undertaken as part of the RELOCAL project funded through the Horizon 2020 programme. The empirical research in Lieksa included 26 semi-structured interviews with a range of local stakeholders, including the management group of the city administration, local politicians, local entrepreneurs and associations, a local media representative, the head of a village association, and some local residents, between October 2018 and February 2019. Most of the interviews were conducted in person in Lieksa. Observations in the town were made during the interview rounds. A three-hour focus group discussion was also held in Lieksa with a group representing the city, businesses, and the civil society sector.

### **Conceptual distinction: administrative effectiveness and democratic accountability**

For analytical purposes, and based on Stivers (1994), we distinguish between the two broader aims of administrative effectiveness and democratic accountability. This distinction is made for analytical purposes and does not reflect the complex realities of local government and governance. Following a review of the relevant literature, several different constituents of local municipal government/governance can be identified that change their orientation and meaning according to the two different aims (see Table 13.1).



Table 13.1 Elements of public management reform when aiming for increased effectiveness versus the accountability of administration

	<i>Administrative effectiveness</i>	<i>Democratic accountability</i>
<b>Role of local government</b>	Provider of services and welfare	Facilitator of the integration of citizens into political decision-making processes
<b>Legitimacy produced</b>	Output/performance legitimacy through efficient decision-making for effective interventions	Input/political legitimacy: ‘citizens expressing demands institutionally and deliberatively through representative politics while providing constructive support via their sense of identity and community’ (Schmidt, 2013: 7). Throughput/procedural legitimacy: via ‘institutional and constructive governance processes that work with efficacy, accountability, transparency, inclusiveness and openness’ (ibid., pp. 7–8).
<b>Role of the citizen</b>	(Satisfied) Customer/client	Citizen (actively engaged in decision-making processes)
<b>Local leadership traits</b>	Professional and decisive administrator (effectiveness)	Listening bureaucrat (responsiveness) Trustworthy, fair, impartial, and credible (Schmidt and Wood, 2019: 4)
<b>Local leadership focus</b>	Problem-solving	Process-solving
<b>Governance ‘style’</b>	Managerial, technocratic, ‘apolitical’ expert (NPM, the ‘new public management’ paradigm)	Participatory, transparent, and inclusive (NPG, the ‘new public governance’ paradigm)

Source: Authors’ compilation based on Vetter and Kersting, 2003; Montin, 2000; Stivers, 1994; Scharpf, 1999; Schmidt, 2013; Schmidt and Wood, 2019; Klijn, 2012.

The aim of achieving administrative effectiveness emphasizes the role of local government in providing well-functioning welfare services cost-effectively and efficiently. Result orientation and thus output legitimacy are key here. Meanwhile, democratic accountability emphasizes local government as a democratic nexus and facilitator of the integration of citizens into political decision-making processes. Consequently, the nature of the role of citizens in a municipality also changes along the two different dimensions. Whereas administrative effectiveness draws attention to the citizen as a customer or client utilizing services provided by the municipality, a



hallmark of the *functionalist* idea of the interrelationship between the local state and civil society (Montin, 2000), democratic accountability draws attention to the role of citizens as engaged and empowered stakeholders in local government/governance. This renders citizens subjects (initiators and actors) in the democratic decision-making process and the development of the municipality as a whole, rather than objects (receivers and targets) of wisdom and measures from a select few. Achieving this necessitates an overall governance style that is communicative and participatory in outlook and inclusive in nature, echoing Stiver's (1994) call for responsive and listening bureaucrats.

The client-provider relationship on the other hand, an essential element in the quest to achieve administrative effectiveness, favours a managerial approach, with professional and decisive bureaucrats. Political deliberation forms the legal basis for municipal decision-making, but strong administrative management is equally required. A key assumption is that the political and administrative leadership is expected to interact for shared purposes and objectives. Thus, 'a strong political and administrative leadership' is also often stressed as an essential element of municipal renewal (Montin, 2000: 12) to solve complex problems and challenges. In this sense municipalities generally function via a complementary model in which the political leadership decides the objectives and strategies, while the administrative leadership executes them. A broader meaning is attached to leadership under the heading of democratic accountability, one that focuses on achieving fair and sound processes in decision-making, which again emphasizes deliberative and participatory processes and practices, and – to return to Stivers – the ability to listen and communicate.

## National context

### *Finnish local government*

The Finnish government system is characterized by a strong central state and strong municipalities. A high degree of power is devolved to local government in Finland, and the municipalities are equal in legal terms, be they the capital Helsinki, with half a million inhabitants, or a small rural municipality of a thousand. Finnish municipalities are furnished with a high level of autonomy, and they have the responsibility for a wide range of welfare and social services, which are mostly financed through local income taxes (Haveri and Airaksinen, 2007). A system of central government transfers to the municipalities, which mainly consists of direct subsidies calculated based on socioeconomic, locational, and demographic factors, also exists. Generally, Finnish municipalities have had wider opportunities since the 1990s to implement independent resource-based local policies, but their diminishing financial resources as a result of declining state subsidies have restricted their financial ability to put these opportunities into practice.



Municipalities are a strong pillar in the Finnish system of government and a foundation of both democratic representation and identity formation in the country. The Finnish Local Government Act (410/2015) (Ministry of Finance, Finland, 2015) states that all Finnish municipalities must have a municipal council, a municipal board (executive), and an audit committee, but the administrative structure is the responsibility of each municipality to decide. A certain variation between Finnish municipalities regarding the balance between political and professional management is thus discernible. The highest decision-making body in a municipality is the Municipal Council (*kunnanvaltuusto*), elected every four years. A smaller group of representatives is appointed from the council members to act as the Municipal Board (*kunnanhallitus*), which oversees the implementation of the decisions the council takes. The council also elects and appoints the municipal manager (mayor), who plays an important part in the daily running of municipal affairs.

The Finnish regional level is relatively weak in European comparison and consists of joint municipal authorities and state executive regional agencies. From the regional policy perspective, the Regional Councils are important joint municipal authorities that promote regional development and planning, as well as supervising regional interests within and for their jurisdictions. The state executive regional agencies (ELY Centres) are responsible for the regional implementation of the government's regional and development policies in fields such as economic development, transport, and the environment. Inter-municipal cooperation has also become increasingly common and plays an important role specifically in public service provision. Finnish municipalities may establish joint authorities, that is, legal public entities, which basically form the second tier of municipal government (Mäenpää, 2012). The joint municipal authorities are especially important for small municipalities that struggle to organize demanding and cost-intensive services.

### *Rights to participate in Finnish municipalities*

In addition to the well-established system of representative democracy at work in Finnish municipalities, participatory and deliberative practices have garnered increasing interest as part of the wider societal shift to empowering citizens and civil society in governance processes and the quest for greater legitimacy and accountability in decision-making processes (see Sørensen and Torfing, 2018). At the local level in Finland the overall framework and foundation for this is provided by the principles laid down in the Finnish Local Government Act (410/2015), which guide the activities, including participatory practices, of any Finnish municipality.

Interestingly, Paragraph 1 (Purpose of the Act) of the current Finnish Local Government Act establishes its purpose along the two dimensions of *input* (participation and exertion of influence) and *output* (arrangement of well-functioning services) legitimacy (see Section 2). Input legitimacy is illustrated



by point 1 in paragraph 1, stating that: *(1) The purpose of this Act is to establish the conditions in which, in municipal activities, the self-government of the residents in a municipality can take place and opportunities can occur for the residents to participate and exert an influence. A further purpose of the Act is to advance and facilitate the systematic nature and financial sustainability of municipal activities.* Output legitimacy follows immediately in point 2: *(2) Municipalities shall advance the well-being of their residents and the vitality of their respective areas, and shall arrange services for their residents in a way that is financially, socially and environmentally sustainable.*

Recent revisions of the Local Government Act have strengthened participation (*osallisuus*) as an element of local government. Residents' participation is guaranteed in chapter 5 of the Local Government Act (Right of participation of municipality's residents) which, in addition to the obvious requirements related to the right to vote in local elections and referenda, secures the right for municipal residents to participate and exert influence. Section 22 of chapter 5 of the Local Government Act calls for municipalities to establish 'diverse and effective opportunities for participation' and proposes multiple ways through which participation can be realized in practice, including local resident panels, the election of representatives of service users to municipal decision-making bodies, and the joint planning and development of services with their users.

However, the practical organization of participation and the measures taken are largely left to the discretion of municipal councils (Kuntaliitto, 2017). This discretion has resulted in a variety of approaches and intensity levels in Finnish municipalities' participatory practices. As a general trend, the character of participatory practices in local government has changed in Finland. Initially, participatory processes were established by municipal government to gain approval and legitimation for political decisions that 'had already been taken'. More recently, democratic innovations and participatory arrangements have gained status to such an extent that it has placed further pressure on municipalities to open arenas and channels for citizen-led (rather than municipality-led) initiatives that precede any political decision-making. This new democratic environment forces administrative leadership to go a step beyond the requirements and guidelines set out in the Local Government Act for the participatory dimension of municipal decision-making.

### **Introducing the Lieksa case**

Lieksa, located on the northern shores of Lake Pielinen in eastern Finland, is a municipality of about 11,000 inhabitants. It is one of currently (2020) 310 municipalities in Finland and 14 municipalities in the eastern Finnish region of Pohjois-Karjala (North Karelia). Finnish municipalities can choose whether to call themselves a 'city', as Lieksa does, if the requirements for an urban community are met. 'Cities' and 'municipalities' are entirely equal before the law. More than 80 per cent of Lieksa's population is concentrated



in its central urban area, while the rest of Lieksa's territory is a large hinterland of tiny villages, managed forests, and uninhabited wilderness (Halonen et al., 2015). Even by Finnish standards, Lieksa can be described as extremely peripheral because of its cul-de-sac location on the Finnish-Russian border (with no international border crossing points nearby) and the long distances to the next regional centre (of North Karelia; Joensuu 95 km) and national capital (Helsinki 525 km).

In the following we offer a brief description of those key elements in Lieksa's condition that triggered the change in how the town was run. These are complex socioeconomic processes of shrinking (partly derived from persistent territorial disadvantages) and the recognition of a risk of missing out on newly emerging opportunities offered by a more conscious political and social turn to environmental sustainability and the subsequent major restructuring of the economy.

### *Complex processes of shrinking*

The municipality has suffered continuous population decline since the early 1960s, during which period Lieksa has lost half its population. Moreover, Lieksa experienced the highest rate of population decline (−42%) of all Finnish municipalities with a population of 10,000 or above (2017) between 1972 and 2017. As a result of continuous natural decrease (more deaths than births) since 1990 and continuing outmigration, the remaining population of Lieksa is characterized by ageing. The percentage of the population aged above 64 has increased from approximately 15 per cent in 1987 to 35 per cent in 2017.

Lieksa's population decline since the 1960s has mainly been the result of two interrelated phenomena. First, a diminished demand for labour due to structural change (mechanization) in forestry and agriculture was not fully replaced by new jobs created in the emerging manufacturing and service sector, which was the result of state-led welfare and regional policies. Second, around the same time the first post-WWII generation entered the job market and moved to larger cities in search of better jobs and educational opportunities. Outmigration from Lieksa has thus been a combination of necessity (due to the lack of employment and higher education opportunities) and choice (the prospect of better opportunities in other parts of Finland or even abroad). More recently, manufacturing has played a significant role in Lieksa's economy, but modernization processes in this sector have also reduced labour demand in the municipality from about the 1980s onwards (Halonen et al., 2015).

Lieksa has become an archetype of a peripheral, shrinking, and declining municipality. This development has led to significant stigma being attached to the municipality, including in the national press. Stigmatization renders Lieksa 'a place with no real future', making it more difficult to retain residents, especially young people looking for educational and employment



opportunities in larger cities, and to attract highly skilled new residents to the significant number of vacancies in the city's business sector. Indeed, the ongoing shrinking processes resulting from outmigration and ageing have been accompanied by increasing levels of unemployment despite a dire need among local companies for skilled labour. High unemployment levels and a declining population have therefore resulted in a dwindling tax base amid rising costs for the provision of municipal services. In addition to these 'internal' factors municipalities have faced external pressure as a result of receiving an increasing number of tasks and responsibilities in public services from the central government in the recent past. However, this has not been accompanied by increasing financial resources being made available by central government. On the contrary, by cutting the expenses in government subsidies, municipal economic resources have been pushed to their limit. Indeed, the dire financial situation in many Finnish municipalities is illustrated by the fact that in 2019 three quarters of all Finnish municipalities had negative final annual accounts (Kuntaliitto, 2020).

Lieksa has grappled with years of financial distress, characterized by declining income and increasing expenditure. Table 13.2 clearly shows this trend since 2010. Amidst a declining population and a continuously increasing share of pensioners, the proportion of the unemployed rose continuously,

*Table 13.2* Key socioeconomic indicators for Lieksa 2010–2018

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Population	12,687	12,585	12,399	12,303	12,117	11,772	11,580	11,297	11,098
Proportion of the unemployed among the labour force, %	18.0	18.8	21.4	21.4	20.6	21.5	21.2	20.5	15.6
Proportion of pensioners of the population, %	38.1	38.3	38.8	39.3	40.1	41.4	41.7	42.9	43.7
Social care and healthcare activities, total, operating net costs, EUR per capita	3,253	3,420	3,820	4,097	4,159	4,389	4,443	4,505	4,513
Overall tax income, thousand EUR						40,798	40,627	39,119	38,900

Data sources: Statistics Finland and Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (for overall tax income)



peaking at 21.5 per cent in 2015. The problematic financial and economic trajectory is also illustrated by the constant decline in overall tax income as the operating costs for social care and healthcare activities continued to decrease.

### *Emerging opportunities*

Despite these significant local development problems, Lieksa is currently already utilizing emerging opportunities in several economic sectors, which may trigger positive developments in the municipality if external and internal conditioning factors are correct. One of these sectors is tourism. Lieksa's location in a vast and unspoilt natural area may provide opportunities to harness increased demand for sustainable forms of tourism. Lieksa also plays home to the 'national landscape' and major tourism destination of Koli, for which significant investments in the tourism infrastructure are planned. The bioeconomy is another sector that could benefit from the industrial and forestry traditions available in Lieksa, particularly against the background of the EU's reformed Cohesion Policy and the Green Deal, which will provide more incentives in this sector and therefore employment opportunities. Another potential field of economic development may emerge from the renewed focus on land-based industries that can be expected because of an already observable trend of increasing demand for 'green' and local products and services.

### *New municipal leadership and strategy*

The difficult financial and economic situation in Lieksa culminated in 2014/2015, when concerns about the city's future socioeconomic viability and vitality reached saturation point among local decision-makers and politicians. Moreover, several looming public policy reforms also significantly affected the municipal level, creating additional external pressure on municipal decision-makers. This watershed resulted in a desire to part with old habits in local government. In this climate ripe for change a young, reform-minded mayor was appointed, who was instrumental in the changes that were subsequently brought about in the government/governance of the municipality. He claimed and was awarded significant powers from the local political leadership. As one interviewee said: *'In 2015 we got a new mayor. He was a younger, reform-minded man who wanted to develop further the working and functioning of the city and the public sector to correspond with modern times. That's probably where it started'*.

Also under his tenure a new municipal strategy (Lieksa Strategy, 2030) was drawn up to steer a reorientation of municipal government and governance, although the previous mayor had already started the process of renewing the municipal strategy. The Lieksa Development Strategy 2030, whose goal was to provide the city with more effective tools for realizing its own



local development aims, especially aimed for the improvement of the business environment. The spatial justice motive behind this strategy was largely related to the safeguarding of the municipality's socioeconomic viability against the distributive background of continuing demographic decline, a peripheral location (poor accessibility) in both regional and national contexts, and the resulting dwindling financial resources, as described earlier. Reforming the municipal apparatus and management style and the repatriation of development resources provided a pathway to a more deliberate and Lieksa-based approach to enable the municipality to use emerging opportunities to attract new businesses. Loosely connected with this 'viability' objective, the strategy also included the strengthening of community and citizen participation in local decisions, directed especially at the young and active cohorts, whose engagement and wellbeing (and willingness to stay) were seen as an equally important factor in ensuring Lieksa's survival. Lieksa's reorientation in municipal governance to tackle its territorial disadvantage and spatially 'unjust' position incorporated procedural fixes into the former ways of doing things in the municipality, indicating an attempt to bring together the aims of administrative effectiveness on the one hand and inclusivity and democratic accountability on the other. The following sections unpack the deployment of this strategy and examine the balancing act between the two aims.

## **Analysis**

### *Towards administrative effectiveness*

The new approach taken to local government and governance in Lieksa since 2015, facilitated and structured by the Lieksa 2030 Strategy, has included an increasingly managerial and entrepreneurial approach to city management and administration. The strategy emphasized 'vitality' (*elinvoima*) and the policies supporting it. The vitality policy is an emerging policy paradigm in Finnish local government that not only emphasizes industrial and entrepreneurship policies but underlines the importance of soft factors (wellbeing and human interaction within and by the municipality) (Makkonen and Kahila, 2020). Nevertheless, as stated earlier, much of Lieksa's focus aimed to develop the business sector and economic policies. In terms of city management, the focus was on business-like and fast decision-making based on the effective preparation of policy proposals. Policy proposals have increasingly met little discussion, and disagreements in the city council have been quickly adopted. Pragmatism and the aim of 'getting things done' have become an overarching style of government in the city, which is intended to solve the problem of socioeconomic distress in the municipality. There is little doubt that this approach has resulted in a more flexible and efficient municipal apparatus that provides a fertile and responsive operating environment for local businesses, which in turn helps provide services and welfare to its citizens. As part of the new operating environment in Lieksa, entrepreneurs and businesses



enjoy better conditions, existing companies have started to expand and invest, and some new businesses have been established. Unemployment levels have also fallen since the mid-2010s (and prior to the COVID-19 pandemic), although it is beyond the scope of this paper to determine the extent to which this is due to local government efforts or a positive change in the wider Finnish economy or the fact that the pace of retirement exceeds that of labour market entries by (the decreasing number of) potential young jobseekers.

The entrepreneurial approach taken by municipal leadership has also resulted in a prioritization of economic wellbeing above other strategic and democratic aims, as the following quote illustrates: *'It is clear that economic vitality is the number one thing, and if we don't succeed in that, our social care and healthcare, as well as educational services, can't be kept up'*.

The approach taken has contributed to the municipal leadership emerging as decisive and effective administrators safeguarding Lieksa's socioeconomic survival against the risks posed by demographic decline, a peripheral location, and the resulting poor accessibility and dwindling financial resources. It has also contributed to the attribution of output legitimacy to the local leadership.

The professionalism, (self-)efficacy, and decisiveness that is the aim of local government is not only visible in the above management style of Lieksa's internal affairs; it also appears in Lieksa's relationship with its surrounding region and neighbouring municipalities. Here, a distinct Lieksa-centred and egocentric approach towards its neighbouring municipalities and especially the regional centre of Joensuu has emerged, which includes the repatriation of economic decision-making power and initiative and resources from the joint municipal and regional levels. The basic thrust of the argument in support of this approach has been that the municipality had to strengthen the supervision of Lieksa's own interests and use the limited available resources in the municipality itself and for the benefit of its own population, based on the explicit knowledge of local needs and opportunities.

*(It is basically) the idea that there is no other choice than to take things firmly in your own hands, because the path where we are being taken by 'the current' – we've seen it doesn't lead to a good result. That's a bit of an exaggerated way to put it, because of course we used to think about Lieksa's advantage, but that vision has now truly been enforced.*

A manifestation of this approach emerged in 2016 when Lieksa's municipal leadership decided to leave the subregional economic development agency PIKES (Pielisen Karjalan Kehittämiskeskus Oy), which Lieksa and the neighbouring municipalities of Nurmes and Valtimo had founded in July 2006. PIKES had been tasked with the promotion and development of the subregional area of Pielinen Karelia (the northern part of the region of North Karelia) through the support of business, entrepreneurs, and entrepreneurship. PIKES was also assigned the role of attracting new companies to the area by operating as a first contact and source of support for businesses planning to settle in the area.



Although the stated aim of PIKES was to benefit the entire subregion, a feeling in Lieksa (and Valtimo) emerged that PIKES was favouring the municipality of Nurmes, even though the City of Lieksa was the largest shareholder and thus paid the major share of costs. A contributory factor was that the PIKES headquarters was in Nurmes. The new leadership in Lieksa was instrumental in the finalization of the separation from PIKES. An argument advanced in that decision was its coherence with the new City Strategy 2030. As the improvement of vitality in the city was one of the cornerstones of the strategy (its first priority area), it was deemed important to repatriate as many vitality-related measures as possible to a unit controlled by the city itself.

#### *Towards democratic accountability*

The new approach adopted in city governance in Lieksa not only included a striving for more effectiveness and speedy decision-making but also had the goal of improving transparency and openness under the banner of 'vitality', which in turn contributed to increased legitimacy, accountability, and trust. In Lieksa, this endeavour mostly included a basic appreciation of participation, that is, an overall understanding that local human interaction was an important resource for local (economic) development. Participation (*osal-lisuus*) is one of the four priority areas of the City Strategy 2030, which states in this context that 'the residents of Lieksa will be more responsible, active and aware: increasing the appreciation of municipal decision making'.

The strategy itself was also drawn up in a more participatory manner than previous ones, which was manifested in an effort to involve and include the views of a diversity of stakeholders representing various sectors in Lieksa. The inclusion of these diverse views also increased the legitimacy of the municipal leadership in the strategy's implementation. As one of the respondents put it: '*It (the change in procedures and ways of doing things) is probably linked to the fact that the strategy was jointly drawn up, prepared, planned, and widely accepted – and people rely on it*'.

In this context, civil society organizations and village associations play an important role as conduits and interfaces between the municipal leadership and citizens. Village associations play an especially important role in addressing the growing divergence and disconnect between the urban centre of Lieksa and the municipality's surrounding small villages. In these small settlements municipal service provision has been reduced as a result of reduced demand and cost-cutting, and more emphasis has had to be placed on communal initiatives and activities. Overall, the local municipal leadership saw the value of citizens and civil society having access to information about decision-making and the benefit of having an accessible and communicative leadership in Lieksa (a responsive administration). Indeed, these aspects were also understood as factors of 'administrative effectiveness', enabling citizens to become engaged in and be of benefit to municipal affairs. In practice this



meant applying a wider range of more interactive ways and tools of political and administrative communication, including an electronic form for (anonymous) direct feedback to the city about municipal affairs, recording City Council meetings for the public to watch online, preparing frequent bulletins, and engaging more strongly in social media. There was a consensus among the interviewees that communication by and interaction with municipal leadership had improved in recent years. According to one of them:

*I think it's evident that the city's communication has been transformed – it's more open than previously, and it's being done a lot more. It affects participation and commitment when people know about things. Decisions are no longer made 'behind closed doors'. So if that's how you define participation, I think it's being done very well now.*

The mayor and other local representatives have also aimed to be visible and approachable by attending many local grassroots events which contribute to creating faith among residents in a more positive future for Lieksa. As one interviewee put it: *'[The city leadership] visits even the smaller village events, which in my opinion also creates a certain motivation and vigour for and faith in the future of Lieksa for the taxpayer and everyone living here'.*

#### *Balancing democratic accountability and administrative effectiveness*

As described earlier, the municipal leadership in Lieksa has engaged in several reforms and changed practices under the banner of 'vitality'. These include striving for an increase in both the effectiveness and – through participation and resident involvement – accountability/legitimacy of their local development decisions and actions. The path towards more effectiveness has included a focus on output legitimacy through increased managerial efficiency embodied by swifter decision-making and problem-solving, greater flexibility, and a favourable attitude towards businesses and entrepreneurship. However, it has also become apparent that democratic accountability and input legitimacy have not been forgotten amidst this reorientation. The reconciliation of effectiveness and inclusiveness in the management/governance of local development, including in the form of more strategic and future-orientated thinking, is still part of the game, although the measures to achieve this are somewhat modest and do not include direct democracy experiments such as participatory budgeting or citizen assemblies.

This balancing act is not always easy. It was possible for the research team to detect three areas of conflict surrounding the issue. One concerns the somewhat excluding nature of rapid decision-making: *the prioritization of economic rather than civic aspects* works in favour of the business community, and this impedes civil society's participation and integration in formal decision-making. However, as indicated in the previous section, at a more informal level communication by the city with its citizens has expanded and



improved significantly compared to earlier practices, which has increased the new leadership's approachability and the transparency of their decisions and actions. This may be a sign of a conscious strategy to compensate for the relative negligence of third-sector interests due to the prioritization of the business sector.

Second, there is evidence that local *decision-making processes are being depoliticized* for the benefit of fast and efficient decisions. Several interviewees referred anecdotally to the existence of the 'Lieksa Party', drawing attention to their concern that a culture of political debate and oversight was disappearing, while too much power was given to management and administration. This echoes Montin's (2000: 2) concern about the deepening cleavage between political and administrative decision-making at local and regional levels, stating that 'making policy has been delegated to professionals and administrative managers, which has affected the role of the political representatives in such a way that they feel they have lost important political control'. One interviewee from Lieksa succinctly summarized this concern about municipal democracy: *'These officials are being trusted, and I think people are too loyal to them. We have a common saying here that we don't have different political parties any more – instead, we have one "Lieksa Party"'*.

A third balancing act concerns the funding relationship between municipal administration and civil society organizations such as village associations. The municipal leadership in Lieksa acknowledges the value and importance of these organizations and offers them financial support. However, since the introduction of the new strategy, this support has been modified from direct funding to one that is tied to specific activities and actions, which requires these organizations to relate costs to the planned actions and assess their impact. The activities of civil society organizations and village associations have therefore been subsumed by the principles of administrative effectiveness. Only time will tell whether this change in the collaborative relationship between the municipality and civil society organizations will have positive or negative effects on participatory processes in Lieksa.

## Conclusion

The distributional aspects of territorial disadvantage/spatial injustice – structural change, demographic decline, and Lieksa's remoteness from concentrations of wealth – are very difficult to affect or reverse. With no resources to regroup or draw on (and with prospects of a further declining tax base and dwindling external support), Lieksa's new municipal leadership had no alternative except to apply procedural changes to former ways of doing things that were perceived as ones that had continued to reproduce the disadvantages. They had to be adjusted to fulfil the city's desire for greater autonomy in implementing its business attraction strategy and in reconciling the aims of effectiveness and inclusiveness in managing its local development.



Despite continuing challenges, Lieksa's new management has succeeded in turning the ship of administrative effectiveness around and in the provision of a good business operating environment. There is also evidence that municipal management has become substantially more transparent and thus more inclusive of diverse stakeholder groups, including citizens. This is partly through more efficient decision-making (hence improving output legitimacy), and partly through the deliberate incorporation of simple practices that have increased the visibility of local decision-making, relevant problems, rationales, implemented solutions, and their outcomes (i.e. throughput legitimacy). Such change has been well received by citizens and has undoubtedly enhanced overall legitimacy and trust in the value of municipal decisions, which may in turn reinforce administrative effectiveness and enhance the prospect of a positive outlook. This indicates an important instance in which administrative efficiency and democratic accountability can be placed not only on a common denominator but may also be mutually supportive. Nevertheless, the political channel of inclusion/participation has somewhat lost its place as a result of the 'entrepreneurial' approach to managing a city described earlier. Critical voices in Lieksa indicate an existing and deepening cleavage between the political and the administrative (depoliticization of decision-making), which indicates a possible weakening of input legitimacy.

In a wider context we can conclude from the example of Lieksa that if the prospects of a peripheral municipality are to be improved, there is no simple recipe of installing an 'entrepreneurial' approach accompanied by some arrangements to improve transparency and citizen participation in local decisions. Just as in any treatment regime, one must understand the potential side effects, as well as the positive/negative interactions between the various interventions that aim to 'heal' a complex problem. This means that local decision-makers should engage themselves and their citizens in an open and reflective learning process to make necessary corrections in balancing effectiveness and legitimacy goals. Again, building on Stivers, we therefore advocate that local government applies and engages in a public administration style that can be characterized as 'responsive place-based leadership'.

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# 14 Autonomy and LEADER

## A comparative study of three local action groups

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### Introduction

In this chapter we consider three case studies based on rural LEADER local action groups in relation to the question of autonomy. The case studies, based in three very different nations, Hungary, England, and Romania (Kovács and Nemes, 2019; Brooks et al., 2019; Zamfir, 2019), derive from a total of 33 carried out for the RELOCAL project, where case study research was a key method of enquiry. The case study method (Weck et al., 2018), which more broadly sought to investigate the impact of local-level actions and strategies on spatial justice, had among its key themes a particular focus on the question of autonomy.

LEADER is a European rural programme dating back to 1991 that aims to foster networked rural development – that is, local development based on local knowledge, needs and assets, but which also draws on external resources and connections, often across geographical levels, from neighbouring to national. A certain contradiction is implicit in the LEADER model: although notionally ‘bottom-up’, besides the horizontal ‘networked’ element, it has a significantly ‘top-down’, hierarchical dimension. Not only is it centrally steered and audited at the EU level, but national governments have a great measure of discretion in how the programme is implemented both institutionally and thematically, centralized (sometimes agricultural) payment agencies may distribute its funds to Local Action Groups (LAGs) and grant recipients, and local and district level authorities may take a hand in its day-to-day operations. From this may result a degree of mismatch between expectations of autonomy and the reality experienced on the ground. In this chapter we seek to uncover to what extent LEADER LAGs have autonomy and how constraints on autonomy may affect their outcomes (including spatial justice outcomes).

This question is explored through four main sections: the first presents a brief history of the LEADER programme since its inception in 1991, outlining its changing conceptualization, relationship to theories of rural development and the general features of its institutional implementation. In the



second section, the concepts of Autonomy and Spatial Justice are explored in the context of the LEADER approach, in order to develop a framework for analysing the autonomy of the case study actions, with a particular focus on a widely adopted definition of autonomy as powers of initiation and immunity and considering the role of participation and vernacular knowledge in local development.

There follow the two empirical sections of the paper, starting with the Findings, which begins by looking at the broader institutional and policy contexts for each compared LEADER programme at national levels, including the implications of later EU accession. This is succeeded by subsections on the autonomy themes of Participation, Powers of Initiation and Powers of Immunity, under each of which similarities and differences between the three case studies' implementations of the programme are explored. The fourth and final part, the Discussion and Conclusion, integrates the foregoing discussions of local autonomy and spatial justice at the theoretical level with the empirical evidence of the case studies, clarifying what degree of autonomy might be expected of a LEADER action, its impacts on spatial justice and the flaws in the programme design that make it vulnerable to co-option by more powerful players at local and higher levels.

### **LEADER, governance and rural development**

Historically, the governance of Europe's rural areas focused on their role in servicing towns and cities. Then, particularly in the post-war period, this crystallized into an approach known as 'exogenous rural development', whereby rural areas were developed and governed by external authorities in a top-down manner, which went hand-in-hand with a productivist attitude to rural industrial sectors, in particular food production.

By the early 1990s when the pilot LEADER community initiative was introduced, agricultural surpluses and environmental concerns had for some time shown the inadequacies of the exogenous, sectoral approach and led to calls for a broader, cross-sectoral form of rural development (Commission of the European Communities, 1988). 'Endogenous' approaches placed a new focus on area-based rural development, based on making the most of local resources through local participation. Within this context, LEADER represented a switch for the European Commission towards bottom-up, area-based rural development with a focus on capacity building (Black and Conway, 1996; Ray, 1998; MacKinnon, 2002; Scott, 2002; Woods, 2005). Key for this to work is that area-based local development, informed by local participation, also needs to be well-networked and integrated externally, securing the place of the dependent local area within wider power structures and external sources of support.

[N]etworked development involves not only deliberative governance and territorial place shaping, but also institutional capacity building,



engagement in relational networks and sharing of responsibilities with an enabling state and other actors . . . to secure their wider spaces of association in a networked world.

(Shucksmith et al., 2021: 326)

LEADER is supposed to be particularly designed to affect this kind of ‘neo-endogenous’, networked rural development, given the definitional principles and the broad structure that it has evolved through its various iterations since 1991. At the highest, EU level, LEADER evolved from an experimental phase, focused solely on deprived rural areas, and aimed at identifying and building on local economic strengths with the aim of reducing rural-urban disparities; to a greater focus on intra-regional equity, creating internal spatial justice through addressing the inclusion of marginalized groups (ENRD, 2016; Shucksmith et al., 2021). At an administrative level it has moved from being an independent, small-scale funding stream of £1.2 billion in LEADER I, shared between 217 schemes; to integration as a delivery option within a major EU funding programme (Pillar 2 of CAP), at a value of £9.8 billion, implemented by over 2,650 schemes as part of overall EU rural development policy (Atterton et al., 2020). It is the seven principles,<sup>1</sup> set out by European Commission, which make the LEADER approach adequate to bottom-up rural development for an enlarged Union.

While old member states were building up their experience in LEADER implementation, by the early 2000s the first wave of new member states from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) were joining the initiative. They encountered LEADER as a mature, no longer experimental policy (Augustyn and Nemes, 2014). A clash between the already mature conceptual apparatus of LEADER and the newly encountered social and institutional structures soon emerged, as particularly exemplified in the Romanian case study in the analysis below.

LEADER has both a horizontal, networked aspect and an aspect of vertical integration – in this sense it is both bottom-up and top-down. Shucksmith et al. (2021) argue that, while Local Development Strategies were negotiated with and approved by the European Commission in LEADER I, subsequently the scheme has become ever more subject to national and sub-national oversight and control (Ray, 1998; Hubbard and Gorton, 2011; Müller et al., 2020; Konečný et al., 2020, cited in Shucksmith et al., 2021: 323), a process of appropriation observed in numerous European case studies. This is one of the key dimensions along which our case studies were analysed and compared.

### **Autonomy and spatial justice in the context of the LEADER approach**

In this section we will problematize the degree of autonomy of LEADER local action groups (LAGs), and the ways in which this relates to two aspects



of spatial justice, procedural and distributive justice. In scrutinizing LEADER LAG autonomy, we adopt the approach of Ladner et al. (2015) as already adapted for the objectives of the RELOCAL project by Blondel and Evrard (2020) who made the first attempts to link the concept of autonomy to spatial justice. Following Ladner et al. (2015), Blondel and Evrard adopted the definition unaltered from Clark, who in his seminal article on the theory of local autonomy, identified two primary principles of local autonomy: the *power of initiation* and the *power of immunity* (Clark, 1984: 198). Initiation, according to Clark, means ‘*the actions of local governments in carrying out their rightful duties*’ whilst immunity expresses the ‘*powers of localities to act without fear of the oversight of higher tiers of the state*’. According to Clark, ‘*autonomy also defines the extent of local discretion in terms of local functions, actions, and legitimate behaviour*’ (Clark, 1984: 198).

What permits adapting a classification tailored to local governments for our purpose is that LAGs act, within the bounds of their remit, as the bottom layer of a multi-level governance system, in which authorities at the EU and national levels represent the top and intermediate tiers. In drawing this parallel we disregard the feature of LEADER whereby each Local Action Group defines its own territory and thus LEADER goes beyond ‘local’ and can be interpreted as ‘territorial’. However, it still represents a Local Administrative Unit (LAU) level according to the EU classification system.

Another contextual parallel that can be drawn between LEADER and local autonomy is decentralization induced by the so-called neoliberal turn of the last decades of the 20th century, which entails a reduced central state with competences devolved to lower levels as well as more collaborative governance. It was the OECD’s New Rural Paradigm (2006) that advocated a new approach in rural development based on three main factors, with decentralization and changed regional policies among them. The shift of focus pointed to the increasing importance of the local (focused on place, rather than sectors) and investments, rather than subsidies (OECD, 2006: 56–58). The LEADER Programme was highlighted in this OECD publication in appreciation of its integrated and endogenous approach to rural development and its multi-level governance model (OECD, 2006: 90–94).

The two notions of decentralization and local autonomy appear to be closely connected in a large body of the literature, for example, the central hypothesis of a recently published volume is that the ‘*degree of decentralization and the level of local autonomy correlates positively with the level of development*’ (Silva, 2020: 2). Concerning LEADER, Chardas (2017: 629) argues that its realization presupposes the existence of state apparatuses with decentralized competences and financial autonomy, which runs into problems in highly centralized states. Other commentators warn that decentralization does not always generate proportionate autonomy in the sense that it might enable local governments to deliver public policies that respond to the needs of their citizens. The capability of local governments to do so depends on the



extent to which the seven dimensions of local autonomy identified by Ladner et al. are within their disposal, that is: legal autonomy, political discretion, scope, financial autonomy, organizational autonomy, non-interference and access (Blondel and Evrard, 2020: 12).

It is not only neoliberal ideology that can induce decentralization of the central state, but historical events can also trigger radical decentralization too: this was the shared experience of several Eastern European countries at the time of the fall of state socialism, deriving from real political demand on the part of municipalities for democratic control and autonomy (Devas and Delay, 2006: 678). The process of Europeanization also played a pivotal role in the creation of more decentralized multi-level government structures in Eastern European Countries; Romania was cited as an example by Marquardt et al. (2012: 5) but, more generally, ‘regionalization’ of government was considered as an important condition for entering the EU across the region.<sup>2</sup> However, as the Hungarian case has illustrated after 2010, decentralization and even (a restricted) local autonomy might fade suddenly away as a consequence of a sharp political turn towards centralization (Pálné Kovács, 2020: 46). According to Ladner et al., Hungary has gained an outlier position among the European countries in the period 1990–2014 as the only one where local autonomy significantly decreased (Ladner et al., 2015: 60–78).

The LEADER Programme is not only decentralized but also collaborative and participatory, which brings it close to local governance issues. In the analysis of Michaels and de Graaf on citizen participation, three of its features are highlighted as factors enhancing democracy: its educative function (it can support citizens to increase their civic skills), its integrative function (it can contribute to citizens’ feeling of belonging of their community) and its role in establishing greater legitimacy of decisions; all of these functions are also pivotal in LEADER (Michaels and de Graaf, 2010: 480). The authors cite a paper in Dutch from 2010, to the effect that participatory policymaking is expected to ‘*narrow the gap between citizens and government, enlarges the problem-solving capacity and . . . improves the quality of policy*’ (Michaels and de Graaf, 2010: 482); these are dimensions frequently mentioned as positive attributes of the LEADER programme. Moreover, according to Devas and Delay, a greater stock of information on resources and their use gained through public participation helps to build the accountability of local government and the emergence of civic society actors ‘*capable of engaging effectively with local government . . . on behalf of the poor*’ (Devas and Delay, 2006: 484), thus contributing to increased social justice prevailing in the locality.

There are, however, counterarguments. Zamfir (2020) argues in his article on the Mara Natur case (Romania) that in the present context of intricate procedures and low funding levels, LEADER serves first and foremost as a pedagogical exercise in uneven development. In this vein, the newly inculcated civic skills are factors in furthering uneven development. Similar criticism by



Husu and Kumpulainen (2019) was raised in relation to the ‘creation of new moral actors’ as an outcome of aspirations in neoliberal policy to ‘empower’ local communities through (among other things) participation. The critical discourse around the neoliberal (Finnish) rural development paradigm argues that *‘community development is not about transferring more power to local people, but rather about withdrawing government resources from communities’* (Husu and Kumpulainen, 2019: 895). The authors’ critical judgement resonates with Peck and Tickell’s (2002) process-based analysis according to which through neoliberalization *‘local institutions and actors were being given responsibility without power’* (Peck and Tickell, 2002: 386). The concept that provides a chance of obviating the shortcomings of neoliberalization is Shucksmith’s ‘disintegrated rural development’. Shucksmith argues that the state can contribute to empowering local communities if it is capable of *‘becoming a catalyst for local action, mobilising less powerful actors and becoming an agent for change’*, as the example of Scottish community-based land reform indicates (Shucksmith, 2010: 10).

Numerous less radical critiques of the impact of the LEADER Programme on local democracy diagnosed that the LEADER approach fails to reach vulnerable layers of rural communities. Those who are already well resourced, skilled and networked can access LEADER programmes and cope with the demands of the grant applications process, whereas lower-skilled, more isolated actors with less capital behind them may struggle to engage and if engaged, to win grants (Shucksmith, 2000: 13–15). Navarro et al. (2016: 272–273) adduce a long list of authors who found that the LEADER and/or endogenous development approach can reinforce existing power structures and marginalize the poor.

The latter article calls attention to the specificities of the Eastern European context owing to a weak presence of interest groups in rural areas in general, and civil society organizations in particular, as a legacy of the socialist past, aggravated by rural outflow, which had been triggered by transition from state socialism. Moreover, people’s lack of trust in the competencies of non-professional and non-statutory actors has enabled statutory actors, mayors and employees of local administration or governance frameworks such as micro-regional municipal associations to dominate rural development partnerships across the wider region. This was a common finding for Furmankiewicz et al. (2010) in the Polish context, Macken-Walsh and Curtin (2013) in the Lithuanian context and Marquardt et al. (2012) in the Romanian context. It should be added that the public sector dominance in LEADER LAGs and the strong influence of the power elite are not specific to the Eastern European context. Examples were reported from the Welsh and Spanish contexts as well (Esparcia et al., 2015: 33, 39; Navarro et al., 2016: 283). Looking at the operations of one LAG in Northern Italy and one in Eastern Finland, Rizzo (2013) concluded that local governance styles deeply influence how structures operate. While the Finnish case showed rural activists



to have played a major role in the foundation of the LAG, the Italian case exhibited characteristics of top-down approaches closely contained by the administrative governance bodies.

Development as a process and activity can be translated into the language of Clark as the powers of LEADER LAGs, '*to initiate*', or in the words of Blondel and Evrard '*to accomplish tasks of local interest*' [our emphasis] (Blondel and Evrard, 2020: 8). Considering the criterion of autonomy and its conditions, self-determination of any local (or territorial) community is obviously related to resources, especially endogenous resources: we might assume that the more locally controlled resources are available for development in a given local community, the higher its level of autonomy. Ray uses the term '*development repertoire*' to refer to the means of endogenous development, implying '*a stock of resources or regularly used techniques*' a community might select from in the pursuit of local development objectives (Ray, 1999: 526). His concept envisages resources as both tangible and intangible, examples of the latter being local history, culture or local knowledge '*transformed into resources available for the territory*' (Ray, 1998: 9).

The concept of neo-endogenous development '*retains a bottom-up core . . . yet understands that extralocal factors . . . impact on – and are exploitable by – the local level*' (Ray, 2006: 281). Exploiting external factors implies increasing the resource base for local development, yet it does not automatically and immediately increase the level of local autonomy. However, depending on the kind and volume of external resources absorbed, internal resources can be impacted positively too, notwithstanding the fact that external resources embedding into the local context might soon become part of an extended endogenous '*development repertoire*' of the locality.

A parallel concept to neo-endogenous development, and indeed closely related to it in that there is a similar interplay between local and external, is so-called vernacular knowledge as a special form of hybrid expertise. Vernacular knowledge is regarded by Lowe et al. as '*place based but crucially nourished by outside sources and agents*' (Lowe et al., 2019: 28) generated '*through the joint production of knowledge, the creation of networks for expertise exchange, and helping equip local actors with methods and tools they can use to develop and apply their own expertise*' (2019: 36).

To conclude, neo-endogenous development and vernacular knowledge intertwine in the development process and contribute to the empowerment of the local community; they enhance local resources and thus strengthen local autonomy.

The degree of '*immunity*' according to Clark is the second criterion of local autonomy denoting the scale of interventions and control by donor and/or government agencies of the upper levels of government. Regarding the *immunity* of LEADER LAGs, which can be translated as the possibility '*to act, without oversight by higher levels for the local interest*' (Blondel and Evrard, 2020: 8) [our emphasis], the literature as well as our case studies provide



ample examples. The crudest and most direct state intervention regarding the implementation of the LEADER Programme was reported by Chardas as taking place in austerity-driven Greece, where dictated austerity measures related to governance reform. He presents a gradual recentralization of decision-making regarding local affairs in Greece, where austerity measures imposed by the Greek Government percolated down through a highly centralized and corruption-ridden state to local actors, affecting public institutions managing LEADER. LAGs of course suffered from severe cutbacks in public expenditure but, sadly, declining financial resources in Greece were also coupled with open political corruption, which completely undermined the organizational autonomy of the LAGs.

The political manipulation of the projects that are to be implemented is a constant feature of the project selection process in the LEADER programmes. All the mayors and elected members of regional councils are attempting to intervene and promote investment programmes of their political friends.

(Chardas, 2017: 630, 639)

What was essentially government intervention over LAG autonomy was reported by one of RELOCAL's case studies from the post-crisis United Kingdom. In this case local development strategies were overridden by the responsible government ministry, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), imposing a mandatory minimum limit (70%) of LEADER spending on job creation (Shucksmith et al., 2021: 10). This government action is less surprising if one takes into consideration the United Kingdom's poor reputation regarding the 'immunity' of local government bodies. According to Ladner et al.'s Self-Rule Index (2015: 47), the United Kingdom figured in the group of lowest-scoring countries with a value of 11.74, compared to which only Ireland scored worse among the EU's advanced capitalist countries (10.47). Of the 39 European countries reviewed, 29 were placed ahead of the United Kingdom and only 9 scored behind, including Albania, Georgia and Moldova.

Other accounts of the scope of autonomy of LEADER LAGs reflect either on mismanagement of the Programme at the national level, such as the frequent change of rules (Marquardt et al., 2012: 403), delays in starting the Programmes of which the Hungarian and England case studies also provide examples, or attest to inconveniences deriving from the reporting obligations and overwhelming bureaucracy (Cardenas Alonso and Nieto Maso, 2020; Chevalier et al., 2017; Oostindie and van Broekhuizen, 2010). Navarro et al. (2016: 280, 284) raise in their study the issue of the 'erosion of idealism' in LEADER that has been a growing feature of the subsequent programming periods, speeding up particularly since it has been mainstreamed in the 2007–2013 cycle.



The latter authors implemented a comparative survey among LAG managers in Wales and Andalusia which is highly relevant from the point of view of governance issues. Managers were asked among other things about their LAG's autonomy, indicating the level of decision-making autonomy on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high); the mean score was 3.8. They also gave positive evaluations of their LAG's impact on the enhancement of local decisions (4.1 mean score). In spite of such basically positive views, the most important attributes of LEADER LAGs and their democratizing impact was considered to be on the wane, and moving towards stronger integration with mainstream rural development policies, which resulted in deficiencies in many instances: *'LAGs have often been controlled by mayors and political representatives of the local and regional public sector, and this has resulted in the RDPs being used to promote political patronage, with political and economic leaders taking decisions over objectives'* (Navarro et al., 2016: 283) At this point the conclusion begins to consolidate that the Greek case described by Chardas may not be that far from the mainstream.

## Findings

The diversity of implementations of LEADER is widely acknowledged. The contextual drivers can be presented in a number of dimensions: one is related to the different geopolitical histories, particularly the situation of new versus old member states; the second relates to institutional background, that is centralized or decentralized state and multi-level governance structures; the third regards policy contexts. And finally, regarding LEADER, the territorial/local context must be underlined, as the crossroads where all the other dimensions meet and interact.

A comparison of the broader national contexts and their impacts on the implementation of the LEADER programme in the two most recent iterations is introduced in the first part of the section below. The second part features a discussion of the similarities and differences concerning the degree of autonomy and related issues revealed by the analysis of the three examined cases.

### *EU membership, multi-level governance, institutional environment*

Differences are apparent between the countries, as far as the institutional environment at the local level is concerned. These are partially related to multi-level governance structures and management patterns. In Hungary, the LEADER Programme has always been governed from the centre, in England implementation was still regionalized at the beginning of the 2007–2013 iteration, up to 2012, when the regional level in Northeast England was dissolved following a sharp political turn to the right at national level. The political turn in both countries paradoxically brought about similar changes



in multi-level governance: the beginning of significant recentralization by, among others, abolishing NUTS-2 regions (in Hungary LAU-1 micro-regions as well). In Romania, programme-level pursuit of LEADER was also centralized; nevertheless, county-level authorities (NUTS-3 level) remained influential actors playing an important role in sustaining LAGs through membership fees. In Hungary, county-level authorities are not involved with LEADER LAGs. Further differences of institutional environment for implementing the LEADER Programme can be illustrated by the UK example where local authorities have had administrative and supporting roles to play (host body, managing body) for LAGs. Such an institutionalized pattern of embedding LAGs into the realm (and services) of local authorities is unknown in both Hungary and Romania.

Continuing with the LEADER Programme as it matured through its successive phases, the advantage of the United Kingdom was immense at the beginning of the 2007–2013 cycle: the United Kingdom/England had taken part in all iterations of LEADER since its introduction in 1991. While Hungary only joined the European Union in 2004, a so-called experimental LEADER Programme was already launched there in 2001 by the Rural Development Department of the Ministry for Agricultural and Rural Development. This was followed by LEADER+ after EU accession in 2004, still as a pilot phase, but with the opportunity of learning and experimenting now provided for many more LAGs (70). It was with the 2007–2013 cycle that LEADER implementation in Hungary entered a more-or-less established phase. Unlike in the United Kingdom/England and later in Romania, Hungarian policymakers were self-confident enough to implement LEADER not only as a separate axis (Axis 4) of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) but also as a crosscutting instrument in the delivery of four of the six<sup>3</sup> measures of Axis 3. This is the period when the programme was extended to the entire country. In 2007, when preparations for the new programming cycle commenced in the other two countries, Romania had just joined the European Union. It thus implemented LEADER from scratch, with a three-year lag after Hungary, and no home-grown experimental phase.

### *The broader policy context*

The main goals to be achieved by the EU Rural Development Programme (RDP) were changed rather significantly in the 2014–2020 iteration. New priorities emerged, such as Priority 6<sup>4</sup> addressing poverty reduction, the most relevant from the point of view of our interest. A greater sensitivity towards social issues, however, mostly remained at the level of rhetoric rather than reality: because social inclusion was to be achieved as an overall impact of economic and ICT development, the scope of Local Development Strategies (LDS) did not show much difference from those of earlier iterations in either of the investigated cases. The new EU framework for rural policy provided more flexibility for national-level policymakers than before, which



was used to a different degree in member states. In Mansfeld-Südharz (East Germany), for example, 14% of the RDF was allocated to LEADER (Dax et al., 2016), whilst in the three countries under investigation, the allocation was limited to the mandatory minimum of 5% and the big innovation of the programming cycle, namely multi-funded CLLD, was not adopted either. The financial support of mono-funded LEADER significantly declined in the 2014–2020 period in Hungary and England; although not in Romania, which in 2014 entered its first full iteration. The largest reduction of LEADER-like rural development, to one-quarter of the support given in the previous iteration was experienced in Hungary, where the ordinary rural development measures were recentralized, and the poorly funded LEADER measure itself remained the sole measure implemented in a decentralized manner by LAGs.

### *The local context*

The size and territorial coverage of the LAGs are by and large similar in the three cases, representing areas with resident populations of 43,000 (Hungary), 55,000 (England) and 68,000 (Romania). It is characteristic of LEADER that the LAG catchment area will have been evolved specifically for the bid to the programme, and it may not have any other governance or administrative profile outside of the LAG action. Therefore, emerging shared identity is indicative of a successful community-building process implemented throughout the idiosyncratic LAG history.

It is probably not by chance that positive connotations concerning the LAG community and a definite, newly evolved common identity seem to be strongest in the Balaton Uplands case, where the LAG catchment area was built through a series of negotiations by the local actors in 2007. As far as territorial disparities are concerned, a rather significant gap between wealthy lakeside and disadvantaged ‘inland’ villages around Sümeg prevailed within the LAG area. Nevertheless, overall, it is an area rich in resources, with regard not only to its economic attributes (high touristic potential, vine growing, agglomeration zones) but also to its natural beauty, cultural heritage and human capital.

In England, the first NULAG catchment area was initiated by the regional development agency, One North East (ONE NE), in 2007, which separated the more prosperous and accessible coastal area of the former county-wide Northumberland LAG, from the remote uplands, which are dominated by low-income upland farms, forestry and military ranges, and with an economy characterized by SMEs and micro-businesses. ONE NE was also responsible for bringing together the team of uplands residents who were behind the first NULAG LDS, which represented the bid to central government for the LEADER grant. In its second and final period – it ended prematurely in 2020 due to Brexit – when it was hosted by the Local Authority, Northumberland County Council (NCC), this LAG expanded its boundaries to embrace



several peripheral market towns, raising the population to 55,000 and somewhat reducing the catchment's prior homogeneity in terms of socio-economic features and settlement patterns.

A different history is represented by the Romanian case of Mara-Natur, which covers three historical micro-regions and some of the member villages bordering the county capital of Baia Sprie. The driver of the initiative (and its current manager) was something of an outsider, a former public employee of Baia Sprie City Hall, who scoped out the programme through exploratory visits to LAGs in Hungary and Slovakia. What resulted was a LAG with a population of around 68,000, concentrated around two cities (Baia Sprie and Baia Mare). This area is characterized by a uniform profile of low incomes, especially in the villages outside the nearest neighbourhoods of the cities. Economic disadvantage is rooted in the area's former extraction economy, which abruptly halted almost 20 years ago, and has not been regenerated or replaced by new, emerging industries.

The comparison of the cases will continue in the sections below through three themes, closely related to the degree of autonomy: (i) participation, as a specific tool to garner local knowledge within the process of constructing an LDS, to recruit LAG members and grant applicants subsequently and (ii–iii) the powers of LAGs concerning initiation and immunity.

### *Participation*

The comparison of the three cases shows rather significant differences regarding *the participatory nature of the LDS process*: three years after EU accession, a great deal of enthusiasm for the programme still prevailed in Hungary, and thus participation was relatively unproblematic in general, and in the Balaton Uplands area in particular, where, as mentioned earlier, the LAG area was established through bottom-up negotiations, experience had been built up with LEADER+, and an extremely hardworking LAG Agency with three offices accessible by the population was established, staffed by people representing vernacular knowledge and different kinds of expertise. Participatory actions were part of mandatory procedures prescribed and controlled centrally, by a Ministry department playing the role of the Managing Authority (MA) indicating the co-existence of bottom-up and top-down elements in implementation of the programme.

The exemplary participatory actions led by the management in 2007 yielded a strategy, which was successfully implemented by 2015 and even beyond this, since the LAG continued to follow this LDS with few changes in Phase 2. It should also be noted that success was strongly influenced by external factors, such as the increasing value of the area's natural assets and its touristic potential as well as emerging consumer demand for quality food products. The most popular 'Quality Mark' project, which brought hundreds of new members to the LAG, was imported through an



international co-operation project that provided a framework, co-operation opportunity and a common background for entrepreneurs engaging in these interconnected branches (see video presentation by Kovács and Nemes, 2021).

In the NULAG case, participatory strategy building was hampered to some extent by the low number of personnel (2–3 full-time paid employees in Phase 1 and one person, supported by a dedicated administrator at the Local Authority in Phase 2) as well as the catchment's accessibility issues – the Northumberland Uplands is a very large, hilly territory of some 3,232 km<sup>2</sup> with some poor-quality internal road systems. It would be unlikely that the LAG's volunteer Board of Members and associated paid staff could be fully familiar with, and thus represent a balanced knowledge of, the catchment area. Furthermore, the initial catchment was extended in the 2014–2020 cycle and place identity was disturbed by amalgamations of local governments in 2009 and changes of electoral ward boundaries in 2013. On the other hand, largely due to the part-time retention of an exemplary Programme Officer between the penultimate and last LEADER phase in England, wide-reaching and in-depth consultation was undertaken during the development of the 2013–2020 Local Development Strategy.

The case of the Mara-Natur LAG seems to cover even more hindrances to participation. Unlike the resource-rich Hungarian LAG area, this is a region where people suffered significantly from the economic breakdown after the collapse of the communist regime. LEADER seemed somewhat out of step with the profile of the local economy (dominated by the remainders of extraction industry), and the volume of LEADER grants was regarded as disproportionately meagre, by comparison with the level of investment needed for sound economic regeneration of the region. Additionally, the programme was largely unfamiliar to stakeholders, and moreover, initiated externally, leading to scant interest and enthusiasm in 2009, when the LAG was established. Because of the very strict control of the MA and PA, imposing fines where projects failed to meet criteria or expectations, and frequent legislative changes (similar to both the England and Hungary cases), the LAG management was uncertain who should be encouraged to participate in the Programme, and how this should be effected. Accessibility issues also emerged in this case, arising from the fact that LAG meetings were generally held in town locations, making attendance too costly and time consuming for many villagers and remote rural dwellers. In this local (societal) context, the management had to work 'bureaucratically' to ensure that the programme implementation ran smoothly.

Ultimately, the aforesaid circumstances, coupled with the reduced relevance of actual place knowledge when confronted with available funding opportunities, resulted in doubts concerning LEADER as an adequate tool of development. A reduction in grant, affecting the proportion allocated to outreach and animation in the most recent iteration hampered participation in



the cases of both Northumberland and Balaton Uplands, less so in the Mara Natur case where an agency with seven paid staff operated in the 2014–2020 programming cycle (cf. the one-to-two of the NULAG case and the three of the Balaton Uplands). In all three cases it is probably true to say that the bureaucratic and complex nature of the application procedure, alongside the diminishing availability of match funding or bank loans to cover pre-financing of the awarded project grants, placed limits to the inclusion of lower-skilled and low-capitalized actors in the actions.

### *Powers of initiation*

If *power of initiation* is interpreted after Clark as ‘*the actions of [LAGS] in carrying out their rightful duties*’, the notion of initiation in case of the LEADER Programme covers the entire duration of the programme cycle at the local level, and it intertwines with participation from the appraisal phase of the LDS onwards. This is the phase when overall development targets are set up, local knowledge is channelled and built into priorities and measures. Depth of local knowledge is to some extent a corollary of the extent of local participation as described in the previous section, as it impacts the quality of the LDS data, which not only provides a firm and place-shaped foundation to creating priorities for the LDS, but also helps implement the strategy through the established contacts. Powers of initiation for Local Action Groups under such broader interpretation mainly depend on three factors: (i) the LDS process; (ii) the resources available; and (iii) the capabilities of the potential applicants.

Regarding the LDS process, the participative nature of the strategy-building and grant application process has been detailed earlier. Concerning resources – the amount of money available for animation and project development – in both the England and Hungary cases this declined in between the first and second iterations as mentioned earlier. In Romania the issue of shrinking resources does not apply, as there was more money allocated for the second iteration, which covered the entire LEADER programme cycle for the first time.

Regarding the capabilities of potential applicants, this applies mainly to Romania, where rural actors’ limited capacities in terms of responding to calls for applications relating to social services and biodiversity, set a limit on the powers of initiation of the LAG that it may not have been able to foresee – and that probably relates to the lower level of development of civil society in the post-communist context. In NULAG’s second iteration, there was likewise only one successful application in one of the six categories set by central government, ‘Culture and Heritage’, but this may be because of difficulty of fitting projects to the centrally imposed restrictions as noted earlier. In the Balaton Uplands case, the measure aiming to revitalize the ‘Smart hiking trails’ failed due to similar capacity shortages.



*Powers of immunity*

Freedom of LAGS from oversight and interference from higher governance levels, called *immunity* by Ladner et al. (2015) after Clark (1984), depends on several factors, listed below, of which two are highlighted in more detail:

- Vulnerability of LEADER LAGS to direct intervention from above. Immunity means independence of the Local Development Strategy and the extent to which it is under the control of each LAG and its associated local assemblies (in the case of Romania and Hungary) or under the influence of the voluntary LAG Board of Members, in the case of England. Independence in developing the LDS was in the power of the LDS in all the cases but one, which took place in the second iteration of NULAG, when, it fell under the control of central government, who overruled the existing LAG-defined LDS and restricted the eligible types of projects and funding, in line with government measures to combat the financial crisis, thus overriding the LDSs of all England LAGs;
- Degree of bureaucracy in the scheme administration imposed by the multiple levels of governance of the LEADER Programme, from the EU, down to national, regional and local government levels.
  - For immunity (as well as for initiation), a critical factor is the level of bureaucratic, as opposed to financial control, exercised by all levels of government – from the design of the application process (complexity, timing, flexibility, etc.) and eligibility criteria, to numbers and types of changes and how they are communicated, to which governance level takes on the role of setting these rules;
  - whether guides, handbooks and other aspects of the application procedure are produced in a timely manner or with delays; whether guidance remains constant or is continually altered during each five-year programme;
  - and finally, can the LAG develop and implement its own projects alongside giving out grants to applicants – this latter was possible in Phase 1 NULAG and was particularly used to develop a flourishing international exchange programme; it was also a valued component of Phase 1 in both Balaton Uplands and Mara Natur programmes.

As commonalities it was revealed that all three cases were subjected to long delays (between one and four years) in implementation due to deficiencies in the administrative capacity of (or between) higher levels; all cases also experienced delays in MA (Managing Body in the England case) decisions, the issuance of guidance or electronic tools/platforms for uploading applications, and so on.



Other contextual factors:

- *the policy context*: this aspect covers the extent to which the aims of the LEADER programme are mirrored and supported by the policies of the national and local governments; this was broadly the case at the beginning of NULAG and the Balaton Uplands but had declined considerably during successive governments from 2010 onwards, which was in part a response to austerity but in part also ideological in both countries;
- *the context of government*: meaning the degree of local autonomy in the national context and of central government control generally (in the United Kingdom/England this is very low and in Hungary it has declined greatly since 2012, but it was at a reasonable level in Romania);
- *the procedural context*:
  - *guarantees of (or lack of) fair procedures*: stability and continuity in staffing and maintenance of responsive contact with the LAG from higher government levels – in England this was affected by austerity staffing cuts to various governance bodies, in Hungary the ‘inter-iteration gap’ financial crisis eroded the quality of communications and trust.
  - *guarantees of (or lack of) the independence of national and/or local government from influence by special interests and lobby groups, such as agriculture and business*;
  - *legal guarantees (or lack of) to contest or otherwise appeal government body decisions at any level*. Such guarantees have been available in both iterations in the three investigated countries.

## Discussion and conclusion

The comparison of three case studies on LEADER actions implemented in England, Hungary and Romania revealed that the way the LEADER Programme is implemented is highly dependent on the national and local contexts. This is also the case for the LAGs’ level of autonomy. Several contextual drivers have been presented in the above sections such as the background of the institutions that frame the adoption of the Programme, centralized or decentralized state structures, policy contexts and broader geopolitical histories, legacies of former political regimes hampering or nourishing the participation of the targeted population in the process of development.

LEADER is usually implemented as a measure on its own aimed at generating and realizing strategies through accomplishing several place-based and community-based projects, which play the role of localizing development. In some instances, it works as a delivery mechanism of devolved rural development measures as happened in the Hungarian case in the 2007–2013 cycle. Place-based and community-based projects should be the outcomes of participatory actions accomplished as the most important attributes of



the LEADER approach from the start to the end of a LEADER Programme and contribute indirectly – through community empowerment – to enhancing LAG autonomy. As we illustrated in the previous section, a great number of conditions influence the flow and outcome of participatory actions from the social, psychological and financial disposition of the recipient community through to the resourcefulness of the area (economic resources, human capital to managerial skills: availability of various kinds of expertise) enabling or hindering a successful infusion of local knowledge into the development process. These conditions are determined by national-level procedural rules (prescription and control of participation), legacies of the past as well as by various aspects of accessibility, including physical (distances, transport infrastructure), financial (affordability of travel, the number of personnel) and procedural (central or territorially dispersed locations of organized participatory actions).

Power of initiation constitutes local autonomy in conjunction with what was termed by Ladner et al. (2015) after Clark (1984) ‘*power of immunity*’, which translates as the ‘freedom of the LAG’ from intervention from above. LEADER as a policy tool, which is implemented in a decentralized manner, operates necessarily within a hierarchical institutional framework, which generates procedures and exercises control. Two of our investigated LAGs were autonomous enough to create and implement their LDS within certain parameters set by the RDP and the managing institutional environment, one was (latterly) not. However, if extended bureaucracy is coupled by mismanagement at the upper levels of government, the execution of an LDS can be seriously threatened – for example, if the tendering or approving processes are delayed or certain measures are not tendered, or they are tendered too late, which was typically the case with the domestic and international co-operation projects. Furthermore, financing the management during the inter-programme periods has always and everywhere created serious problems. In spite of some limited attempts to tackle this (e.g., in the England LEADER programme), it still does not seem to be resolved.

Paradoxically, according to the result of the comparison of autonomy levels of the investigated cases, NULAG proved to be the least autonomous and Balaton Uplands seemed to operate as the most autonomous LAG. This outcome is due to not only the unprecedented intervention by the ministerial level of administration to LAG matters in the second phase of NULAG, but also the institutional environment. LEADER implementation in this country is embedded in local institutions whose behaviour might be Janus-faced, providing services and capacities on the one hand, but trying to influence LAG matters on the other. The latter happened, when the host body (National Park) and the Local Authority both attempted to commandeer the LEADER programme for their own institutional ends towards the end of Phase 1. Similar attempts have been reported by the Mara Natur case, where the county council is a member of the LAG, helps it in a number of ways, but also attempted to co-opt (so far unsuccessfully) its managing agency. The



Balaton Uplands LAG has operated independently of any upper-level local authorities; it is extremely vulnerable to national-level policy decisions and the shrinking financial endowment of the LEADER Programme; it has suffered a major drop in funding and lengthy delays in implementation; but its autonomy has not been disturbed otherwise than by procedural issues.

LEADER is a programme which makes available small grants for rural actors and thus its direct impact on spatial injustice is necessarily limited. However, if the distributional aspect of LEADER, linked to development, is considered, the aim of contributing to a more just territorial distribution of resources represented a specific focus in two of the three case studies (NULAG and Balaton Uplands). In addition to territorial targets, social targets were clear in the NULAG case in the first iteration and in the Balaton Uplands LAG in the second, both having a particular focus on rural youth. The most vulnerable social and minority groups were not addressed in any of the investigated LDSs, which is understandable, if we consider the programme-level thematic agendas of LEADER in the two most recent iterations. If small-scale entrepreneurship, rural tourism and networking of these actors are addressed, for example, in case of the Balaton Uplands LAG, it is necessarily the small business-owning class which gains most benefit from the Programme. This is, however, a legitimate and adequate purpose of rural development, especially in the context of post-state socialism. This fact does not detract from the failure of LEADER to consider how systems of governance and dimensions of power may act to the benefit of existing powerholders, emerging repeatedly in the literature (Commins and Keane, 1994). Those who are already well-resourced, skilled and networked can access LEADER programmes and cope with the demands of the grant applications process, whereas lower-skilled, more isolated actors with less capital behind them may struggle to engage and if engaged, to win grants (Shucksmith, 2000: 213–215).

LEADER has been interpreted through diverse discourses. According to critical social scientists quoted earlier, for example, LEADER might work in favour of uneven development and has been shaped by the neoliberalization that was a prevailing trend at the time of its origins in the early 1990s. It is seen by the latter discourses as scaling down responsibility to local levels without providing these lower government levels with financial autonomy and power. Governing approaches and epochal trends are of course always influential but empirical evidence suggests that the concrete drivers of decentralization differ by macro-region in Europe. The allocation or withdrawal of resources can be triggered by different contexts as well. In the former state socialist countries, and in Hungary specifically, decentralization of state administration was a reaction to the failing, over-centralized socialist state structures, rather than a manifestation of neoliberalization, and withdrawal of the already meagre development resources from the local level in 2009 was a desperate step enforced by the critical financial status of the heavily



indebted country in the context of the global financial crisis. The fact that these normative funds have never returned to the local level has been in line with recentralization (Ladner et al., 2016), the opposite trend to neoliberalization and decrease in local autonomy to an extreme degree during the Orbán governments since 2010.

As has been mentioned in several contexts in this paper, the financial endowment of the LEADER Programme in most EU member states remains at the mandatory minimum level of 5% of the RDP, resulting in modest levels of funding for the individual LAGs. This is the primary condition which sets limitations in terms of both power and responsibility of LAGs over the scale of impact on local development they might achieve. Considering this, high expectations of sound, area-related development must exceed the realities. What can be expected, however, is niche-based, unique and place-shaped development, explored through participatory actions and integrated local knowledge thus complementing the funding repertoire available in rural areas and transmitting resources to those stakeholders for whom other funding instruments are not available, which was achieved by NULAG and Balaton Uplands in Phase 1 implementation; the Mara Natur LAG also has attempted to go in that direction.

Our case studies show both the ‘light and shadow’ potentials in LEADER. They uncover several common features as well as differences driven by deviations regarding maturity, institutional contexts and preparedness. They also echo the findings of earlier studies to highlight the programme’s design flaws that make it vulnerable to co-option by the most powerful players in rural development, be they ‘the usual suspects’ of privileged places and players in the local area, or local and even national authorities.

Faced with their own economic and reputational pressures, private and public sector players may not only target the programme’s modest resources, but, just as importantly, seek to claim credit for the hard-won rural innovations born, at least in part, of LEADER’s promise of autonomy. In some of the cases we have discussed in this chapter, the local legacy of LEADER may lie as much in the experience of such contradictions as in its local development achievements.

## Notes

- 1 Area-based local development strategies; bottom-up elaboration and implementation of strategies; local public-private partnerships, local action groups; integrated and multi-sectoral actions; innovation; co-operation; networking (European Commission [EC], 2006).
- 2 In Hungary, for example, seven NUTS-2 regions were set up by the Millennium. They provided the institutional framework for regional development programming up until 2012, when the NUTS-2 tier was abolished from the multi-level government system. Since then, the regional tier has been represented by counties (NUTS-3 level), of which 19 are operating.



- 3 The four measures delivered in a devolved manner were: Village renewal, Cultural heritage, Developing micro-enterprises, Rural tourism. Two measures (Village buses, Integrated Rural Centres) were put to a centrally steered tender process.
- 4 Priority 6 of the RDP aimed at 'Promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction via development of small enterprises and job creation, local development, enhanced accessibility and use of ITC'.

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## Part 5

# Conclusions and policy considerations





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# 15 Conclusions and policy considerations – what does local experience tell us?

*Matti Fritsch, Petri Kahila, Sarolta Németh  
and James W. Scott*

The individual chapters in this book have offered a wealth of insights into the role of locale and place-based actions in improving spatial justice through targeting more balanced and equitable socio-economic development as well as growth in a more general sense. This is a globally relevant ambition and while this volume draws on empirical research that has been carried out within the geographical and policy contexts of Europe and the European Union, the authors hope that their closer examination of spatial justice dynamics across a diversity of welfare regimes, territories, cultural settings and spatial scales offer generalizable considerations that will contribute to a better understanding and handling of important governance dilemmas, especially in current times of economic and social crises.

In our European context, we started discussion in the introduction (Chapter 1) by highlighting six key challenges, frequently raised in recent academic literature and policy documents that relate to economic, social and territorial cohesion and to the effective realization of a place-based development. These challenges involve, among others: (1) continuing disparities despite a long-standing Cohesion Policy, (2) an EU legitimacy crisis that is at least partially linked to it, as well as (3) the persistent question of how to simultaneously maintain inclusive welfare and increase economic efficiency and competitiveness. In addition to these challenges, we also identified policy challenges that are closely linked to current failures in promoting place-based development and spatial justice. These include shortcomings of top-down public interventions, weak local capacities for action in the most disadvantaged areas, and a lack of opportunity spaces within Cohesion Policy for experimentation, ‘learning from doing’ and thus innovation. Taken together, these challenges suggest a need to rethink how conditionality, impact requirements and long-term policy cycles can be reconciled with flexibility that empowers localities.

Against this background, the RELOCAL project, on which the individual contributions of this volume are based, has gathered knowledge of both locally owned and top-down initiated strategies that employ available resources in novel ways in order to create social and economic opportunities and growth for all members of a given locality or community. As a result, in this book a wealth of significant contextual information has been uncovered



regarding many different conditions that affect place-based strategies as well as the possibilities for effective action to address spatial injustices. Although, the focus is on European localities, RELOCAL's results are of wider interest and the lessons learned provide broad insights regarding the why and how as well as the outcomes of place-based action. At the same time, in the context of this concluding chapter, it is a considerable challenge to generalize from the richness of the case studies and wealth of local experiences to distil the key research insights and policy considerations.

In order to structure the main messages emerging from the RELOCAL project and the individual contributions in this book, we have identified five key issues which will be elaborated later. These issues relate to:

1. understanding perceptions of spatial justice as a key to addressing them,
2. questions of scale which are locally significant in complex ways
3. the ways in which grassroots action can be empowered and the challenges that place-based and participatory development generate for (an often weak) civil society
4. addressing the need for greater learning opportunities, capacity building and experimentation
5. the issue that despite its apparent desirability, place-based action often faces 'hostile' governance environments

These points will be elaborated in the following sections.

### **Understanding perceptions of spatial justice may provide a key to solving them**

Socially anchored perceptions – either individual or collective ones – need to be considered when assessing expected impacts of approaches and interventions that aim at better procedural or distributive justice in particular cases. Such perceptions are not always in line with material conditions, since individual or community values behind those perceptions are also not necessarily of a 'material' nature, that is, related to an 'economic' rationale. Perceptions depend on relations to particular contexts, across Europe, within a national setting, a particular region, or compared 'across the street' to another neighbourhood. These reference points should clearly be recognized. Also, some may perceive the same quality or phenomenon as an asset while others would judge it to be a disadvantage, challenge or a threat (e.g., border location, sparse population, immigration), varying by groups within the same local context and across regions and localities. An action adjusted to the perceptions of the affected population will aim for a stabilized and resilient local economy and controlled or arrested demographic decline instead of the achievement of unlikely and unrealistic levels of growth (as shown in Chapter 13 via the example of the local government of Lieksa). It is also important to bear in mind that constructed positions and relations describing



localities on various scales are subject to change – reflected in local processes, discourses and policies. Consequently, the inclusion of local perceptions on a more continuous basis, that is, into the design, implementation and evaluation of policies increase the place-basedness and effectiveness of those interventions.

Inclusion of local perceptions of spatial justice is a strength of participatory models of local governance, models which allow diverse voices to be heard, use various tools, participatory and deliberative methods with local stakeholders for a more shared decision-making capacity, giving the residents' knowledge (i.e., local knowledge) the right to be presented in decision-making processes (see Chapter 11). Conversely, excluding communities and the actual target groups from shaping the action that is supposed to correct spatial injustice easily leads to a situation where injustices or at least their perception will just become worse. At the minimum, it will result in an ineffective use of resources, as indicated in Chapter 10 and the Ladywell housing scheme in London.

Negative external perceptions of localities (ranging from neighbourhoods to regions) also matter significantly in terms of room for manoeuvre and tools available for successful policy interventions (see, for instance, the integrated urban development projects in the Hungarian György-telep case in Chapter 6, and cases where stigmatization is especially problematic, such as the Romanian case presented in Chapter 5). Besides being directly counter-productive to economic development, stigmatization can reinforce negative mentalities in the labelled places as stigma can easily be internalized by the residents of those localities, producing more perceived and existing spatial injustice and further isolating stigmatized and 'problematic' localities from 'mainstream' society. Such labels also tend to have longer histories, trajectories which need to be understood. Many dimensions of social and economic marginalization, basic services deprivation, and various ethnic boundaries may intersect and interweave in a single stigmatized territory. Consequently, without careful thought and mapping of these injustices and their perceptions, policies may even trigger new or reinforce existing divisions and layers of prejudice.

Finally, various regional and social typologies and classifications used by redistributive policies, and actions, even when applying a positive discriminatory approach, have the potential to reinforce or even create (racial-ethnic, territorial etc.) stigmatization. These may – unintentionally – label a locality or a group of people as 'disadvantaged' or 'marginalized', which can in some respects even contradict the experiences and perceptions of the communities in question (see also Chapter 8). Consequently, policy interventions should also include, and maybe even depart from, positive visions for the future, and thus challenge entrenched negative images of place. Such approaches can actively combat stigmatization of localities (ranging from neighbourhoods to regions) and help community-building as well as promote trust in and legitimacy of top-down interventions.



In light of the above, it is crucial to understand how social and spatial injustices are perceived by the citizens and at the relevant levels of government and policy making, since they can substantially differ. This would also shed light on the question of how to balance between the goals of welfare and growth in particular places and resolve the apparent contradiction between welfare-driven and growth-driven approaches. Overall, this would be part of the paradigm shift in terms of what we understand as the ultimate goal of development, placing emphasis on the well-being and welfare of local populations, their resilience and the mitigation of precariousness. To mitigate territorial disadvantage, spatial justice objectives need to be decoupled from economic growth and efficiency, particularly in the context of population decline and socio-economic crises. Besides a focus on 'actual', objective aspects of development, local/regional development policy have to pay equal attention to image improvement, and always with the engagement of the pertinent social groups. Well-thought communication strategies are needed also for the enhancement of both internal and external perceptions of the place.

### **The role of the local level in multi-scalar policy**

The local level is where the complexity of spatial justice problems manifest most obviously and therefore it needs to be understood as the nexus of integrated and cross-sectoral approaches to combat spatial injustices. Some specific spatial injustices, such as residential segregation and informal housing (e.g., Chapters 5 and 9) are manifestations of deeply rooted and complex social-economic injustices (including racial/ethnic discrimination and exclusion) and as such cannot be eliminated without the municipality assuming responsibility and leadership and without addressing socio-economic cohesion holistically. Single interventions with limited timeframes rarely have the potential for counteracting these complex processes. Well-planned/strategic interventions that combine soft (social, community-building and capacity-building actions) and hard (e.g., infrastructural) measures are better suited to respond to complexity and changeability.

Such interventions and measures need to be embedded in a broader municipal strategy and programme, integrated urban policies, where local government assumes political, institutional and financial responsibility with a multiannual budgeted programme, clear short-term, middle-term and long-term action plans and a devoted 'inclusion unit' that has the capacity to coordinate across social, territorial, housing-related, infrastructural and other aspects of inclusion. Otherwise, there is a risk of not only failing to fix the injustice but also exacerbating injustice with stigmatization, and a criminalization of poverty.

In terms of competence, it should be mentioned that in some countries where cases were examined within the RELOCAL project (e.g., in Finland,



Sweden and Germany), municipalities are relatively autonomous and well equipped to approach spatial justice questions in an integrated fashion. Finnish municipalities, for example, probably represent the most integrated administrative level and institution in the Finnish government system, and one with significant, although increasingly tight, financial resources. With a wide range of responsibilities, and their key role in the provision of a variety of services to their population, municipal leadership has significant leeway to address spatial justice questions, particularly when the political and administrative leadership shares the same concerns and goals with regard to their locality's future development (see Chapter 13).

Even in the case of a high level of autonomy, local initiatives are not isolated from the influence of higher tiers of government and governance. As the Hungarian and Romanian cases in this volume suggest, mismatched legislative and regulative frameworks imposed from above can inhibit success even when requirements regarding an inclusive and integrated approach are met at the local level. However, top-down intervention in local-regional development can be well received and accepted from below by the formal (public) stakeholders of the locality providing that its legitimacy is rooted in the fact that all levels remain associated in the governance structure. Legitimacy is also achieved when the top-down intervention is aimed at addressing structural inequalities that are beyond the control of local government. National and European interventions are often able to bring in know-how, technical expertise, financial means and coordination (the case of Alzette-Belval in Chapter 11 and the LEADER model presented in Chapter 14). Nevertheless, there still remains the risk of failing to include a broader set of local stakeholders and the residents. Therefore, when implementing top-down interventions, it is important to frame participation in such a way that inhabitants know in advance the extent to which they can influence the process and to ensure that local elected representatives partly 'own' the decision-making process. This means that the local representatives must also clearly back and support the strategy at hand (see especially Chapter 11). Some responsibilities, specifically in terms of structural policies, have to be fulfilled by higher-level political decision-making, and the question eventually is how to better balance and integrate the bottom-up and the top-down approaches. As the scale of intervention broadens, the depth of place-based knowledge becomes thinner in an action, which makes it more difficult to catalyse meaningful participation and bottom-up initiatives.

Finally, while preserving municipal autonomy, voluntary engagement in regional municipal networking and (sub-)regional cooperation is useful in delivering better spatial justice for the region as a whole, but also benefitting local economies and communities through pooled assets, better coordination and cohesion within the region. However, regional partnerships may become imbalanced and unjust towards 'weaker' constituents as opposed to central actors. The question is here how to find a balance and avoid the risks of



potential isolation on the one hand and of subordination on the other, both potentially increasing vulnerabilities (see, e.g., Chapter 13).

The local level is the one where the necessity for integrated development (horizontally across sectors and vertically across scales) most obviously manifests. Therefore, it is obvious that this is the scale that should have a more prominent role and competence in addressing inequalities and spatial injustice within the multi-level system of government. On the one hand, this includes the assurance of a high degree of local autonomy, determined mainly and more explicitly by decisions and capacities at the national level: giving a clear mandate to the local level, defining clear distribution of competences across the scales, ensuring resources proportionate to the devolved responsibilities, promoting and facilitating horizontal learning processes. On the other hand, place-based does not equal exclusively local or ‘bottom-up’, as local actions combatting spatial injustice cannot fare well in isolation from other policy-making scales. Functioning structures that ensure smooth communication and interaction between various stakeholders working together in the vertical of EU Cohesion Policy are required. Sensitivity and responsiveness to local situations (e.g., in neighbourhoods, municipalities or regions) and specificity by higher levels are thus of importance.

### **Empowering grassroots action and increasing local capacities for action**

All RELOCAL case studies indicate that a decisive factor for improving local abilities to articulate needs and justice claims and to mobilize local resources is the active participation of civil society and other non-state actors. Simple redistribution of financial assets to civil society itself may not be sufficient and could reproduce existing disparities. Hence, education, co-creation and learning processes between public employees and civil society/residents are needed that are based on local knowledge and a comprehension of the local situation and relations.

The primary rationale for this is the incorporation of ‘local knowledge’ (i.e., ‘local population’s lived experiences’, Borén and Schmitt, 2022: 827) into the decisions affecting spatial justice of/at the local level besides the use of ‘place-based knowledge’ (‘place-based professional experiences and expertise’, *ibid.*). In some places and cultures this embracement of informality as regards policy decisions and local development actions, rather than its mitigation, comes less naturally and/or lacks necessary capacities and hence it requires extra effort from all parties. This is especially important because neglecting the unequal distribution of capacities for citizen/civil society engagement and participation can be a source of further growing spatial injustice (between places equipped with the necessary institutional capacities and social and human capital, and those without; between passive groups and citizens/neighbourhoods that are active and interested in voicing their needs and development ideas). Even in localities that embrace active



participation of civil society and other non-state actors, there is a risk that certain civil society organizations might monopolize this role and as a result enjoy better access to resources for participation as often it is the 'usual suspects' who get engaged and whose voice is heard in shaping local decisions and policies, reproducing existing inequalities and tensions within a specific place. Therefore, it is important to improve the representation of different groups also within civil society.

Community- and citizen-oriented approaches are also decisive in terms of explaining the benefits to citizens of a given initiative and so to raise their interest, then include them (their perceptions and their 'local knowledge' as a resource) in the definition of actual solutions. This way, solutions are not imposed on people which would create further injustices and output legitimacy is reinforced. In addition, if they are consulted not only about the expected positive outcomes but also about potential risks, and the ways to avoid them, tensions and emergent obstacles in the implementation are easier to sort out. Overall, co-ownership of the entire local/regional development policy cycle by citizens/civil society will improve the legitimacy thereof at all levels.

True empowerment of grassroots action in local development entails commitment and concrete efforts from higher levels of governance to promote the integration of lived experience of spatial injustice (proximity) and valuable local knowledge. However, the work of civil society organizations often takes place within the confines of short-term and isolated projects and is conditioned by a lack of funding and sustainability. Consequently, to save all the merits of proximity, public authorities should integrate civil society projects and initiatives better into their local development work (via co-ordination, co-operation, the facilitation of synergies and negotiated strategic orientations).

### **Promoting opportunities for learning, capacity building and experimentation**

Multi-actor constellations and long-term interactions are needed in the governance of local development in which information, knowledge and feedback are shared, reflected upon and subsequent actions are adjusted. It is during these interactive and cyclical processes where local and place-based knowledge encounter and enrich each other forming 'the basis of learning loops which develop over time' (Borén and Schmitt, 2022: 827). The organization of 'learning loops' is central to the flexibility and adaptability of local development actions and of programmes with a place-based approach conceived at the national or European level. Chapter 9 on the governance innovation of the 'Stockholm Commission' drives home the point that political awareness of and local knowledge on spatial injustice for better policy decisions and implementation can be increased through proper and localized organizational learning 'using existing resources in innovative ways' (Chapter 9).



The semi-autonomous Stockholm Commission engaged diverse local stakeholders, facilitated a more structured place-based learning process, but also cooperated with the municipality as a consultant for steering documents, municipal plans and the evaluation of processes and outcomes.

Learning across governance scales is crucial also for the effectiveness of higher levels of policy-making. European and national decision-makers can and should strive to learn from the experience of local initiatives in order to provide an institutional environment that is supportive of local agency. The facilitation of such learning processes can be achieved through embedding local initiatives into (existing) regional and national strategies, and/or European funding schemes. Moreover, higher levels of policy- and decision-making are crucial in providing opportunity structures and incentives for horizontal learning and knowledge exchange between local/regional actors and their actions. This may happen, for example, through ‘multi-level’ and networking programmes co-financed by the EU, such as LEADER for rural development (Chapter 14), or Interreg and URBACT. Beyond their financial-distributive scope, the impact of these EU programmes on spatial justice lies in the provision of influential reference points for local and regional policies and in generating learning processes. In addition to harnessing local and place-based knowledge, development projects (place-based actions) may draw knowledge both vertically (across scales) and horizontally (between localities).

Localities themselves should be considered as laboratories for experimentation and innovation (Chapter 7), which, in turn, should feed into the work of the EU and national authorities in shaping and designing specific regional development tools or programmes. In this context, Finnish experimentation with ‘community led local development’ (CLLD), that is, adapting some of the ‘LEADER methodology’ under the redistributive framework of the European Structural Funds (more specifically, ESF, the European Social Fund) for the use of communities in cities. It offered some ‘seed money’ to locally and grassroots-coordinated, socially innovative projects that trigger cross-sectoral co-operation, empower communities in local development and, thus, improve spatial/social justice. In practice, a local civil society organization in Kotka (Finland) that was well networked both locally and at the national and EU levels (to be engaged in the CLLD policy design) provided a platform for civil society organizations and representatives of the municipality to implement activities for the improvement of spatial justice (Hämäläinen and Németh, 2022).

Experimentation does not signify ad hoc measures taken without any inclusive consultation and mechanisms for learning and co-ordination across scales, actors and beneficiaries. Ad hoc approaches, or ‘muddling through’, can indicate the lack of real commitment to address injustice and can exacerbate the existing situation, creating confusion and distrust and in the worst case resulting in policy failures, wasting time and resources. Sometimes there



is a very small and 'soft' ingredient missing to complement existing policies and measures for improved social/spatial justice. Soft procedural innovations resulting from experimentation tend to promise high gain with smaller risk and if successful, have the potential to access greater support for local actions and strategies.

In long-term and deep learning processes, experimentation comes naturally. However, it does not always lead to success and good practices. Failures of an action as well as negative lessons learned need to be made transparent and broadly understood, these matter for the future success of interventions. A failure can raise more awareness of a problem, help define better the gaps and needs, detect drivers and inhibitors previously unthought of, and map social and power relations. It is important therefore to record, evaluate and analyse (on all relevant levels, from local to the European) what is learned to be able to use that knowledge in designing future interventions (projects, programmes, policies). Conversely, if causes of failure are deliberately obscured or ignored, what will remain is confusion, speculation, distrust that all inhibit future solution, and contribute to persisting inefficiency. Accordingly, tolerance for failure should be an underlying philosophy reflected in the control, monitoring and impact evaluation of European programmes. In other words, impact indicators should serve as a ground for learning rather conditionality and penalization.

### **'Unhelpful' institutional environments – can higher-level actors embrace place-based spatial justice?**

The success and impact of even the smallest neighbourhood-level urban interventions depend on higher-scale institutional and structural factors. Governance modes and public policy priorities can hijack place-based initiatives to deliver policy objectives of national governments rather than furthering objectives of social cohesion (Chapter 6). As RELOCAL cases for instance from Greece (Chapter 12) and Hungary (Chapter 6, also Chapter 14) indicate, place-based interventions often struggle with the absence of institutional space for local deliberation and inter-jurisdictional action due to cultural-institutional contexts favouring paternalistic and top-down approaches, an (over-)centralized regulatory environment often dominated by a preference for short-sighted and temporary political benefits (election cycle effect). This is also coupled with insufficient financial resources, disinvestment and pervasive fiscal centralization. As the Greek and eastern European case studies indicate, transparency, and effective and continuous participatory arrangements are especially important for re-earning trust and acceptance of local residents after long negative experiences.

Hungarian experiences (Chapter 6) indicate that one-sided dependencies of small municipalities or neighbourhoods on higher levels of authority and on external resources hinder constructive and balanced relationships,



dialogues and partnerships. Such partnerships would however be essential for the improvement of procedural and distributive justice. Since such cases are plentiful in the European context, efforts are needed to fashion potential initiatives that promote local empowerment. One strategy is to build up civil society and increase its capacities for action. Careful and strategic ‘social engineering’ (as suggested by the ‘Balaton Leader’ case from Hungary) and novel platforms for interactions to improve the climate of co-operation (Euralens, Chapter 11) are needed as explained above in relation to the empowerment of grassroots action.

Most importantly, institutional change instead of redistributive temporary aid is required: fixing procedural imbalances through which fairer distribution could be attained. But for such institutional change to occur, well-defined domestic policies would be needed and the institutional framework of the national policy regime should be less centralized and hierarchical. When top-down policies lead to a systematic reproduction of spatial injustices, even the best intended local action would have only limited/selective and temporary improvement of such unjust situations (see, e.g., Chapter 6). The lack of a national strategy and legislative reform can pose as great an obstacle as the shortage of resources at the sub-national levels to effectively solve spatial injustice (RELOCAL’s Mălin-Codlea case, Hossu and Vincze, 2019) and makes small-scale projects and temporally limited programmes initiated by local actors (often using external sources such as EU funding) even less effective.

Finally, the Hungarian cases (Chapters 6 and 14) indicate that it is also important to maintain multilevel collaboration on a continuous basis in order to avoid hindrances to knowledge transfer, a loss of impetus and social capital and to prevent localities from missing out on funding opportunities. Also, ‘if LEADER is not a mandatory element of the post-2020 rural development programme, there is a real danger that the Hungarian government will eliminate it from the national policy system’ (Kovács and Nemes, 2019: 27). This also points at the need for ‘mainstreamed’ European programmes as opportunity frameworks (financial and conceptual support) with in-built conditionalities (minimum criteria).

### **Concluding observations**

A clear message that emerges from the RELOCAL project and hopefully this volume is that locality or place is much more than a location where development and cohesion ‘happen’. Place is a social anchor, an enabler of a sense of identity, community and commitment to a set of common goals. A wider sense of social, economic and territorial cohesion, and hence spatial justice, is not possible if a perceived competition between ‘winning’ places and those that struggle for recognition and an economic future result in political tensions. More and more in today’s Europe, regional/local development is about policy-makers, politicians, third-sector organizations, activists and



volunteers, businesses, researchers, communities and individual residents coming together to actively co-create and co-own develop strategies and their implementation.

While we will refrain from producing an exhaustive list of policy recommendations, there are a number of practical messages that can be derived from the various case studies in this volume. One message that stands out is that while there is no single 'good practice', partnership and learning processes are key elements for successful strategies in more global terms. To elaborate this idea in more detail we can suggest the following:

- *You can't go it alone – spatial justice is a joint effort.*
- *Sharing resources creates leverage for effective action.*
- *While it differs greatly from locale to locale, institutional learning is a vital resource. It can take the form, for example, of intermunicipal volunteerism, governance partnerships and/or a combination of both.*
- *Recent crises have taught us that growth should not be defined and assessed in terms of growth in volumes, but rather in terms of improved local resilience.*

Our case studies provide evidence, furthermore, that the pooling of assets in a community and/or in a network of communities increases degrees of freedom and visibility is addressing development needs. It also helps reinforce a sense of shared concerns. The two main messages that emerge here indicate that:

- *Place-based development is community-building.*
- *A long-term approach is needed.*

Above and beyond these considerations, in order for localities and place-based action to continue addressing spatial justice concerns and disparities in an effective way, several conditions need to be met that require redoubled cooperative efforts between actors operating at different scales and in different capacities. At one level, the European Union and its member states should continue to establish and further develop instruments and governance arrangements (opportunity structures) that enable local communities to make use of their local assets and capacities in order to address disparities 'from below'. In addition, state-level actors should assume responsibility in providing enabling institutional conditions for the empowerment of local actors. Member State inability or unwillingness to do so may result in deformed project objectives, the cementing of uneven distributions of power and thus, in the systematic reproduction of disparities. At the local and regional levels, decision-makers should introduce routines for the mobilization of local knowledge and to engage diverse stakeholder groups and civil society more generally in the design and implementation of actions. Local/regional decision-makers and local stakeholders should also be encouraged to engage in horizontal networks and exchanges to have up-to-date and contextualized



assessment of their own assets and relative (dis)advantages. Such networks are also rich sources of practical knowledge regarding potential development strategies. This is easier said than done, of course, as the short-term ‘transaction costs’ of participatory development practices can be rather high for public administrations. However, we would argue that there are few available alternatives to the mobilization of local knowledge and the realization of networked learning opportunities. It goes without saying that spatial justice can never be achieved once and for all, it requires continuous effort, and this includes monitoring, revision, and if need be, the renewal of development goals.

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