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**Resituating the Local in Cohesion and Territorial  
Development**

**Deliverable 7.1**  
**Empirical findings from case studies**  
**on regional autonomy and spatial**  
**justice**

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## Abbreviations

AMO	Project Management Assistant (Assistance à Maitrise d’Ouvrage)
CLLD	Community-Led Local Development
EC	European Commission
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
GA	Grant Agreement
ITI	Integrated Territorial Investment
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
WP	Work package

## References to other RELOCAL reports

In this report, each case study is mentioned by its RELOCAL number in bold and red. e.g.: **DE1**. For a full list of the case studies’ action name and location, see **Map 1** in **Annex 1**. For national report, we use again bold and red and the name of the country, e.g.: **France national report**. Other RELOCAL deliverables are mentioned according to their short code and appear in blue and bold in the text, e.g.: **D1.1**. For complete references, see section 7.

## Executive summary

### Background

The notion of autonomy has become central for considering the articulation between democracy, public policies and local development. The present report questions the possible link between local autonomy and spatial justice. It synthesises the research conducted in the framework of RELOCAL Work Package (WP) 7, investigating “how different degrees of regional autonomy can affect the outcomes and future perspectives of spatial justice as a cohesion objective” (GA<sup>1</sup>, p. 23). Our understanding of autonomy takes its roots in the reference definition provided by Clark (1984): the conjugation of two specific powers: “initiation and immunity” in local stakeholders’ hands. Adapted to the RELOCAL research interests, autonomy is the combination of the power of initiative, i.e. capacity of the locality to accomplish tasks serving its own interests and that of its population, and the power of immunity, i.e. the effective possibility for a local authority, to act without oversight by higher levels. These two faces of autonomy refer to the “two faces of democratic self-determination” as defined by Scharpf (1999): “government by the people” and “government for the people”. This definition of autonomy is operational and fruitful for exploring the power *within* the locality to initiate and to “immunise” actions pursuing greater spatial justice. In that sense, WP7’s understanding of autonomy is also critical, questioning whether autonomy allows localities to tackle spatial injustice.

### Findings

Firstly, our understanding of autonomy allowed us to investigate a paradox: even though local autonomy has increased all over Europe, local democracy (i.e. effective involvement of the local population in decision-making) has not increased. More locally driven forms of government of the (local development) action do not automatically produce more inclusive forms of participation in taking action and making decisions. Local development actions are structurally shaped by a dual project-based approach and a problem-solving approach. That constrains the way participation is conceived, run and effectively used. Participation with the local population is often understood as a legal constraint rather than as a leverage for building legitimate projects. The disconnection between the local development action and the local population before, during and after the action’s implementation takes different forms, varying between discrediting, oversight and symbolic manipulation. All those political strategies produce mainly frustration in the local population and tends to confirm the idea that “decentralisation is not more democratic because it supposedly would make the political decision closer to the citizen or because it would mechanically enhance proximity” (Desage and Guéranger, 2018). Secondly, the report sheds lights on how the increased level of local autonomy is used by localities. The general progress of autonomy is visible at the local level in most of the European countries. A closer look demonstrates that the capacity of localities to organise themselves depends to a large extent on the competence of their leaders (e.g. dynamism, openness, capacity to implement adequate measures given the circumstances). Leadership

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<sup>1</sup> **GA** stands for RELOCAL Grant Agreement. Like all the RELOCAL material in the report, they appear in blue and bold.

skills nowadays tend to involve proactivity and adaptability to change, rather than commanding. The legitimacy of local institutions to act appears to be embedded in proximity, openness and transparency. Despite waves of decentralisation, the report demonstrates that rising responsibilities have rarely come with financial means and, in some situations, without a clear mandate to act. Also, in some cases, decentralisation can be reversed by state-led initiatives, or it is often incomplete. This confusion on responsibilities partly explains the weakness of solutions to local issues.

Thirdly, several case study reports demonstrate that the integration of civil society organisations in the decision-making process is not an achievement *per se*, as it definitely raises a democracy issue. This transfer of responsibility should not come without a certain guarantee that they would not use the action only or mainly for their own benefit. The delegation of (some) public services to local associations and NGOs should come with obligations and commitments that they serve the “general interest” or the “common good” in the same way that local authorities are supposed to. Dedicated research would be necessary to address the circumstances of the outsourcing to the third sector.

Fourthly and substantially, certain marginal and peripheral territories cannot simply be abandoned, as their very situation does not allow them to face their problems alone and requires distributive justice at a larger (national and continental and probably global) scale.

Finally, participation should be understood as a way of fuelling actions of local development with place knowledge. Recognising *place* knowledge (sometimes named *vernacular* or *inhabitant* knowledge) in complementarity to other forms of knowledge (e.g. expert, scientific) and giving it the *right* to be represented in decision-making processes through adequate participation processes would allow a rethinking and reframing of the notion of legitimacy (and transparency) of local development strategy. This understanding of place knowledge that invites a reconsideration of participation (i.e. not merely as a top-down information move, but rather as a horizontal partnership in the process of action) contributes effectively to feeding into the input legitimisation (“government by the people”). It reinforces the legitimacy of the decision-making process and therefore the output legitimisation (“government for the people”).

## Outlook

Based on our results, we have identified five sets of changes needed in order to use *autonomisation* of the local action as a tool for greater spatial justice:

- Implementing a more inclusive and balanced (internal/external) government of the local action
- Adopting a (decolonial) approach to rethink the way (local) development itself is conceived
- Adopting a more progressive way of imagining the objectives of the local action
- Re-articulating the local action with ambitious long-term public policy
- Re-injecting trust, flexibility and social control to measure the impact of the action

All those points fix quite an ambitious political, fiscal and social path for local development to become more autonomous and fairer at the same time (GA, p160). But rising nationalism wave in Europe requires such an ambition of democratisation, *relocalisation* and reinforcement of territorial development policy.

## 1. Introduction: situating WP7 interest and understanding of autonomy

The RELOCAL hypothesis is that processes of localisation and place-based public policy can make a positive contribution to spatial justice and democratic empowerment. In this large context, the report at hand questions the possible link between local autonomy and spatial justice. It synthesises the research conducted in the framework of RELOCAL WP 7, investigating “how different degrees of regional autonomy can affect the outcomes and future perspectives of spatial justice as a cohesion objective” (GA, p. 23).

The notion of autonomy<sup>2</sup> has been central in diverse sets of academic and public policy debates. Firstly, a number of international organisations value local autonomy as a system of local government. The European Charter of Local Self Government (1985) signed by the 47 countries associated with the Council of Europe is the most iconic example of a European norm pursuing this endeavour. And, as a tendency, this norm has been crafted into reality as the degree of autonomy of local government has increased compared to the beginning of the 1990s (Ladner *et al.*, 2015, p. 6).

Secondly, the notion of local democracy has been shaken and questioned over the last few years by a number of political movements. These can be regionalist and autonomist claims. They can also be populist political parties, even though they take different manifestations. The Commission has therefore called for an analysis of “under which circumstances, claims to (more, or partial) regional autonomy or decentralisation are - or are not - justifiable on account of economic, political and social justice” (European Commission, 2015, p. 44).

Thirdly, the paradigm shift initiated by DG REGIO in 2009, to rethink the EU cohesion policy from the perspective of the place-based approach, places an emphasis on the local (Barca, 2009). Cohesion policy strategy is a truly multi-governance policy, where objectives, funding and mechanisms are defined by the EU, the regional and national levels, and where the local levels *in partnership* with higher levels are called on to drive and articulate territorial development strategies that fit place specificities. This raises the question of the “capacitation” of the local to promote development, and therefore of the *autonomy* left/given to the local in driving such strategies.

The notion of autonomy has become pivotal for considering the articulation between democracy, public policies and local development. Depending on the context in which it is used, this notion may have different meanings; requiring therefore clarification. In ancient Greek, “*autonomia*” referred to the *capacity of oneself* (“autos”), a group or an organisation to govern itself according to its own rules (from Greek “*nomos*”: law, rule). It can also refer to a person’s capacity to take an informed, uncoerced decision. This notion has been used in numerous disciplines, i.e. philosophy, political science, medicine, for considering the relationship of a person or a group within society. It invites critical questioning: autonomy to what end? for whom and given by whom? how legitimate? And what are its outcomes? This report seeks, in the same vein, a comprehensive understanding of autonomy, allowing us to address the question of whether “regional autonomy or decentralisation are –or are

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<sup>2</sup> In the literature, we more often find mentions of “autonomy or “local autonomy” than “regional autonomy”, although most of the authors refer to the same key definitions that we are going to present later in the section 1. In this report, we will use autonomy / local autonomy / regional autonomy, as the scale of the locality under RELOCAL scrutiny may be a neighbourhood, a village, a town, a city, an agglomeration or a (rural) region (cf. D6.4, p. 31).

not-justifiable on account of economic, political and social justice” (GA, p.145). More precisely, our objective, as it was spelled out in the Grant Agreement, is “to investigate whether greater regional/local autonomy –which would potentially include a better understanding of regional local needs, greater legitimacy and different capabilities to promote change, including knowledge of how to *work the EU system*– promotes social justice and territorial cohesion” (p. 7)

As D1.1<sup>3</sup> emphasises, spatial injustice transcends boundaries and scales (2017, p. 19). RELOCAL has therefore chosen to work primarily with the notion of localities, understood as “places in which the challenges of spatial justice and democratic deficit, and the responses to these challenges and inequalities, can be analysed and understood” (*ibid.*, p. 78). Localities are not “bound enclaves, but porous and interlinked parts of wider contexts” as much as they are not “homogeneous place[s], but (...) place[s] of multiplicity, variation and diversity, which include inequality and injustice within any given territory” (*ibid.*, p. 77). In that context, the RELOCAL WP7 team problematises autonomy as a possible, if not discussable, leverage for localities to promote spatial justice. At the beginning of the project, we choose to use as a starting reference the report on local autonomy wrapped up in 2015 by Andreas Ladner, Nicolas Keuffer and Harald Baldersheim for the European Commission. It has the main advantage of providing us with a comparative quantitative analysis of local autonomy in Europe, which appears complementary to our mainly qualitative approach to the question in RELOCAL. This choice has had theoretical implications. In order to use the report by Ladner, Keuffer and Baldersheim, we needed to adopt an aligned understanding of “autonomy”. For this reason, we also start our report with Clark’s (old but still sharp) definition of local autonomy, as the conjugation of two specific powers: “initiation and immunity” (Clark, 1984, quoted by Ladner *et al.*, 2015, p. 17). On this basis, Ladner, Keuffer and Baldersheim offer to define the power of initiation or initiative as “the competence of local authorities to carry out tasks in the local authority’s own interests”, and the power of immunity as “the possibility for a local authority to act without being under the control of higher levels of government” (Ladner *et al.*, 2015, p. 17).

Albeit interesting, this definition is much centred on the capacity of the local authorities, meaning here the local institutions, to act. It rapidly made us wonder about the other forms of action –community-led, civic, private– to act for change that we also wanted to integrate in our research. For this reason, we decided to adapt Ladner, Keuffer and Baldersheim’s definition for the interests of RELOCAL. By power of initiative, we mean the capacity of the local level to accomplish tasks of local interest, in particular by/with the participation of the local population, and taking into consideration local knowledge. This first aspect of autonomy corresponds to one of the “two faces of democratic self-determination”, the “government by the people” as Scharpf puts it (1999, p. 6). The second face of autonomy is the “government for the people” (*ibid.*), that we define in this report as the possibility for a local authority to act, without oversight by higher levels, for the local interest, and in particular for the locality and its population.

In the RELOCAL context, this definition of autonomy has appeared to be operational and fruitful for exploring the power *within* the locality to initiate and to “immunise” actions pursuing greater spatial justice. In that sense, the WP7 understanding of autonomy is also critical, questioning whether autonomy allows localities to tackle spatial injustices. Understanding spatial justice as a long-term ambition to strive for, WP7 analyses how localities can contribute to more socially and spatially just outcomes. It concentrates on

<sup>3</sup> D1.1 stands for RELOCAL Deliverable 1.1.

how actions and initiatives aiming to tackle specific spatial injustices develop, expand or fade away within localities, and on their socio-spatial impacts within and outside localities. WP7 is therefore interested in investigating how the autonomy of the action and the autonomy of the locality interact, and the extent to which this interaction produces a more just allocation of opportunities and resources. It focuses on the following research questions:

- **Autonomy of the action:** how do communities/interest groups organise themselves in localities to address spatial injustice and push this issue on policy agendas?
- **Autonomy of the locality:** what do these autonomous actions spatially produce, and do they “make a difference” in terms of spatial justice *in* localities and *in relation to* other scales?

Given that these two questions were posed in **D6.1**, and have been then declined as analytical dimensions, they have been addressed by all 33 RELOCAL case study reports and 11 RELOCAL national reports. These 44 reports represent the empirical material of WP7 on which our analysis is based. The research questions are closely connected to those pursued by other WPs. In relation to WP4, WP7 also questions the influence of perceived spatial injustice in the mobilisation of local stakeholders. In relation to WP3, WP7 focuses on the institutional mechanisms at the local level, keeping in mind that WP7’s particular interest is to assess which ones are permitting and encouraging (or not) bottom-up initiatives. The WP7 report (and in particular its conclusion) also aims at informing WP9 on policy considerations.

This report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 comes back more thoroughly on how *autonomy* is defined conceptually and operationalised in the RELOCAL context. Chapter 3 presents the empirical underpinnings of this report, the methodologies applied, as well as the analytical scheme. Chapter 4 presents our analytical results, while Chapter 5 offers a reflection between this latter and our theoretical starting points. Chapter 6 synthesises the results. It briefly outlines concluding remarks from an analytical standpoint as well as for policy considerations.

## 2. Theoretical reflections on (local) autonomy and (territorial) development in RELOCAL

WP7 seeks to “inform scientific and policy debate regarding an exploration of how different degrees of regional autonomy can affect the outcomes and future perspectives of spatial justice as a cohesion objective” (GA, p. 23). Against the background of the localities approach (D.1.1, p. 77) briefly outlined in the introduction, this report seeks a comprehensive understanding of autonomy, allowing us to problematise it as a leverage for localities to promote spatial justice. To do so, we need to situate this ambition against the background of several sets of enquiries in the academic literature: local autonomy, local development and democracy. Given the complexity of these and their broadness, we will focus on aspects relevant to our research question. This will provide the groundwork for framing more specifically our conceptual understanding of autonomy, before outlining how we operationalise it in the context of RELOCAL.

### 2.1. Resituating autonomy in the European literature: from an institutionalised to a relational understanding

The notion of autonomy is widely used in public debates and a wide range of disciplines dealing with public policies and state organisation. It can therefore be a “slippery” concept (Jones, 2014; but see also Clarke, 2015). It is “moveable, historically specific, highly contextual and contested and used to pursue a variety of ends and ideologies” (Pickerill, 2006, p. 732). Clark (1984) had argued for a “theory of local autonomy” to capture institutions and their relative geographical power vis-à-vis the different tiers, or scales, of the state (in this case local and state-level governmental relationships) (Jones, 2014, quoting Clark, 1984). Even though Clark’s definition remains referential, a unique and widely accepted definition of autonomy does not exist yet. Therefore, rather than a single definition of local autonomy, Keuffer (2016) identifies a myriad of debates, approaches and definitions reflecting different dimensions of local autonomy. We will focus here mainly on four of them.

There is firstly a *legalistic* approach that regards local autonomy as the *sets of rights* provided by national regulation to local and regional public authorities in the pursuit of a number of competencies. There is secondly a *functional approach* in relation to fiscal decentralisation (financial means) associated with political decentralisation. Thirdly, the *organisational approach* looks into the ways local government organises itself, considering primarily “its capacity to exercise its functions efficiently and effectively” (Keuffer, 2016: 458). Fourthly, the *political approach of intergovernmental relations* considers the vertical bilateral relations in politics and how they affect policies. It considers different dimensions of centralisation and decentralisation, to explain how political and administrative systems are organised territorially (*ibid.*). This brief overview demonstrates that the analysis of autonomy is dominated by law and political science disciplines, which explains the clear focus on institutions and their functioning as the main point of interest and the main explanatory variable in/for autonomy. In this view, refers to the study of vertical power relationships between the nation state and its constitutive territorial entities.

Being part of the same “approach” to autonomy, the *European Charter of Local Self Government* adopted by the Council of Europe in 1985 has left an important imprint on the understanding of local autonomy, both in academic and public debates. This normative document understands autonomy not merely as a vertical relation *from* the national level

to sub-national entities, but entails the notion of discretion (Keuffer, 2016: 451) that implies a proactive dimension in the local authorities' role in "adapting (the) exercise (of the delegated powers) to local conditions" (CoE, 1985: art. 4.5). As put in the article 3, "local self-government denotes the right and the ability of local authorities, within the limits of the law, to regulate and manage a substantial share of public affairs under their own responsibility and in the interests of the local population." (CoE, 1985, art. 3). We see in such a definition a more direct connection between autonomy and democratic self-determination, but also a mention of the "local population". On the first aspect, one needs to remind that the Council of Europe mandate is to uphold human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe. Autonomy in such a declaration is presented as connected to democracy. And the underlying assumption is that a greater autonomy would benefit to democracy. The second underlying assumption is such close form of democracy would be in "the interests of the local population", which is, unlike Clark's definition of autonomy, differentiated of the local authorities' interests. Or to put it differently, the interests of the local authorities are not always exactly the same as the interests of the local population, and the Council of Europe considers that it is important to pay attention to both when supporting local autonomy.

This understanding of autonomy has remained pivotal and influential until the present day, as the Council of Europe monitors progress on that aspect in Europe. This allows its documentation. Yet it has the downside of limiting the common understanding of autonomy to a "top down" relation resulting from constitutional and institutional arrangements and reflecting a power struggle at a specific moment in time.

In this context, the European Commission ordered from Ladner, Keuffer and Baldersheim a quantitative analysis of the evolution of local autonomy in Europe in the last three decades: "Conducted from October 2014 to November 2015, this study aimed at creating a Local Autonomy Index (LAI) to analyse and report changes in the extent of decentralisation in countries of the European Union" (Ladner *et al.*, 2015, p. 5)<sup>4</sup>. The objectives they have set are to "go beyond recording the share of funds managed by local authorities" and to "capture the extent to which local authorities also have a say in how these funds are spent" (*ibid.*). Unsurprisingly, they start their "theoretical considerations" section with Clark's definition (*ibid.*, p. 17). This latter refers to two criteria for assessing local autonomy as the conjugation of two powers: initiation and immunity. **The power of initiative** corresponds to "the capacity of the local level, as a layer of government and a set of institutions, to accomplish tasks of local interest" whereas **the power of immunity** is the "possibility of local action without oversight by higher levels" (Clark, 1984).

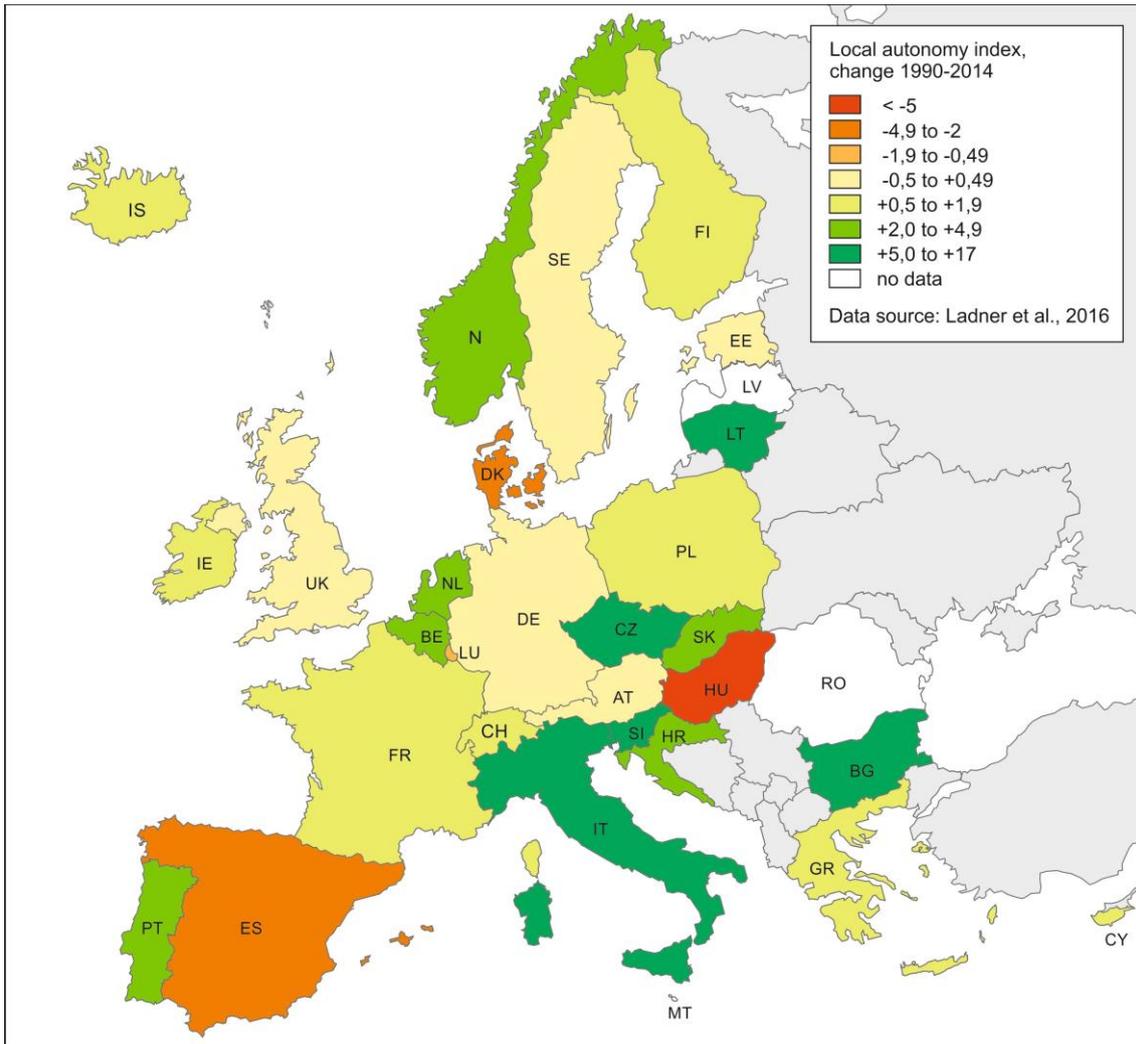
On this basis, the authors choose to focus on the definition of local autonomy given by the article 3 of the European Charter of Local Self-Government that we have mentioned earlier in this text. They offer to consider autonomy as "a policy space for local democracy" (Ladner *et al.*, p. 19). Embracing Scharpf's approach (1999), they assert "local government embodies two faces of democratic self-determination [...] government for the people and government by the people" (*ibid.*). Bridging with Dahl and Tutfe's definition (1973), they refer to the two "constituent elements of democratic polities [:] *system capacity* and *citizen effectiveness*" (*ibid.*) to polish their definition of local autonomy as "components of system capacity that enable decision-makers to respond fully to the collective preferences of citizens expressed effectively" (*ibid.*, p. 19). On the basis of those theoretical considerations, they constitute a coding scheme based on different types of capacity, combined together to form a more "restricted number of dimensions of local autonomy

<sup>4</sup> Data are available on <http://local-autonomy.andreasladner.ch>

[used] for the construction of a local autonomy index (LAI)" (*ibid.*, p. 26). Those seven constitutive dimensions are:

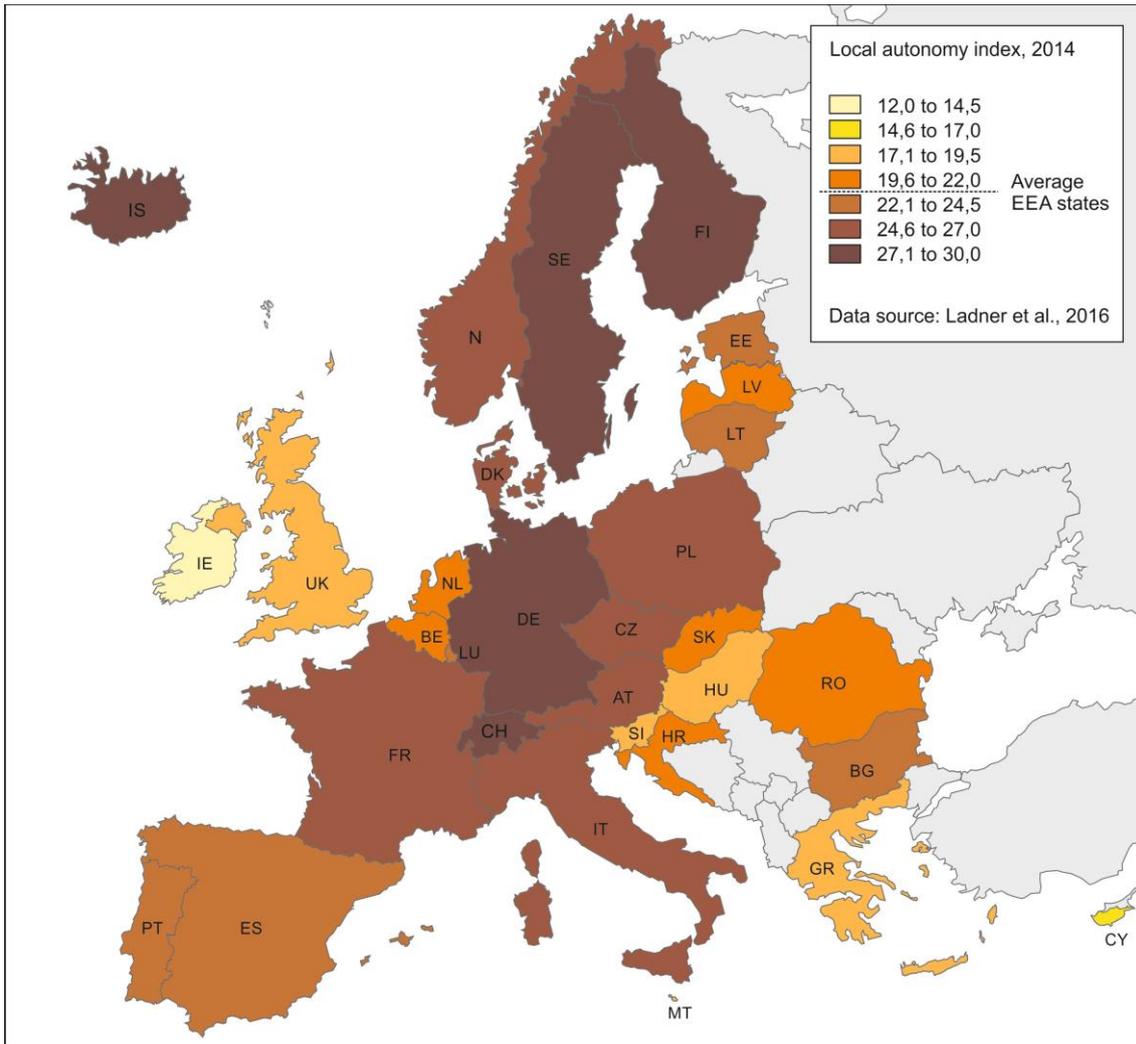
- Legal autonomy: the formal statutes of local governments and the modalities of their legal protection;
- Political discretion: the general distribution of power and the effective decision-making powers attributed to local governments for the provision of services;
- Scope: the range of services for which local governments are responsible;
- Financial autonomy: the financial resources available to local governments and the ability to decide freely on their sources;
- Organisational autonomy: the free organisation of the political and administrative arenas of local government;
- Non-interference: the extent to which local governments are free to exercise control;
- Access: the degree of influence of local governments on political decisions taken by higher levels of government. (*ibid.*, p. 64)

This study demonstrates that local autonomy has increased across Europe, with the notable exception of Hungary, where the opposite can be observed after 2010 (see Graph 8, **D6.4**, p. 23, for a visualisation of the 11 countries in RELOCAL, and **Map 1** below). Over the period 1990-2014, the authors note that the municipalities "enjoy more freedom to take on new tasks, are legally protected and have more directly the possibility to make themselves heard when it comes to decisions on higher levels" (Ladner *et al.*, 2016: 347). While these changes took place in the new democracies in central and eastern Europe in the 1990s and the first part of the following decade, the position of municipalities within the state was consolidated much earlier in western Europe (*ibid.*). **Map 1** reflects these changes rather well. From 1990 to 2014, autonomy increased in particular in central European countries such as Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia and to a lesser extent in Poland and Estonia. Hungary is clearly an outlier. In western European countries, autonomy increased, especially in Italy and Portugal, and to a lesser extent in Finland, France, Ireland, Greece and Switzerland. In Denmark, Spain and Luxembourg, autonomy has slightly decreased, whereas the level of autonomy remains roughly the same in Germany, Sweden and Austria.



Map 1: Change in local autonomy index (1990-2014) in EEA countries  
Cartography: Malte Helfer, University of Luxembourg

**Map 1** can only be read alongside **Map 2** (below), depicting the local autonomy index (LAI) in 2014. Although autonomy has been a major trend in the organisation of EEA states between 1990 and 2014 (with the exception of Hungary), one should recall that the levels of autonomy remain heterogenous, as shown by **Map 2**. The countries where autonomy is the highest are almost the same as where the level of autonomy has remained similar (DE, CH, FI, SE). There, autonomy is a key characteristic of state organisation. Countries where autonomy appears below average are to some extent central and eastern European countries (i.e. the Baltic states, Slovakia, Croatia, Slovenia) but also Belgium, the Netherlands and in particular Ireland and the UK. The contrast between DE, CH, and AT demonstrates that federal state systems do not necessarily mean greater local autonomy. The same goes for unitary states (e.g. UK, FR, PO).



Map 2: Local autonomy index in EEA countries in 2014  
Cartography: Malte Helfer, University of Luxembourg

The Ladner, Keuffer and Baldersheim study identifies country groups according to geographical and cultural criteria. There are some congruencies with the “welfare regimes” used in RELOCAL, that classify countries according to policy environment (see congruent country groups highlighted in green in the first row of **Table 1** below), although the categories are not strictly the same (differences are indicated in red). From a different way to classify France, differences are connected to the fact that Ladner, Keuffer and Baldersheim’s approach is more precise than the RELOCAL one. At this point of the report, our intention is not to draw a particular comparison between our two analyses, just to underline those small differences in order to nuance and contextualise the later possibilities of comparison (in section 4 of this report).

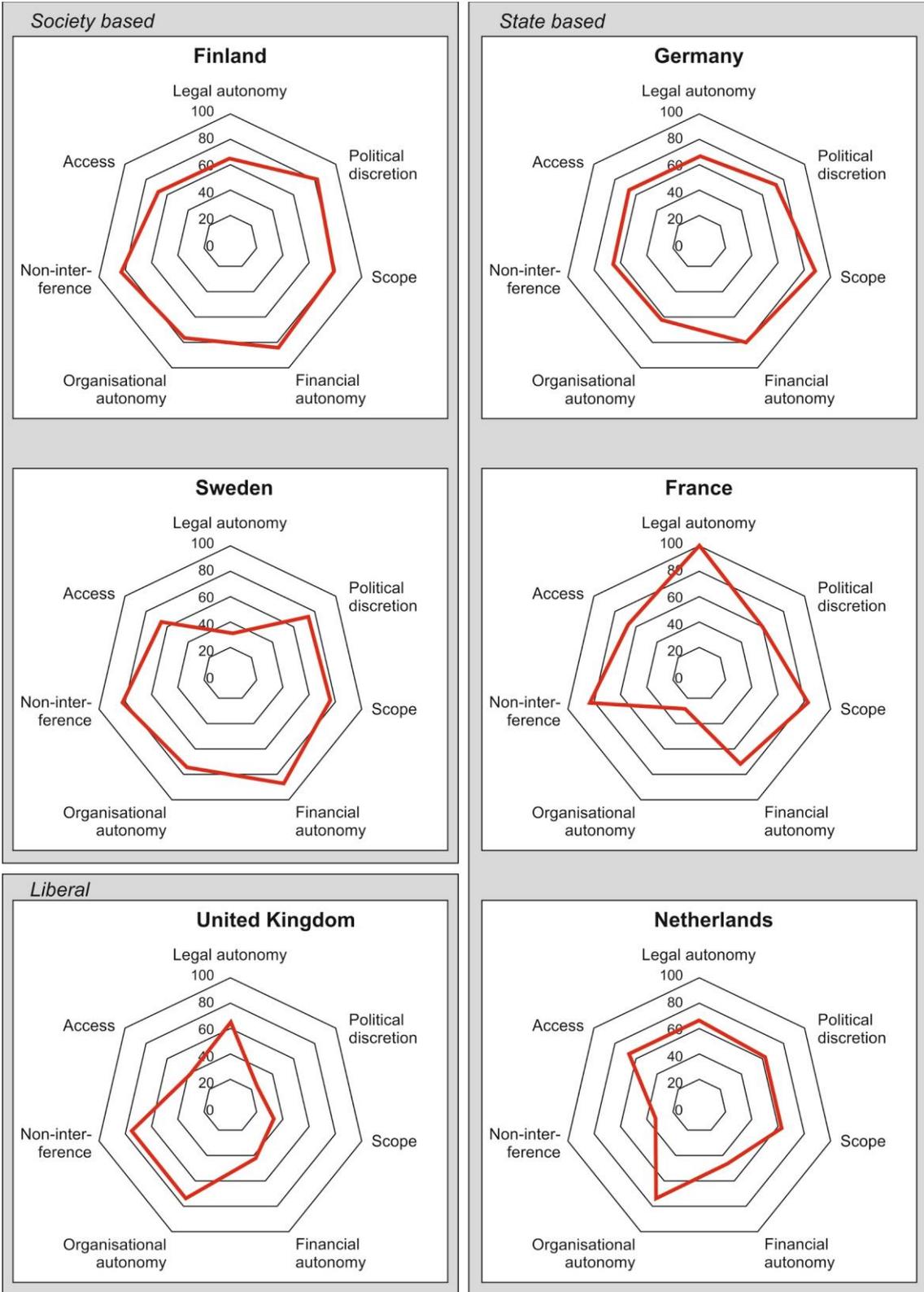
Country	Local Autonomy Index score	Ranking in Europe (39 countries)	Country group pattern of local autonomy (Ladner <i>et al.</i> )	Dominant model of integration (welfare regime) in RELOCAL
Finland	29.33	2	Nordic	Society-based
Sweden	28.67	3	Nordic	Society-based
Germany	27.50	5	German-speaking mid-European	State based
Poland	26.71	8	Central and eastern European	Mix of models
France	25.64	10	Mediterranean	State-based
Spain	22.06	20	Mediterranean	Family-based
Netherlands	21.67	23	Benelux	State-based
Romania	20.00	27	Central and eastern European	Mix of models
Greece	19.00	28	Mediterranean	Family-based
UK	17.38	31	British Isles	Liberal
Hungary	17.22	33	Central and eastern European	Mix of models

 Table 1: RELOCAL countries ranked according to the Local Autonomy Index<sup>5</sup> in 2014

 Source: Ladner *et al.*, 2016

In order to go a bit beyond this first overview, we have decided to represent in spider graphs (Figure 1 below) the seven constitutive dimensions of autonomy of Ladner, Keuffer and Baldersheim (2015) listed earlier for the 11 RELOCAL countries of study. When looking more specifically into the individual autonomy characteristics of these country groups, one sees an even more diverse picture. One cannot recognise a pattern for the so-called “state-based” and “mix of models” regimes. Actually, the autonomy characteristics of Germany are closer to those of “society-based” countries and especially Finland. In these countries, all autonomy characteristics are basically “ticked” (except legal autonomy in SE). There might be a common pattern between Greece and Spain, where autonomy is mostly characterised by a relatively high level of legal autonomy and non-interference, combined with a low level of “access” (i.e. degree of influence of local governments on political decisions taken by higher levels of government), political discretion and organisational autonomy.

<sup>5</sup> Local Autonomy Index (LAI) is calculated according to 11 variables, drawing on the 7 constitutive dimensions outlined earlier in the text. Average LAI 2014: 22.00 (39 European countries), symbolised by thick border line in the table.



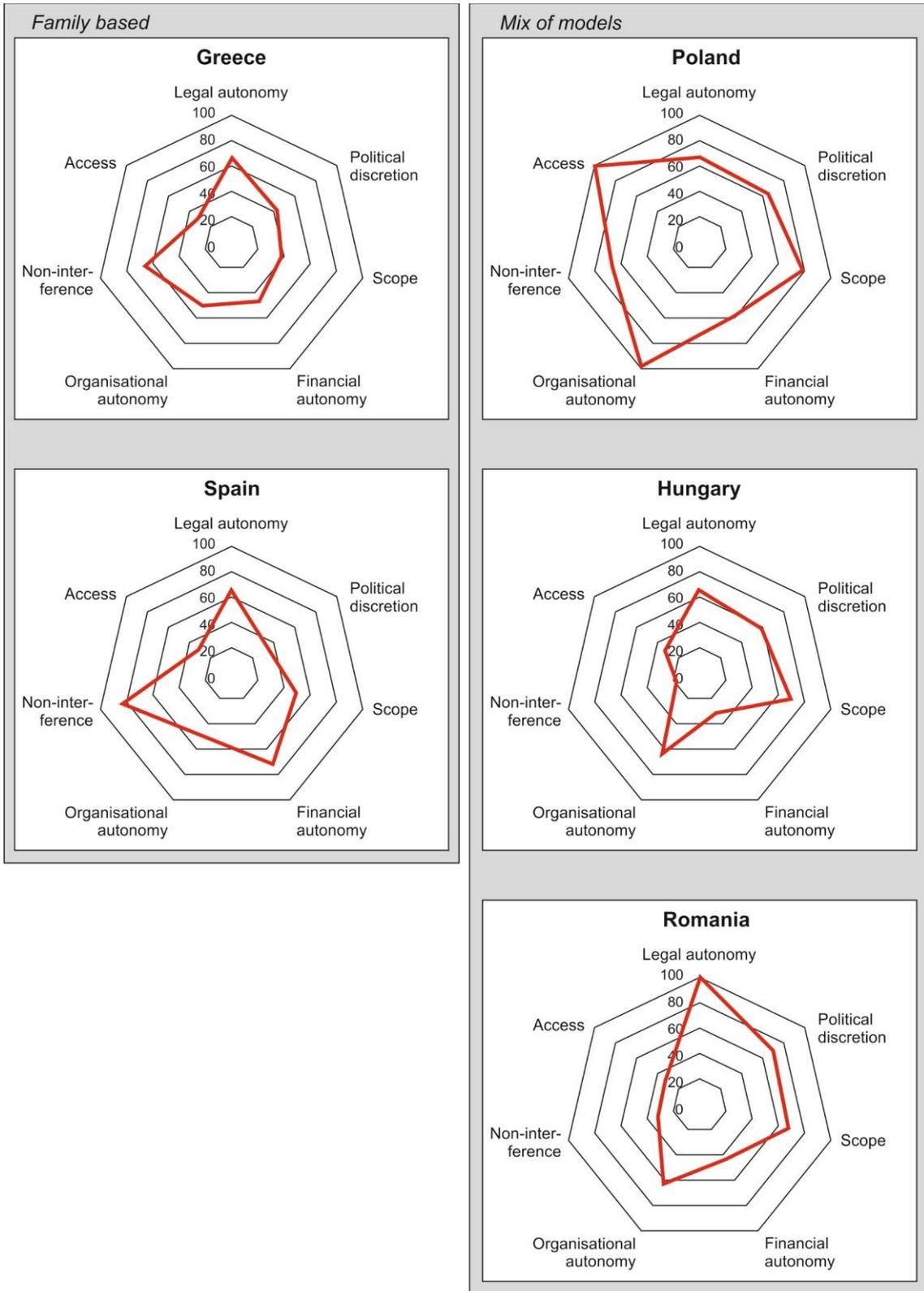


Figure 1: Spider graphs; countries displayed according to welfare regimes defined in RELOCAL. Data source: Ladner *et al.* 2016. Design: Malte Helfer, University of Luxembourg.

To sum up, this analysis allows a systematic pan-European comparison of local autonomy and a sense of its evolution over time (since 1990). Far from reducing the complexity of the matter, the constitutive dimensions of the LAI also provide a differentiated picture of autonomy. The analysis is undertaken from the perspective of the nation state, and essentially considering the legal and financial powers left to sub-state authorities. Autonomy here is closely related to representative democracy, as decentralised authorities receive their mandates from their constituents.

Yet this perspective-based account has some limits, inherent to the legal-public policy perspective, that can be qualified as “top down”. As outlined by Pratchett (2004), this perspective analyses to what extent higher levels of government delegate tasks and concede competences, without paying attention to the real capacities of local government to act and thus express its local identity. Also, as summarised by Jones (2014, p. 110), there is a danger of reifying the notions of ‘local’ and ‘regional’, treating them as “preordained, as opposed to being constituted through geo-historical and spatialised social processes, and vice versa”. More substantially, as summarised by Brown: “There is more to local power than merely the relations within the state” (1993, p. 263). He suggests instead that autonomy “must capture the forces of power that relate to the ways in which local control and self-rule are maintained both through and against broader relations of power” (*ibid.*). For him, “existing theories have a one-sided and reductive account on the local” (*ibid.*). It is equivalent to the local state. And since the local state is juxtaposed against higher tiers to the state, links within the state apparatus are bracketed. The approach too readily denies relations between local governance and the local culture and politics, and totally disregard the local population.

He therefore suggests two amendments to Clark’s understanding of local autonomy:

- a. relying on a Foucauldian understanding of power (i.e. power thought of as a network of forces inherent in every social relation, instead of a possessable or exchangeable discrete entity), he suggests “a **circular or relational view of power**”. This understanding allows us to recognise “domination (the top-down vectors of power) in a state-local relation, as well as strategies and tactics of resistance (the bottom-up side of power relations)”. (...) “The focus is on the relations between social objects like ‘the state’ or ‘the local’ since questions of how these objects have come to be defined and held to be truthful, appropriate, and common-sensical implicate the terrain on which strategies of domination and resistance combat” (Brown, 1993, p. 263);
- b. “if power is a relational category, diffuse and ubiquitous, ‘the local’ cannot be thought of as something that holds power. (...) Instead, it must be viewed as a socially reified object that is constituted through social relations saturated with power. (...) ‘Local’ –places through a series of different means (political, cultural, historical etc.)– [is] made powerful or powerless not by a sovereign, but by those who represent them through events in social life. (...) This place-making process is ongoing, often inconsistent and contested” (Brown, 1993, p. 264).

Such an understanding of power and local, which Jones sums up in the term “relational-autonomy” (2014), allows the enquiry on autonomy to go beyond the binary state-local relationship, thus putting the local (the locality, the local population and local knowledge) at the centre of the enquiry. In the next section, we are going to theoretically explore the relation between the notion of (local) autonomy and the notion of (territorial) development, as it is the specific focus of RELOCAL.

## 2.2. The conjugation of local autonomy and territorial development as a catalyst of spatial justice? <sup>6</sup>

Territorial development is a wide and complex research field that has historically been dominated by economic concerns such as growth, income and employment (Armstrong and Taylor, 2000). This understanding was mirrored by dedicated policies and programmes at national and international levels (see Pike *et al.*, 2007, for a review). While most of the international organisations had conducted a top-down approach presented as “people-centred” that was “place-neutral” within the 1990s, a debate arose in the late 2000s on their effective capacity to tackle regional disparities. In this section, we will focus mainly on the intersection of territorial development with the rising injunction to conduct it at the local scale. In other words, we are going to pay attention to what we qualify as the “autonomisation” of the territorial development policy, from global to local. We will concentrate both on the evolution of policy of territorial development as conceived by the international organisations and the European Union at the same time, considering the second as a specific –but not that different– focus of the first group. From our WP7 perspective, such a double approach is necessary because several RELOCAL case studies are actions funded by the EU regional policy but also by international organisations (e.g. World Bank, UNDP) or extra-national development programmes (e.g. the government of Norway development policy). But first, let us start by (critically) positioning ourselves on the concept of development in the social sciences literature.

### 2.2.1. A critical perspective on development

Indeed, this report draws on critical theories in the social sciences to question the very concept of development. Whether the emphasis is on freedom, the human, the territory, durability or sustainability, economics, the social world and community, the idea of development always postulates progression from a starting point of supposed inadequacy to the fulfilment of an ideal. As has been emphasised by many researchers in the “post” perspective – in particular post-socialist and post-colonial, but also in the decolonial perspective– the main problem with this way of thinking is that it always positions the First World / the West, its values, its “performances”, its “modernity” as the model for this supposedly desirable progress (Blondel, 2017, 2018; Boatcă, 2006; Boatcă and Costa, 2010; Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006; Tlostanova, 2012). Apart from the position of dominance of the First World thus constituted over the correspondingly backward Second and Third Worlds<sup>7</sup>, this prevailing conception of development limits the range of possible approaches to being-in-the-world or to being-here<sup>8</sup>. Its other main fault is that this extreme simplification precludes thinking about developments and changes outside of a so-called linear progression – or even progress – from point A to point B, and therefore has the consequence that certain territories and certain populations are thought of as “lagging behind”, “in transition”, or “catching up” in a game in which the First World made

<sup>6</sup> This section refers to RELOCAL-based pieces of research that have been published in a special issue of *Justice Spatiale / Spatial Justice* academic journal, edited by the authors of the report. For more information on this, see: (Blondel & Evrard, 2019; Viràg and Jelinek, 2019; Vincze, Bădiță and Hossu, 2019; Keller and Viràg, 2019; Németh, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> See the writings of Wallerstein and their more recently interpretation in political sociology (in particular by the aforementioned Manuela Boatcă).

<sup>8</sup> In its Heideggerian conception, see for example Paquot (2007).

up the rules by and for itself in order to be and always to remain the winner (Koobak and Marling, 2014 ).

As Carlos Salamanca Villamizar and Francisco Astudillo Pizarro note, exploring “development” from a “spatial justice” perspective is therefore a way to “incorporate questions such as the distribution of the costs, damage and negative consequences of *development*” (2018). By focusing on the “development” of Europe’s internal territories, our research project RELOCAL, and this WP7 report in particular, seeks to explore how this hegemonic global position, so often described and decried, also holds true within the First World itself (i.e. the European cohesion and development policy towards its own territories). In other words, its aim is to observe the results of the connection (and disconnection) between policies and the local, be they international development (e.g. UNDP in Hungary and World Bank in Romania in RELOCAL case studies, the European Cohesion policy) or national (often adapted, at least partially, to the above-mentioned policies). At a time when “local” and “peripheral” territories are often stereotyped and stigmatised in the public arena, this report, which takes a resolutely interpretative perspective, seeks to explore the links between local autonomy and spatial justice within the framework of territorial development policies that aim to accentuate the scope of action available at local level in Europe.

As WP7 aims to improve “the knowledge base regarding the relation between regional policy and political claims to regional autonomy and decentralisation” (GA, p. 23), we focus almost exclusively on the way public policies for territorial development within Europe are devised and interwoven, contradict and complement each other. In that way, we (normatively) consider autonomy as an **inclusive instrument** that can be used to stand back from current development policies. This could be described as the *autonomisation* of development. To explore the local contributions of these policies, we empirically focus our analysis on **actions contributing to local development within localities** (as defined in D.1.1, p.77). These are analysed in terms of justice, in particular in terms of procedural justice (what empowerment<sup>9</sup> of the local?) and distributive justice (what contribution to tackling territorial disparities?). Now we have theoretically positioned ourselves within critical theory, we need to concentrate more on policy-oriented debates (and related scientific literature). This will allow us to explore more deeply the articulation between several of our keywords: autonomy, local and development.

### 2.2.2. Local autonomisation as a starting point for questioning the development imperative

The academic literature emphasises the contradictory imperatives that the “local” has had to face in the last two decades in international organisations and EU development policy. To begin with, the neoliberal urge to reduce public debt has prompted nation-states to remake themselves through successive policies of devolution, fusion and decentralisation (e.g. see Brenner, 2004), which have frequently meant a change in the modes of territorial government rather than its disappearance. While the nation-state often continues to be described as the main frame of reference and source of control, other levels have emerged: one supranational level is the European Union, an ever more important generator of

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<sup>9</sup> Understood as the transfer of political capacities from state institutions to civil society (Gagnon and May, 2010, p. 48).

standards, frameworks and directives that affect the conception of public territorial development policies (Evrard, 2015). This is particularly salient in post-socialist countries like Hungary or Romania, where the EU constitutes the main initiator of territorial public action (Viràg and Jelinek, 2019), even though this policy continues to be filtered through the interpretative prisms of the member states (Vincze, Bădiță and Hossu, 2019). The local and regional levels have also been reinforced, and are positioned as the supposedly proper layers for public intervention<sup>10</sup>.

To justify these transfers of prerogatives, it is argued that state power alone is insufficient to drive development. For example, the European Commission argues in a communication entitled “Empowering Local Authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes” that “centrally-led, top-down development policies and programmes alone cannot succeed in addressing the complexities of sustainable development and fighting poverty” (Commission européenne, 2013).

In contrast, local authorities benefit from a positive outlook. Seen as being “closer to the citizens”, they would have the “responsibility to meet their primary needs and to ensure access to basic services for all” (*ibid.*). The latter view prompts Jaafar Sadok Friaa<sup>11</sup> to claim, in the context of the preparation of the programme of urban development and local governance for Tunisia: “In order for decentralization to work, local authorities must gain autonomy, capacities and responsibilities” (World Bank, 2014).

Another aspect of this reconfiguration of development towards the local is the (re)new(ed) attention paid to the third sector and socially oriented activities (Geddes and Newman, 1999). Those latter are presented as more likely to reduce social inequity, promote environmental sustainability, encourage inclusive government and governance and recognise cultural diversity. At the same time, all these elements have been emphasised to varying degrees as crucial within broadened definitions of local and regional development (Pike *et al.*, 2007; Houghton and Counsell, 2004; Keating, 2005).

In parallel, the international organisations have reconsidered not only the way development policy ought to be governed but its very content, given the profound spatial changes brought about by globalisation (Barca, McCann and Rodriguez-Pose, 2012). In general, their sectorial approach, their dependency on public aid and their tendency to focus on the construction of infrastructure are increasingly interpreted as being less adapted to globalisation (Rodriguez, 2011). Additionally, and maybe more importantly, those development policies have been criticised mainly for their supposed inefficiency in terms of spatial justice. As summarised by Görmar *et al.* (5-6), “economic growth has decoupled from the growth of well-being and life satisfaction, especially in central and eastern Europe where the focus on a competitive and innovative economy has led to further centralisation and peripheralisation<sup>12</sup> and as a result to ‘consequential geographies of (in)justice’ (Soja, 2010, p. 1)”.

On the same level, rising territorial disparities is one of the factors leading Barca to consider that “place-blind policy-making” has failed in the EU (2019). For him, entrusting institutions at national and supra-national levels to design, recommend and enforce

<sup>10</sup> Regarding the states, Renaud Epstein speaks of remote government in the French case (Epstein, 2008; 2013), Cyril Blondel of remote and elitist government in the Croatian and Serbian cases (Blondel, 2016). In parallel, city government is increasingly attracting scholarly attention, identified as places of social change (Pinson, 2009; Gagnon and Jouve, 2006). With regard to France, see for example Issue 2 of the 2008 journal *Esprit*, dedicated to the “government of cities”, or Issue 1 of the 2010 journal *Pôle Sud* dedicated to “new urban criticism”.

<sup>11</sup> Described as lead urban specialist at the World Bank.

<sup>12</sup> As defined by Nagy, Timár, Nagy and Velkey (2015).

policies at national or EU level is inadequate, especially for tackling “the problems of the ‘left-behind areas’.” Instead, he has pleaded for a place-based approach (Barca, 2009). He defines it as being about “giving people in places stuck in an under-development trap the power and the knowledge to expand their ‘sustainable freedom’ by improving their access to, and the quality of, essential services, and by promoting the opportunity to innovate, thus reducing economic, social and recognition inequalities” (Barca, 2019, p. 3).

Rodrigues-Pose also argues that “more place-sensitive territorial development policies are needed in order to find a solution” to the sources of resentment in less dynamic areas (2017).

What is noticeable is that both those two approaches consider development as a “profoundly geographical phenomenon” requiring “an appreciation of the geographical concepts of space, territory, place and scale” (Pike *et al.*, 2007, p. 1255). It is therefore the “particular attributes of places” that “shape whether, how and to what degree specific local and regional development definitions and varieties take root and flourish or fail within and wither over time” (*ibid.*).

The 2014-2020 EU programming period has attempted to translate this renewed approach (in terms of governance and in terms of content) into its Cohesion policy, establishing dedicated tools (e.g. CLLD, ITI). In general, local authorities are encouraged to devise and implement their own territorial development strategies, with European or international policies playing a support role (Evrard, 2015). From a passive, “recipient” position in relation to development policies, local authorities are invited to become actors, even drivers of “their” own development.

Thus, in the last decades, the EU approach converges with that of international organisations that advocated in their programmes for multi-level governance, strengthening the power of the local level. On the one hand, the local level is supposedly more legitimate and more effective in its capacity to produce development. More local autonomy would thus be synonymous with more distributive justice for the benefit of local territories and their populations. “Autonomising” development then produces a logical shift in the conception of development itself, which gains the patina of a new, or at least stronger, equalising purpose. On the other hand, this shift of balance towards the local is also seen as being more democratic. It is presented as a response to demands from citizens themselves to participate more in decision-making.

This raises a number of questions. Firstly, can this process be facilitated, how can local authorities be supported in this process, given their heterogeneous resources, competences and capacities? Secondly and more fundamentally, this raises the question of the aim of such a policy and of its recipients: “what is local development?” and “local development for whom?” (Pike *et al.* 2007). Beyond this, the paradigmatic shift towards a place-based approach in the Cohesion policy requires questioning how localities –and especially the EU’s internal territories– can be *enabled* to drive a strategy in the pursuit of spatial justice. WP7 investigates whether *autonomy* can be instrumental in thinking about this enablement process, in terms of powers, resources and knowledge. As outlined earlier, thought of as a relational notion, autonomy can support reflection on the processes allowing place-based development strategies and the localities’ interlinkages both with upper levels of governance and with the local population. This last aspect also needs to be clarified before we can conclude this theoretical discussion. It indeed raises a democratic question that will be precisely the object of our next section.

### 2.2.3. Autonomy and development governed by and for the (local) people

We start this section about local population by repeating the question posed in the last paragraph: local development but for whom? This poses in fact a larger democratic question, a question that Scharpf immediately widens by referring to a quote from Abraham Lincoln, delivered in 1863, expressing an aspiration for the US nation to have “government of the people, by the people and for the people”. Scharpf uses this quote to elaborate on the notions of accountability, participation and legitimacy. For him, political decisions are said to be legitimate if and because they are derived from the authentic preferences of citizens (Scharpf 1999, p. 16). This input legitimisation is described as the “government for the people” side of the argument. On the other side of the argument, the “output legitimisation” is directed to the common interests and problems of the community’s members. It emphasises the “government for the people” dimension of democracy (Scharpf 1999, p. 16). Political decisions are legitimate, therefore, if and because they effectively promote the public good by collective problem-solving (*ibid.*). For Kaina, democratic performance is connected to input and output legitimisation insofar as this component of the political system’s effectiveness describes its abilities to ensure people’s collective self-determination by both participation and problem-solving for the common good (Kaina, 2006, p. 126).

In the RELOCAL context, this approach is instrumental for assessing the effectiveness of local development actions, both as regards their capacities to tackle spatial injustice and ensure fairer access to resources, infrastructure (what we relate to distributive justice) and as regards their capability to do so in a fair manner, ensuring people’s participation (what we relate to procedural justice) and taking into account the “common good”. To that extent, our understanding of autonomy is expanded to the **right and the capacity to enhance spatial justice in a locality for the local people**. Or to put it differently, autonomy is therefore about **people’s and a locality’s enablement as a means to spatial justice**.

Beyond our local-centred perspective (the locality, the local population and local knowledge), and to start the conclusion of this section, we retain two other aspects to characterise the notion of autonomy in the RELOCAL context. Drawing upon Clark (1984) and Ladner *et al.* (2016), we conceptualise autonomy as a right and a capacity to act. As a relational notion (Brown, 1993 and Jones, 2014), we consider that autonomy should be understood in a specific geographical context. We also consider local autonomy as the conjugation of two specific powers: “initiation and immunity”. Nevertheless, we have decided to adapt Ladner, Keuffer and Baldersheim’s definition to the interests of RELOCAL. By power of initiative, we mean the capacity of the local level to accomplish tasks of local interest, in particular by/with the participation of the local population, and taking into consideration local knowledge. This first aspect of autonomy corresponds to one of the “two faces of democratic self-determination”, the “government by the people” as Scharpf puts it (1999, p. 6). The second face of autonomy is the “government for the people” (*ibid.*), that we define in this report as the possibility for a local authority to act, without oversight by higher levels, for the local interest, and in particular for the locality and its population.

WP7 aims to qualify and characterise this autonomisation process and to understand its limits in tackling spatial injustice. WP7 is therefore interested in investigating how the autonomy of the action and the autonomy of the locality interact, and the extent to which this interaction produces a more just allocation of opportunities and resources. WP7 focuses on the following research questions:

- Autonomy of the action: how do communities/interest groups organise themselves in localities to address spatial injustice and push this issue on policy agendas?
- Autonomy of the locality: what do these autonomous actions produce in spatial terms, and do they “make a difference” in terms of spatial justice in localities and in relation to other scales?

These questions raise a number of “new” questions that we propose to answer with the support of empirical work. Firstly, research will have to consider who the people are. Are they citizens, inhabitants or beneficiaries? Secondly, if the empirical analysis demonstrates that greater autonomy facilitates spatial justice, what are the operational consequences for the place-based approach? If not, what are the operational consequences to make such a thing possible? In connection to WP3 and WP4, how can autonomy facilitate the account of the locality’s specificities and governance characteristics? Thirdly, the notions of development and justice are inherently normative. As we take this dimension into account, we will mostly reflect upon it while conducting the analysis.

### 3. Methodological reflection

#### 3.1. Empirical body

This report relies on two main empirical bodies of work. Firstly and for the most part, the empirical work has been conducted in the frame of WP 6. The 33 case study reports and 11 national ones document the qualitative side of the empirical results. This work stems from case study experts involved in the RELOCAL consortium who have meticulously implemented **D.6.1: Methodological framework for Case Study Research**. Placed under the lead of ILS, SU (WP3), CERSHAS (WP4) and UL (WP7) played an active role in conceiving and writing this document. These partners have also answered case study experts' queries prior to and during their fieldwork in order to ensure that the six research questions (two per WP) were covered. After the fieldwork, these institutions have also agreed to split the analytical work consistently, based upon five pre-defined analytical dimensions listed in **D.6.1**. Dimensions 3, 4 and 5 of these reports are of primary interest to WP7.

Secondly, and complementary to these, WP7 have set up five local workshops, one in each welfare regime (as indicated in the **GA**), conducted by one of the RELOCAL partners (see **Table 2**). Each partner has provided us with a report. Those reports are in **Annex 4**. Those workshops aimed at investigating "whether the degree of autonomy can be put in relation to better (distributive and/or procedural) spatial justice.

Welfare regime	Case study	Action	RELOCAL Partner in charge
Liberal	Highlands and Islands region (Scotland)	<b>UK33</b> : Strengthening communities	HUTTON
State-based	Nord-Pas de Calais region (France)	<b>FR17</b> : Euralens	UL
Society-based	Västerbotten region (Sweden)	<b>SE29</b> : Digital Västerbotten	NORDREGIO
Family-based	Western Macedonia region, Thessaloniki metropolitan area, Volos city and Karditsa regional unit (Greece)	<b>EL3</b> : Post-mining Regional Strategy, <b>EL4</b> : Alexander Innovation Zone, <b>EL5</b> : Overcoming Fragmentation, <b>EL6</b> : Ecosystem of Collaboration	UTH
Mixture of models	Maramures County (Romania)	<b>RO26</b> : Mara-Natur LEADER	Desire

Table 2: Local workshops conducted in support of WP7 research questions

Local workshops were conceived in such a way that they could contribute both to WP7 enquiry and to the Case Studies' work. Therefore a division of labour between us (UL) and case study experts proved necessary. While the workshops were designed, conducted and reported by the case study experts, we (UL) provided guidance throughout, especially with two documents:

- Guidelines for conducting WP7 local workshops ([Annex 2](#))
- Operationalising WP7 Guidelines: experience from the Euralens workshop ([Annex 3](#)).

As a result, besides a direct contribution to WP 7, local workshops have contributed to the reflection on which local initiatives (institutionalised or not) can best tackle some aspects of spatial injustice (Guidelines for WP7 local workshops, see [Annex 2](#)).

### 3.2 Analytical steps (inducto-deductive approach)

As outlined in Section 2, we (UL) made the analytical choice as WP leader to break the term autonomy down into “autonomy of the action” and “autonomy of the locality” and their interrelations with the (re)production and/or decrease in spatial (procedural and distributive) injustice in Europe. To be able to conduct a systematic analysis of the 33 case studies, we elaborated an analytical grid that breaks these two terms down into key questions, allowing us to apply our analytical perspective of autonomy to the case study (see Table 3, next page). It was presented to RELOCAL partners, and discussed at length with WP3, 4 and WP9 leaders. We (UL) mostly used case study reports to fill this grid in while reading or after having read case study reports. Meetings between them allowed reflection on both the usability of the grid, that was then adapted, and on the results of the analysis. Methodologically, therefore, this approach consists in a mix of a deductive (e.g. analytical grid) and an inductive approach (e.g. systematic reading of the 33 case study reports to adapt the grid).

RELOCAL project's key assumption is “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” (Madanipour *et al.*, 2017: 78). As a consequence, our analysis is driven by the term “locally-driven”, referring first and mostly to the stakeholder in charge of and/or (if different) involved in the action under scrutiny. To that extent, the local actor may refer to local institutional public actors (municipal and/or regional authorities), but also private and civil society actors who seek to implement, oppose or divert territorial development policies in the locality (Madanipour *et al.*, WP1 report, 2017). Secondly, and this is the specific WP7 insight of the question, we seek to determine to what extent the local population (i.e. inhabitants, or specific population group targeted by a potential spatially just policy) is associated with the action. To put it more clearly, an action can be driven by upper levels of government, but we mean to analyse the extent to which this action facilitates spatial justice in both distributive and procedural terms, and therefore we look specifically at how the inhabitants are engaged with it.

Key research question on autonomy	Sub-category	Key questions	Analytical categories and <u>main</u> keywords from the manual (D. 6.1)
Autonomy of the action <i>(Government by the people)</i>	<i>Autonomy of imagination</i> Idea and conception of the action	How did the action emerge? Is the action locally driven, by whom?	Dimensions 2, 4, 5 Level of engagement, legitimacy, place-based knowledge, perception of injustice
	<i>Autonomy of organisation</i> Implementation of the action	How participative and transparent is the action? Who takes decisions?	Dimensions 3, 4 Participation, level of engagement, transparency, distribution of power, structures of coordination, modes of leadership, decision-making
	<i>Autonomy of politicisation</i> Evaluation of the action	Who can measure the development impact? Are social and spatial justice considered? Is place knowledge taken into account?	Dimensions 4, 5 Legitimacy, transparency, accountability, flexibility and adaptability, organisational and individual learning, place-based knowledge
	Impact of the action	What are the effects of the action in terms of procedural justice?	
Autonomy of the locality <i>(Government for the people)</i>	Capacity of the institution to act	Legal and financial means of the locality	Dimension 3 Distribution of power, structures of coordination, modes of leadership, decision-making, actor network
	Power of the institution in relation to upper levels of governance		
	Impact on the action	What effect does the action produce on the local institution?	

Table 3: WP7 Analytical grid  
Realisation: UL<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> In this report, we use a number of keywords (right-hand column). For reasons of consistency within the RELOCAL project, please refer to [D.6.1](#) and [D.6.4](#) for their exact definition and further references.

### 3.3. Reflexive considerations

The RELOCAL project relies to a large extent on a deeply relational and contextual definition of spatial justice and locality (D. 1.1) that requires intense fieldwork and documented case studies. As a result, the material at hand is rather wide and qualitative in its essence. Although each research team involved adopted a comparable and systematic research approach to the case studies, individual subjectivities mark the way research is approached, conducted and reported. In addition, at the level of this transversal analysis, although a significant effort has been made to be systematic, consistent and to exchange findings with the researchers involved (section 3.1 and 3.2), results are again interpreted and analysed according to our specific perspectives. As a result, 2 to 3 filters stand between this report and the 33 localities under scrutiny. We might, for example, quote a researcher who quotes a stakeholder from fieldwork.

Results outlined in this report should essentially be understood as what they are: results from 33 case studies mobilised to answer a specific question for the RELOCAL project. As a consequence, it is difficult to assert whether this small window on reality is just visible in a few case studies or whether they are symptomatic of the evolution of public action in Europe. Nevertheless, subject to these caveats, we think we have been able to identify tendencies that enable a better understanding of the relation between local autonomy and spatial justice in Europe. We rely not only on our thorough reading of the empirical material collected by our RELOCAL colleagues, but also on our own research experience and our own empirical work in the context of RELOCAL. Our main results are presented in the next part.

## 4. A WP7 analysis of RELOCAL results: limited autonomy and perpetuation of injustice

The main objective of the WP7 analysis is to measure to what extent the action under scrutiny is locally driven and locally embedded, and whether this “localisation of the action” is a critical factor in combatting spatial injustice. This corresponds to our spatial justice-related understanding of the concept of “local autonomy”. In other words, our main objective in this section is to assess to what extent the local (population, territory, knowledge) is included in the government of the development of the locality, and to what extent this local inclusion enables spatial injustice to be combatted better.

The first dimension includes more elements of procedural justice that we correlate with government by the people. In this report, it corresponds to the participation of the local population in every step of the action under scrutiny. What we mean by “local population” depends on the target of the action. It can be a category of people considered to be problematic or disadvantaged or, more largely, facing some sort of injustice. When not defined, it can simply be the “inhabitants” of the territory targeted by the action (in some of the RELOCAL case studies, the action has a territorial and not a social target). However, what is at stake with participation does not seem to us to be just a question of giving a seat or a voice to the local people, but also to help them to express themselves, to make their voices heard. Hence, in the first part of our analysis, we will pay attention to the conditions of participation of the local, i.e. as much the way participation is conducted or not during the action, but also the way it is perceived, facilitated, ignored. We also include in this environment of participation the possibility that, feeling ignored, a part of the local population, organised or not as an association, may have mobilised themselves to build an action.

The second dimension corresponds more to elements of distributive justice, that we correlate with government for the people. In this report, it corresponds to the representation of the local territory during the action under scrutiny. In the present-day way(s) of defining democracy in Europe, the question of representation accords most of the time with (local) institutions that gather several political (local) representatives elected by the (local) population of the territory and some kind of technical expertise (planners, urbanists etc., whether or not they are directly hired by the institution). Our first interest here is to assess the capacity of action of the local territory: how does the local institution relate to it during the action, technically and politically?

This capacity to act is determined by classical factors such as legal and financial means. It also questions the real power of decision that the local institution has in its regional / national / European context. This refers not only to the possibility to act, but also to the habits and the legitimacy of local institutional actors to be decisionmakers and policymakers in relation to other levels of governance that traditionally represent and hold most of the power in the specific context under scrutiny (it can be the state or the region, for instance).

Furthermore, in this part, we also question the possibility of the local institutions to act in a present-day capitalist world. What can local public policy do to attenuate global structural economic and social injustices?

## 4.1. Autonomy of the action: government by the people and procedural justice

Whereas participation of the local population in local development planning has, in the last decade, become commonplace in political statements and public policy all over Europe, the 33 RELOCAL case studies tend to demonstrate that in most contexts, it remains a vain wish. We will see it in the next sections: most of the time, local institutions inform the local population of an action they have already conceived themselves. In some contexts, they might consult inhabitants, but rather on secondary aspects. As observed in other contexts, participation of the local population in making decisions and taking action remains very limited (Blondiaux and Fourniau, 2001; Blondiaux, 2008). The local population is still approached as an object to be governed, and not as a subject that could be a (significant) part of local development nowadays.

### 4.1.1. Conception of the action: a *problem-based* approach targeting *vulnerable territories and populations constructed as beneficiaries*

In this section, we aim to better understand how the action has emerged in its territorial context and to what extent the local population is part of this emergence.

First of all, in most of the case study reports, the way the action is constructed appears to be based on the two largely dominant conceptualisations in urban and territorial planning today: the project-based approach and problem-solving approach.

The project-based approach has indeed become dominant in most of the European countries and in European Cohesion Policy since the beginning of the 2000s, replacing former, more structural and pluri-annual planning concepts (Brenner, 2004; Pinson 2009; Blondel, 2016). More precisely, it means that most of the time, the chosen actions of RELOCAL answer a call for projects, and are conceived, expressed and conducted as a project, following a linear track: idea / conception / realisation / evaluation. We will come back to this aspect when discussing certain specific situations, arguing that this way of conceiving action may be a reason why the action in itself does not produce spatial justice. The same goes for the second dominant trend in the construction of public action today. In most of the RELOCAL case studies, this construction of public action is firstly based on the identification of a problem, being a problematic space and/or a problematic population. To that extent, we could even consider that the local problems are constructed as being matter of:

- spatial justice: often targeting disadvantaged localities, at different “local” scales: neighbourhood, municipality, group of municipalities, region (this is the basis of the intervention of the LEADER program for instance, that concerns several RELOCAL case studies);
- social justice: targeting a vulnerable social group. It is interesting to note here that the vulnerability of the group is not so often clearly defined in the case study reports. Most of the time, it seems that vulnerability is used as a synonym for poverty. It often relates to the classical sociological approach by class, in combination, in some contexts, with age (e.g. **DE1**), or ethnicity (e.g. the Roma population);
- socio-spatial justice: targeting a combination of the two preceding categories (and those represent the majority of RELOCAL case studies). For instance, as Eniko Vincze specified for the purpose of this report, in the case of **R025** and **R027**, the “project beneficiaries, i.e. Roma defined as vulnerable social groups subjected to

exclusion and marginalization, are located in well-defined territories of the localities". The objectives of the projects are however "formulated in the terms of housing-related social problems manifested in space (such as territorial segregation, and legalisation of informal settlement)" (WP7, 2020)<sup>14</sup>.

We can draw here a parallel with the work of Sylvie Tissot (2007) on the construction of the public action targeting "*quartiers sensibles*" (which we can translate literally as "sensitive neighbourhoods") in France. These policies are often based on the local participation, pushing liberal *solutions* to the *problem* such as "regeneration of the social ties, local solidarity, inhabitants' capacity to restore community life and conviviality" instead of more structural responses such as "public action against poverty, socioeconomic inequalities and discriminations" (*ibid.*). The point here is not to disqualify project-based and problem-solving approaches in the construction of public action; we just want to underline the domination of those methods in the way RELOCAL actions are constructed, and more broadly in the way public action in Europe is built nowadays. We will also confirm a well-known constructivist critique of the widespread naive vision that the behaviours, the populations (and even the territories) associated with social problems would constitute natural species (Blumer and Riot, 2004). This vision usually contributes more to the reproduction of inequalities than to their eradication.

Furthermore, what is also noticeable is that even if "local participation" and more broadly "localisation of the action" is often one of the main goals of most of the RELOCAL actions, very few case study reports mention the participation of the local population in the action. To a certain extent, it seems to exemplify the lack of interest that both practitioners and researchers show in this issue. One may postulate that those converging deficits of interest reinforce each other. We mean that the lack of information on the involvement of the population in the action in almost all of the case studies certainly demonstrates that this aspect does not seem very significant, either in public policymaking these days or in the communication of local stakeholders towards RELOCAL researchers. Besides, the low level of reflexivity of researchers on that issue in case study reports might be interpreted as a sign of a lack of interest of researchers themselves, or maybe, as a theoretical and/or a disciplinary bias in geography and planning.

#### 4.1.2. The weak involvement of the local population in the initial and final phases

From a general perspective, the local population seems to be weakly associated with the action in most of the case studies. What is particularly striking is that the local population (and more largely the targeted audience) is not associated either with the initial phases of the action (imagination, conception) or the last phases (its evaluation). Most of the time, those first and last parts are quite institutionalised.

We will focus mainly here on the first phase, as we have more empirical material about it. What we observe is that a political leader, a civil servant, an NGO or a private actor comes along with an idea that he/she/they consider to be a possible initiative that would foster development at the local scale. It is interesting to notice the roles that are given to each

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<sup>14</sup> We have circulated a first draft of the WP7 report among our RELOCAL colleagues, who have responded to some of our interpretations. In order to openly include those discussions in the text, we have decided to mention the relevant suggestions and their authors in the text.

actor in this initial phase. Very rarely during the conception phase, participatory events are organised in the targeted locality with the people targeted by the action, in order to adapt the action to the specific local needs. The only exception (to a certain extent) noted among RELOCAL cases is **HU13** (presented in 4.2). The local population (whether it is the whole of it or some targeted communities) is usually conceived of as “beneficiaries”, more objectified than considered as a subject of the policy (**FR17, RO24, RO25**). At this stage of the action, they are not considered as stakeholders but as receivers of the development initiative that has been designed for them but without them. In that sense, very rarely is the “knowledge” of the local population valorised and used as a contribution during the policymaking phase.

Most of the initial decisions are taken by political stakeholders. It could be a state government or body, a region, a group of municipalities or a municipality decision to act in favour of a less-developed area of their territory. And most of the time, they give the mandate to act to a locally-embedded stakeholder, whether this latter is a department or a service of the locality, an NGO offering specific skills in the domain, or a body created by and/or for this very purpose (**EL5, FR17, FR18**).

For instance, case study **FR18** is about a state Planning Public Agency (EPA). The story is that Nicolas Sarkozy, while visiting the French-Luxembourgish border, decided to create the initiative when observing what can be labelled spatial injustice, i.e. the difference in development between the French post-industrial “underdeveloped” side of the border and the booming new economy in Luxembourg. In that case, it is noticeable that the action was imagined and decided outside the territory by an upper local of government (in this case, the state and its most prominent representative, its president). The installation of the state planning agency then involved local authorities, but mainly the region (Lorraine, at that time) and the two *départements* concerned. Municipalities have played a more secondary role in this process (they were just consulted about the perimeter) that has resulted in the creation of a state planning agency which took back decentralised competences, such as urbanism, from the municipalities. Not to mention the local population, that was not consulted at all during this initial phase.

**EL5**, which is about the 2011 local authority reform “Kallikratis” in Volos, Greece, tells a quite similar story. Here too, not only did the Greek state decide about the content (its object, its ambition) of the political reform in a very centralised manner, but also about its concrete application (merging 9 municipalities in one and naming it after the biggest one, Volos). Here too, the local leaders seem to have had little to say, and the local population is not involved at all, either as regards the content of the policy *per se* or its shape.

Both cases represent a symptomatic situation in which local autonomy seems very fragile as soon as what is at stake is too strategic from the state’s point of view (potential economic development in **FR17**, potential economies of scale in a constrained budgetary situation in **EL5**). It is as if the matter were too serious to ask the locals their opinion.

As presented in the WP6 report, 16 case studies are considered to be “top-down” initiatives and 6 are regarded as “enabling bottom-up” out of a total of 33 case studies, although all are about local development (**D6.4**, p. 25). More than an empirical faux-pas, it seems to us (from a WP7 perspective) that this simply represents the situation of who still controls local development initiatives, whose ideas come to reality as projects big enough to justify European research on them. And the answer is quite clear: most of the time, those are nationally/regionally initiated (or to put it differently: top-down) projects. As pointed out, by researchers such as Renaud Epstein (in the French context, 2015) and Cyril Blondel (in the Croatian and the Serbian context, 2016), states retain the government of local development. Even though this latter is increasingly remote/indirect, most of the

decision-making stays in state hands, in particular when it comes to who is legitimised to establish a relatively big project.

All this seems quite banal in policymaking nowadays. But by looking now at some exceptions, we will show that other, more “autonomous” ways of imagining and conceiving local development action do exist. They just appear to be less common (in the RELOCAL corpus and in general). The best RELOCAL counterexample might be the case study **DE2**. It focuses on a Youth Centre developed by the non-profit association Second Attempt in Görlitz, Germany. What is interesting to underline here is that “the idea for the Centre emerged during a youth protest in 2012, when young people organised a flash mob in the town council and demanded more involvement in local decision-making, particularly regarding youth, cultural, and urban development issues” (**DE2**, p. 2). In that case, and contrary to most of the other RELOCAL case studies, the first spark came from a group of young local inhabitants who came with a demand for more to be done for young people. But instead of waiting for a more classical institutional answer to their needs, in 2013 they created a platform for initiatives to empower “adolescents and other citizens of Görlitz in local decision-making processes through collaborative urban development”. Among them are an “annual music and culture festival, art and political education workshops, recording studios, urban gardening, and neighbourhood management” (*ibid.*). Their engagement and activism have been recognised and won awards nationally, to the extent that in 2019, the municipality of Görlitz “gave them the mandate to open a Centre for Youth and Socioculture in an old industrial building” (*ibid.*).

What we want to highlight here is that the initiative is autonomous in three ways: it is a local idea, held by a group of local people who have identified what they consider to be a local spatial injustice: the weak policy on youth in their locality, Görlitz. Thus, not only is the action locally embedded in the territory, based on local knowledge (the local youth perception of injustice), but it is also locally driven in the sense that a group of young local citizens has decided to build themselves a platform to fight a specific injustice. Only then did the municipality intervene by supporting the initiative financially (and politically). Our intention here is not to label **DE2** as a good practice, but just to see this experience as proof that a local initiative may emerge in a certain context, that the local population may be able to identify a problem, a need, an inequality or an injustice (and certainly being directly concerned by this injustice helps). And then, a group of local inhabitants may even work up an idea and implement it (without the support of upper levels in the initial phases). Albeit quite unusual (only 4 case studies in RELOCAL are labelled as genuinely bottom-up: **DE2**, **EL6**, **HU15**, **PL23**), such a locally autonomous idea exists in Europe. To what extent they produce a more consistent answer to fight distributive injustice is yet to be discussed in this report (and it will be in section 4.2). But the **DE2** case study already proves that the contribution of such forms of inclusion of the local population in taking action and making decisions is undeniably positive in terms of procedural justice:

“In terms of procedural justice, the organisation employs a bottom-up organisational structure, capacitating individuals to develop their own ideas and projects. They provide financial and conceptual support to small-scale activities, use place-based knowledge to democratically engage citizens in the rehabilitation of their neighbourhood, and lobby for the interests of youth and cultural actors on a regional and national level” (p. 30)

Before closing this section, we are going to say a few words on the evaluation process. What we observe is that no case studies mention a local population-based evaluation of the action under scrutiny. This is an aspect of RELOCAL that is limited by the fact that only 8 case studies out of 33 are “finished actions”, as the WP6 report indicates (**D6.4**, p. 12).

No evaluation by the inhabitants does not mean no evaluation at all. For instance, **PL24** mentions an internal evaluation of the action by the same institutionalised structure that implemented the action. If this structure does indeed integrate some local association of inhabitants<sup>15</sup>, the extent to which their advice represents the majority of the advice from the local population is not discussed. Although it is not specifically explained, **PL24** being a LEADER action, an external evaluation by the EU has probably been conducted too. But again, it is quite unlikely that it included an evaluation by the local population. In this report, the researchers relay the self-satisfactory representation of the participants in the programme, referring to local interviews they conducted: “All these investments into the public space of the villages would not be possible without the involvement of the inhabitants. It is exactly the inhabitants, and the local leaders among them, that constitute one of the most important elements of the entire process of village renewal” (p. 27). In the more critical case study **RO28**, it is noted that “the inhabitants of the locality have not been consulted, either during the design and the implementation of the project, or at the finalisation of the individual projects of PIDU” (p. 2). **RO27** researchers describe a very similar situation, where “the communities were not involved in the elaboration of the project; they were not consulted about what they would like to achieve, but only informed about what their possibilities were” (p. 24). In **RO25**, the authors are more direct, asserting that “the whole **project coordination** had a clearly *top-down structure*” (p. 15). If they notice that “a part of the population from Pata Rât was organised in the Community Association of Roma from Coastei, which [...] gave an opportunity for the locals to express their needs” (*ibid.*), they also highlight that, however, “the project only gave the Association the possibility to participate in a few contexts, and without representing the voice and the needs of the other communities from Pata Rât” (*ibid.*). For the purpose of this report, Eniko Vincze specifies that “the local population did not participate in the major project decisions but only in community development events where they were informed and consulted on technical matters” (WP7, 2020). In **RO28**, the authors explain this lack of interest for the vulnerable population targeted by the project by a “racialised perception of the inhabitants [that] persists among both the local population and the authorities” (p. 8); the researchers regret that “the poor inhabitants of the area, among which include Roma ethnics, are hardly represented at the local level, and their needs were not addressed in the action” (p. 1). Consequently, the urban regeneration plan elaborated was lacking “a deep and serious knowledge of the locality and its inhabitants” (p. 24).

Thus, what our colleagues of the Desire team underline seems to correspond to what we have observed ourselves in the context of the WP7 local workshop of **FR17**. The perceptions of (local) institutions (civil servants or political leaders) of their own action quite often differ from the perception of the majority of the local population. If inhabitants and local association leaders have expressed empathy with local institutions’ difficulties in implementing local development, they nevertheless have clearly expressed regrets on the lack of room given to their opinions in the policymaking and during its implementation. Some of the participants of the local workshops stated that local development initiatives supported by Euralens seem to have been chosen more on political and face-to-face criteria than on a fair selection.

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<sup>15</sup> Mainly (but not exclusively) representatives of the local associations, “such as volunteer fire departments or farmer housewives’ associations”, as Pamela Jeziorska-Biel, in charge of **PL24**, underlined for the purpose of this report (WP7, 2020).

This comes as quite an unsurprising result, though, if we take into consideration the civil servants' or political leaders' perception of local participation. We will see in the next part that this latter is still perceived as a political place to convince the local population of the validity and the legitimacy of the initiative they have led or with which they were associated. The evaluation time has the same political importance. It stays firmly in the hands of the institutional actors, which see no interest in opening the discussion about the action and its impact to criticism. It seems that the best way to control potential criticisms is to prevent them from being formulated.

#### 4.1.3. The local population during the implementation of the action: a recipient but still not a full subject

If the local population is often simply ignored during initial and final phases, its status during the implementation phase is more blurred. In most of the RELOCAL situations, the involvement of the local population is somehow made compulsory by national law. However, we will see that in most of the cases, it seems that the local population is more consulted than asked to fully participate.

Let us start with what seems to be one of the least favourable situations. **R028** researchers for instance describe such a situation in a district of Bucharest, Romania. Whereas the local population is "active" and trying "*ad hoc* initiatives to improve their lives", the local authorities receive such initiatives "negatively": "Even when people mobilise in the neighbourhood to pursue a common interest, they often met the closed doors of [the local authorities]" (p. 18).

In **R025**, the management team of the project deliberately decided not to include the local population, imposing a confidentiality agenda. The researchers quote a member of the staff asserting that "the lack of information on the website is a decision taken by the management team", which according to them, demonstrates "an anticipated fear of receiving criticism" (p. 18). Eniko Vincze specifies for the purpose of this report that "the project was conceived from the very beginning as a *good practice* and had the ambition to be promoted as such both locally and internationally" (WP7, 2020)<sup>16</sup>.

In **FR17** or **FR18** for instance, most of the decisions are taken by the civil servants on a day-to-day basis, which are regularly reported to the political body in charge of the institution (in the case of **FR17**, the leader of Euralens is the mayor of Lens). The population is consulted during the implementation phase, although not really as a potential contributor, but rather as recipients of an action about which most aspects have already been decided.

The same goes for **UK32**, which the author describes as "a very constrained version of local participation, where issues and options are predefined by council officers in consultation documents". Local community participation in the city project has been "confined to the initial planning consultation, ward councillor interactions with the local authority (...), ward councillor interactions with the local authority (...), and an on-site exercise by the Local Authority, to shape policies for the commercial use of the ground

<sup>16</sup> As established in other contexts dealing with European and international funds, the obsession for certain actors to be perceived as a "good performer" drives them to do the opposite of what the funders would wish (Blondel, 2016). Nevertheless, we do not want to enter into this debate here, as this is more broadly connected to the issue of the control of the action that we are going to address at the end of section 4.

floor of the building” (p. 23). None of this concerns strategic decisions in this project about modular housing for homeless and insecurely housed families in Lewisham, England.

The case of **SE30**, a local commission in Stockholm that largely failed to include inhabitants in the making of a local social sustainable development policy, is quite symptomatic of such a claim. One of the interviewees quoted –a long-term politician– state that “there are limited possibilities to question what the civil servants have done, as [they] have prepared the different plans and errands for decision in the Committee” (p. 21). The author of **SE30** discuss that in general in Stockholm: “the power of final decision makers seems to fall short in relation to civil servants” (pp. 21-22). In the case of the social sustainability commission, however, this was the intention and done so in order to get grounded-in-practice or ‘realistic’ suggestions (p. 21). Moreover, not only is the local population not really listened to by the civil servants in that context, but those latter are also not so much listened to by the (local) politicians: “I knew of these reports, but these district council politicians had never read them” (p. 22). Therefore, there are “obvious limits to the city’s capacity for organisational learning and getting all its units to work along the same strategy” as the author of **SE30** has stated to us for the purpose of this report (WP7, 2020).

In case of **DE1** the civil servants have tried to involve local people in order to adapt the action to the needs of individual villages in the first year of the project. Nevertheless, the authors of the **DE1** report also underline the same participation fatigue at the local level: “in some of the selected *SCS* villages, previous participation processes had been experienced as exhausting and long-lasting without clear returns in the form of tangible outcomes for the villages (...). Citizens are often asked for their opinions, yet their plans are not realised” (p. 21).

In the case of **FR18**, the report portrays quite a similar situation. Not only is the local population quite ignored, but so are local politicians, as the structure in charge of planning is state-led and most of the decisions are still very centrally decided. During a consultation session about the implementation of a new neighbourhood plan, the author observes that the EPA team together with the concerned mayor have spent “a large proportion of the public consultation meeting explaining 1) the rationale for the action (i.e. how many houses were envisaged) and 2) on which aspects the public was able to influence the process” (p. 28). And the author had to conclude: “this situation points out the limitations of structure like EPAs. Planning specialists are equipped with technical knowledge. Yet they are challenged to plan “with the people” (p. 24).

As for **SE30**, the **FR18** author describes a situation in which the local population seems frustrated: “the confusion on the room for manoeuvre left to the municipalities can create resentment both towards the municipality and the EPA” (*ibid.*). In this particular situation, it resulted in resistance by “a group of citizens in favour of revising the number of houses to be built, [using] flyers, petitions and social media” (p. 29). The local population appears to be willing to have a say in the action. They appear tired of being asked to participate as objects towards which the policy has been directed, and demand to be considered as active subjects.

In the case of the local authority reform in Volos (**EL5**), the authors asked themselves: “Did the reform strengthen greater participation in the decision-making of local social and economic groups and stakeholders?” And their answer is no. The first clarification is that here again, what they have observed is rather a (failed) attempt at consultation and not real participation.

To explain such a missed opportunity, they claim that “consultation and cooperation are not a well-embedded tradition” and that they are “undermined by aggressive behaviour, either on the part of the political personnel, or on the part of special interest groups” (p.

16). They point out in particular that they [the municipality] operate more with the mentality of a closed 'block' that includes the 'winners', but not the 'losers' or the ones outside the political game. As a result, a lot of the local knowledge is not used" (p. 18). All those results reinforce the analysis conducted in the report on the **FR17** case study. The author observes that "several civil servants and politicians complain about the participation processes that do not work: *Nobody comes; they do not understand what they are asked, and their answers are not appropriate* (P8, P22, P27, 2018)." (p. 23). But on the other side of the spectrum, as in **EL5**, most of the inhabitants interviewed assert that "their opinion would be neither valid nor valuable (H3, 2018)" (*ibid.*). Participation processes seem to happen only because they have been made compulsory by law. Mainly symbolic, they are part of a political process in which institutional stakeholders (civil servants and politicians) use them as convincing tools to justify a public policy about which all the essential points have already been decided, in the belief that they are the only ones legitimised and competent to do so. As noted in **FR17**, most of the decisions about the actions are "taken, in closed circles (...) reuniting only heads of services", but as one of the interviewees claims: "heads of services, 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)" (*ibid.*). And the conclusion of this part of the **FR17** report appears to be very close to that of **EL5**:

"This desire to stick to its own (institutional) kind in the way of making public policy is problematic because it produces projects that refuse to engage with people's aspirations. Firstly, because the public action is centred on policymakers and not on "policy receivers", it is much more adapted to the needs of the former than to the aspirations of the latter. In our context, this is for instance very visible through the multiplication of similar policies developed by local institutions that seek (1) to demonstrate their own success, (2) to justify their existence in a context of institutional reorganisation, (3) to prove the necessity of their jobs in the context of a fusion of services, and (4) to claim their political validity in a context of high political volatility" (p. 24).

If we reconnect here the discussion with the one conducted in the preceding section, we see quite prominently that the disconnection between the local development action and the local population before, during and after the action implementation takes different forms, varying between discrediting, oversight and symbolic manipulation. All those political strategies produce mainly frustration in the local population and tend to confirm that "decentralisation is not more democratic because it supposedly would make the political decision closer to the citizen or because it would mechanically enhance proximity" (Desage and Guéranger, 2018). Based on the observations made in the RELOCAL case studies, more locally driven forms of government of the (local development) action does not automatically produce more inclusive forms of participation in taking action and making decisions. Or to put it differently, RELOCAL local development actions seem to be weakly governed by the people. And this perceived procedural injustice may in certain cases cause more than frustration, e.g. resistance and even alternative local development, as the **DE2** case shows. As Desage and Guéranger (2018) put it: "new forms and new spaces of democracy already exist or emerge"; what still needs to be invented are new forms of government that better represent the plurality of the inhabitants of the territory concerned by the action and, in particular, better tools to fight the exclusion of the most vulnerable of them.

But more than being simply an issue of representation, this lack of autonomy also appears to be a possible explanation for the reproduction of spatial injustice in the territory observed, as we shall now explore in the next section.

## 4.2. Autonomy of the locality: government for the people and distributive justice

If we have concentrated our attention in the preceding section on the (weak) integration of the local population in the government of local development, we have said little so far about the local institutional organisation of the action. What are the local institutions' (technical, political, financial) capacities to act? How independent of upper levels are they? And what is their autonomy to act in relation to actual global structural trends (i.e. generalisation of neoliberal capitalism and its consequences)?

### 4.2.1. The rise of local autonomy (almost everywhere) in Europe

Let's start this section with a look at the 2016 Ladner *et al.* report on local autonomy measured by the so-called local autonomy index. From our perspective, it corresponds more to the second aspect of local autonomy (autonomy of the locality/government for the people), as it encompasses different dimensions such as vertical influence, and legal and financial autonomy of local authorities. This report is valuable because it is a recent comparative capture of the evolution of local autonomy in European countries. But as noted in **D6.4**, the limitation of such a quantitative state-based analysis is that it erases regional differences (for instance, not differentiating the specifics of autonomy in Scotland in the UK context).

What is significant from a WP7 perspective is, firstly, the common trend. Almost everywhere in Europe, local autonomy is portrayed as increasing between 1990 and 2014. Poland, Romania and the Netherlands are the countries where progress has been the most significant. Finland ranks first among the RELOCAL countries, followed by Sweden, Germany, Poland and France. On the other side of the spectrum, the UK, Hungary and Greece rank last. Only two countries in Europe show a decrease in autonomy (according to the autonomy index): Spain and Hungary.

The report demonstrates no possible grouping in relation to traditional (clichéd) East/West or North/South divides, nor any correspondence with the classification by welfare regimes in the RELOCAL project (**D6.4**, p. 23). What the reports describe is the decentralisation of competences and means from states to local authorities that Europe has faced for the last four decades. This movement has been already described by many researchers (see for instance Brenner, 2004). And it seems that the differences from one country to another are mostly explicable by national political debates. For instance, the particular situation of Spain's decrease in autonomy seems mostly connected to a state re-centralisation reaction to the desires for independence in the Basque country and in Catalonia. The Hungarian situation also seems highly political and may correspond to a broader re-centralisation of powers in the hands of the state under Orbán's rule.

What is also interesting from a WP7 perspective is how those large (national) trends relate to particular situations in each case study. The decrease in autonomy in the Hungarian context is for instance described and noticed in **HU13**:

“The centralisation process that had started in the early 2000s switched gears in 2010 with the coming to power of a new conservative/right-wing

government that began intensive centralisation in public policy-making by pulling administrative and executive functions away from local governments in all policy areas. Changes in the country's public administration and public policy system increased bureaucratic control mechanisms over local governments by the central state and decreased their room for manoeuvre in making autonomous decisions about public service provisions and local development" (p. 14).

And as noted in **HU16** (and **D6.4**), this re-centralisation has had a negative impact at the local level on the outcomes of the action under scrutiny.

While little is said about the sensitive issue of autonomy in the Spanish RELOCAL case studies, the authors of **UK32** underline that their case study is quite unusual for England, as Lewisham is "one of only four (of the standard 32) London Boroughs with an elected Mayor" and is part of a regional body, the Greater London Authority (GLA), while most regional governance bodies were dissolved in 2011/12 (p. 20). In that context, the Lewisham case study appears to be an exception to the rule, as local autonomy here seems quite high in comparison to the UK's low score on the autonomy index of Ladner *et al.*

On the opposite side of autonomisation, the two Finnish case studies are situations in which local institutions (and local civic organisations) seem to have enough room for manoeuvre to initiate an action. In **FI12**, the authors note that the initiative came from the civil society organisations, with the backing of the town of Kotka. Together they "decided to use the 'CLLD component' of the Finnish Structural Funds Operational Programme Priority 5, supported by ESF, to strengthen their co-operation for the benefit of disadvantaged groups of society in Kotka" (p. 17). Their main perception of the impact of the action on the autonomy of the locality is that "the independence of Kotka has been reinforced in terms of the utilisation of EU funding to launch a place-based action dealing with local social challenges the way they see fits best" (p. 21).

In **FI11**, the authors point out the 2015 appointment of a new, young and keen-to-reform mayor in Lieksa as the main variable to explain a new local dynamism. Quoting interviews, they assert that he "became a driving force behind and took leadership of the development, implementation and monitoring of the new City Strategy" (p. 14). It is interesting to observe here that the country in Europe where local autonomy is the most advanced according to the Ladner *et al.* index delivers, in RELOCAL, two case studies in which local actors have had the autonomy to imagine, lead and implement a local action. In between the ends of the autonomy spectrum, what the authors notice in the reports corresponds to what Ladner *et al.* have identified in their study, and it is somewhat reassuring. The general progress of autonomy is visible at the local level in most of the European countries, and not only in Finland.

Let us take for instance the case study **NL20**. This targets persisting "societal problems" in Rotterdam South, which gives the programme its name: *Nationaal Programma Rotterdam Zuid*, or NPRZ. If the initiative comes from the state (as its two main pillars, education and employment), and although the national government is indeed one member of the executive committee of the NPRZ, many other bodies (in particular local ones) are also represented: the municipality (Rotterdam's mayor), educational institutions, employers, health and care (wellbeing) organisations, housing associations and even representatives of the residents.

To that extent, case study **FR17** appears quite similar to **NL20**. If the initiative of the creation of Euralens also comes from above (in that case, the Pas-de-Calais region), its ambition is to relocalise the government of development, as an interviewee quoted in the report states: "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)" (p. 20). And the ones in charge of designing this new local strategy are a diverse group of (mainly local) people, including "not only politicians and civil servants but also civil society and private actors" (*ibid.*). All of the LEADER and CLLD actions identified by **D6.4** (p. 37) present the same kind of government of the action, characterised by a co-leadership of local institutions between municipalities, devolved and decentralised organisations and some local associations. It concerns both the actions that are directly financed by LEADER: **HU16, PL23, PL24, RO26, UK31**, and CLLD: **FI12**, but also those which have been in the past and kept a LEADER-style type of government, such as **ES7**, or constitute a model to be reproduced at the national level in other LEADER territories, such as **EL6**.

When we look more closely at good practices in relation to autonomy in the above-mentioned case studies, what is noticeable is that the capacity of localities to organise themselves seems to depend on the competence of their leaders. Those key competences are in particular their dynamism, their openness to including a plurality of actors formulating action and implementing it. All this seems to correspond to an evolution in leadership skills, that tends to become more proactive rather than peremptory/commanding. If we take again the supposedly ideal example of **FI11**, the researchers describe in detail how the new young mayor pays a great deal of attention to building support for the new agenda by strengthening his media presence "with frequent news bulletins and more activities on social media" (p. 17). One interviewee also mentions that "the city leadership even visits the smaller village events, which in my opinion creates a certain motivation, vigour and faith in the future of Lieksa, also for the taxpayer and everyone living here" (*ibid.*). And the local inhabitants are not the only target, as the researchers point out that "much effort was made to involve and include the views of a diversity of stakeholders representing various sectors in Lieksa" and this happened already "in the early phases of the strategy-making process" (*ibid.*). Those changes were perceived by the interviewees as "a positive novelty" that increases "the legitimacy of the town to implement the strategy" (*ibid.*)

Thus to sum it up, the legitimacy of local institutions to act appears to be embedded in proximity, openness and transparency. Nevertheless, as strongly expressed in the conclusion of the report, this quite positive change in how things are done in a municipal setting (in terms of implementing a more just government for the people) is related to a conjunction of local and non-local factors. In the case of Lieksa, the authors mention "socioeconomic and financial malaise, changes in the leadership and external pressures to transform" together with the embeddedness of the action in "the highly institutionalised system of Finnish local government guided by the principles laid down in the Finnish Local Government Act" (p. 30). This result relates to recent research on leadership in peripheral places, such as the doctoral thesis by Martiene Grootens on Estonia and the Netherlands (2019). She also insists that the local resources and the structural environments are "critical for place leadership to develop".

This being said, at first glance, someone looking at the situation of institutionalised local autonomy in Europe would conclude on a very positive note. Local autonomy is progressing (almost) everywhere. Everywhere, local (institutional) voices are part of the decision-making actions related to the development of all or part of their locality, in particular during the implementation phase.

#### 4.2.2. Incomplete decentralisation, rising responsibilities and limited means

Going beyond this initial overview, in this sub-section we shall see how those rising responsibilities given to the local population to endorse their own development have rarely come with financial means and, in some situations, without a clear mandate to act. But first, we will look more closely at the decentralisation process and its consequences on the conduct of action, in particular on the autonomy of the locality or, in other words, on the government for the people.

If we come back for instance to cases **FR17** and **NL20** mentioned in the preceding sub-sections, we saw that the involvement of local institutions in the imagination and the initial conception of the action is as weak as that of the local population. This underlines limitations in the decentralisation of the action, if the local institutions act more as a delegation of state services than as an autonomous entity, which would ideally be autonomous in conceiving and putting its thoughts into action. Our point here is not to disqualify state-initiated projects but to reflect on the unconsidered consequences of not involving the local actors in charge of the implementation of the action it had imagined. Involving them in the initial phases, i.e. in the way the project is put into words, in the choice of strategic objectives, might create a stronger local commitment to the project, but also reinforce the local stakeholders' legitimacy to act.

Let's take another example, **FR18**, to make our point clearer. Like **NL20**, it is a national strategic action, or to use official words of the French state, an "Operation of National Interest" (OIN). The EPA is a "unique [instrument] in the French planning system" that "take[s] back" planning responsibilities from local levels to plan urbanisation in areas considered to be strategic for the French state (in this case, the French-Luxembourg border, under great pressure for development) (p. 1). In the context of WP7, it appears to be a good counterexample of reduced local autonomy. The government of the EPA is quite strongly in the hands of the higher administrative levels, as the state holds 5 seats on the committee, as many as the region, and the two *départements* concerned hold 3 each, while the association of municipalities has only one seat (plus one advisory). The municipalities are, as an interviewee highlights it, "largely under-represented", even in comparison to other EPAs (p. 20). According to the author, this "imbalance between *having an interest* (for municipalities and inhabitants) in the action and *having a say* in the decision-making process creates misunderstandings at different levels that hamper the effectiveness of the action, especially in terms of procedural justice" (p. 20). This lack of legitimacy is exemplified by the creation of a local association of inhabitants that opposes the EPA's action. The central demand of this association, called "*Boulangeois solidaires*", is for "the municipality to keep control of its own development and the decisions that relate to it" (p. 24). Not only do they oppose the very first objective of the EPA, which is to "double the population of the area in about 20-30 years" but they also oppose the way such a change is governed, without the local level (them and the municipality) having a say and being able to "control" this change. This appears to be more than a NIMBY reaction: quite legitimate local demands seem to have been underestimated by the EPA. They are pointed out in particular by the local municipalities, that claim that such an increase in population is strongly impacting them financially in particular, because it requires them to build and operate new public services: "[the EPA] also brings us constraints. It obliges us to create a second school in Micheville, a high school. And then, what about leisure (for the new inhabitants)? What about restaurants, hotels? It is up to the municipalities to do something (...)" (p. 23). All this corresponds to a crystal-clear demand for more concrete

local autonomy. As the author notes in the report, the EPA is perceived “to focus mostly on its ambition” and not as a fair governing tool for the locality.

If **FR18** is clearly a counterexample in our report on autonomy, it is still a good reminder that decentralisation may be reversible. In many RELOCAL contexts, if decentralisation is not reversed, it is quite often not completed. The **RO28** researcher, for instance, makes this point clear. Her case is about an integrated Plan for Urban Development of the Plumbuita neighbourhood in Bucharest (that concerns in particular three lakes in this area). But who is in charge of the urban development of this neighbourhood, between the General Mayor of Bucharest (PMB) and the Mayoral Office of District 2 (PS2), remains vague:

“The decision-making capacity of PS2 is limited due to an unfinished decentralisation process, leaving unclear the distinction between the responsibilities of PMB and PS2. With limited territorial management capacity, PS2 does not own property but can only manage different public areas. PS2 collects local taxes but has a limited budget” (p. 15).

In other words, it is not clear which institution is responsible for what, since the city and the district authorities “spatially overlap” when they are developing an urban project in the public space, as the **RO28** case study exemplifies. Moreover, the vertical decision-making described by the author seems to indicate that in this case, the power stays in the higher-level hands, at the expense of a more localised government of the action in the district (*ibid.*). Ionna Vrabiescu has explained to us, for the purpose of this report, that: “the main culprit in this case (...) is the National Waters, authority that has no budget to manage the lakes, but insisted on maintaining full authority over these particular 3 lakes of Bucharest instead of shifting the authority to the General Mayor of Bucharest who could, in turn, leave the management to the District Mayor” (WP7, 2020). The result seems to be that an action has provided rather weak solutions to local problems from the population’s point of view, but has rather served the preconceived problems identified by the municipality: “the action ended up not serving the needs of the poorest, but implemented one programme that re-enforced their stigmatisation: the video surveillance system”, which does not contribute to delivering greater spatial justice (p. 26). Furthermore, this unclear governance, characterised in this case by the overlapping responsibilities of different authorities, seems to fuel the local population’s dissatisfaction towards its local institutions as “the perception of local population about PS2’s responsibility towards the district is bigger than its actual capacity for action (budget, decision-making, authority)” (p. 20).

In order to discuss **RO28**’s assertions, let’s go back now to **EL5**, which is precisely about the effect of a decentralisation-related administrative reform in Greece (the 2011 Kallikratis law). As outlined in the preceding section, the rationale of the law was to “decrease further the fragmentation and to reorganise the local government through a reduction in the number of its entities and the enterprises under its jurisdiction” (p. 12). The main achievement of the reform in the case of Volos is that, according to most of the interviewees, the reform “has concentrated resources and improved efficiency in managing the finances of the municipality or implementing projects” (p. 15). But the researchers highlight that some of the interviewees perceive the reform as an “unavoidable trade-off where efficiency of the city management increases at the expense of local autonomy, participation and democracy” (p. 18). If we set aside the questions of participation (which were dealt with in 4.1) and democracy (which are dealt with later in this section) to concentrate on what the authors call “local autonomy”, it seems that the reforms in Volos have produced results quite similar to those in Bucharest. The reform has

failed so far in “providing equally good services to the distanced and remote communities” (p. 15). The merger of 9 former municipalities in one and the concentration of the public services in the central city of Volos has, unsurprisingly, led to a decrease in the quality of service in smaller remote areas or villages in comparison to the urban area (p. 16). On that aspect, the authors of the **Romania national report** claim that the decentralisation process should also be analysed as a factor increasing uneven development in the country. As Eniko Vincze stated for the purpose of this report:

“Since development is left reliant on the capacity of different territories to attract capital for investments and/or on the capacity of the local state or non-state actors to “absorb EU funds”, the challenges of infrastructural underdevelopment or of the different manifestations of socio-spatial injustice are addressed to the extent to which the local actors are competitive on the market, including the market of the projects sustained by EU, Norwegian or other types of funds” (WP7, 2020).

As for **RO28**, the neoliberal understanding of local autonomy reforms does not produce greater distributive justice, as it is conducted at the expense of the smaller levels of government (districts, villages) considered to be less valuable in comparison to urban areas and metropolises in a competitive world.

#### **4.2.3. The Janus-faced local association and NGOs in local development: a delegation of the action often synonymous with embeddedness and opacity**

For the last part of this section, we would like to focus on one specific phenomenon that we have observed in several RELOCAL case studies, namely the renewed intermediation role played by local associations and NGOs in local development. Facing rising responsibilities and having limited means (as we showed in the preceding sub-section), local institutions are not only involving local associations, but sometimes making them the (delegated) leader of the action.

Let’s start for instance with the “ideal” case study of 4.1, **DE2**. As set out in the preceding section, the case study is about a non-profit association named *Second Attempt* for the promotion and integration of youth culture in Görlitz, Germany. In 2012, a group of young inhabitants of the town started to protest in “reaction to the socioeconomic situation” pushing “young people [to leave] the town” as a result of a lack of prospects for the future (p. 2). They were demanding “more involvement in local decision-making, particularly regarding youth, cultural, and urban development issues” (*ibid.*). If the association already existed before the protest (since 2003), it “provided a platform and support to the protesting students and thus expanded its activities after 2012”, as Viktoria Kamuf, one of the author of **DE2** specified for the purpose of this report (WP7, 2020). At first they developed their activities in those precise domains outside of the town’s bosom, but they quickly received support from the municipality (*ibid.*). Their dynamism in the particular context of a post-GDR space and time also rapidly attracted attention (and support) “from the region, the state and – in relation to singular projects – the ESF” (*ibid.*). Between 2013 and 2016, they even became “the model case in the research project *Youth.City.Laboratory* (in German: *Jugend.Stadt.Labor*) of the BBSR, “a research institute advising the Federal State Ministry dealing with spatial development issues” (p. 3).

The association thus having demonstrated its competency, its legitimacy, or in the authors’ words its high professionalism over the course of years (p. 26): “they were able to take over tasks the municipality itself could not fulfil: the acquisition of supra-regional funds

targeting youth and cultural activities and the mobilisation of parts of the citizenry that have so far been neglected by decision-making processes” (p. 30), to the extent that the municipality “has [in 2019] given them the mandate to open a Centre for Youth and Socioculture” (*ibid.*). The association has been given the “freedom to develop the contents of the Centre and to take over responsibility and engage in public affairs” (p. 26). The authors see in this move an acknowledgement that “the association can raise resources (such as local youth engagement, secure funding from outside, etc.) which the municipal government could not” (*ibid.*). One could describe such a process as the municipality outsourcing/subcontracting one of its competencies, namely local (cultural, social, economic) youth life to a local NGO. It constitutes somehow what we qualified as a bottom-up outsourced action (although this sounds a bit like an oxymoron).

This process is far from being isolated in Europe. **HU13** is a case that allows more in-depth examination of the point we are trying to make here. The case study is about the implementation of the programme *Give Kids a Chance* in the district of Encs (Hungary), in which the general approach combines “the reduction of child poverty with the eradication of poverty among families, ending segregation and ensuring a healthy childhood that supports expansion of children’s capabilities” (p. 1). To do so, the programme components target “early childhood [0-5 years] education such as after-school tutorials, complex family support” and “capability expansion services, such as community houses and special developmental in-school classes, second-chance programmes” as well as “employment, health screening and housing programmes” (p. 18).

In terms of context, as in **DE2**, the concerned district in **HU13** is one of the “traditionally disadvantaged micro-regions (...) of the country” that combines “spatial, social and ethnic exclusion (...) with very high unemployment rates and low levels of educational attainment” (*ibid.*). The authors highlight in particular that services “are mostly supplied in the district centre but not in villages” (*ibid.*).

When it comes to the government of the action, the **HU13** case study differs from **DE2** but still illustrates the rising role of NGOs in Europe. The Encs district *Give Kids a Chance* micro-regional programme is one of 31 in Hungary (for the 2017-2022 period), mainly funded and supported by the European Social Fund and the National Development Plan (p. 17). It is interesting to note that it follows a successful pilot project launched in Szécsény in 2006 “financed by the Norwegian Fund and managed by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) Programme Office to Combat Child Poverty in cooperation with the Prime Minister’s Office”. As with **DE2**, in **HU13** researchers and the national government are involved from the very beginning of the project.

The coordination of the micro-regional programme *per se* takes place on two parallel platforms. On the one side, the *Give Kids a Chance* local office team organises “thematic workshops for local stakeholders, including mayors, nurses who visit homes, kindergarten teachers, primary school teachers, social workers from the Family and Child Welfare Services, special education needs teachers from the Education Services” (p. 19). On the other side, the Order of Malta (the Christian international NGO) was given the state mandate to mentor the micro-region of Encs, with the academic support of a research team of the HAS. During the design phase, this mentoring includes “the facilitation of local planning through participatory events to assess local needs and the adaptation of micro-regional needs to overall programme components”. During the implementation phase, it includes the provision of “professional and methodological support for local implementers”, and “quality control and if necessary, help[ing] the operative staff in micro-regions in administrative affairs” (*ibid.*). More concretely, it means that they “visited settlements in order to assess the conditions of public services in small settlements and collected local needs from institutional actors and the public” (*ibid.*).

The role of the municipalities in the **HU13** context seems a little stronger in comparison to the **DE2** case study. Indeed, the *Give Kids a Chance* local office is a micro-regional association composed of local government (volunteer) members. As Judit Keller, one of the researchers in charge of **HU13** analysis, has explained to us for the purpose of this report, “micro-regional associations have been established to maintain public services in a joint fashion by member local governments” (WP7, 2020). This is, according to her, “especially important for smaller settlements as it is too expensive for them to maintain all the services they are entitled to maintain (e.g.: social care)” (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, the control (what is more politely called in the case study the “mentoring”) of the action is also delegated to an NGO, here the Order of Malta. In comparison to **DE2**, only control of the action is outsourced in **HU13** and this delegation cannot be qualified as bottom-up, but rather as top-down, as the Order of Malta obtained this commission from the national state.

Without entering as extensively into details, several case studies present similar (yet not exactly identical) governments of the action. In **HU14**, the above-mentioned NGO the Order of Malta, shortened here to Málta, plays a different role. In this case study, the action was “a series of development projects between 2011 and 2016, which targeted two adjacent disadvantaged neighbourhoods of Pécs (György-telep and Hősök tere)”, Hungary (p. 14). More concretely, the authors indicate that “90 low-comfort social housing units were renovated, three community houses were established, various social services were provided” with the support of ERDF (*ibid.*). In the report, Málta is successively qualified as “broker”, “turntable” (p.15) and “shadow municipal [body]” (p. 16). Its role is depicted as the one of “an NGO bridging the local realities with the realities of the project world” (p.15), as one of the interviewees summed up:

“There was the project which required this, and required that, so both the municipality and the residents had to take part in it. And there was Málta, which could take the lead in opening up something like a communication channel, which connects all these actors in a way, that besides a necessary relation they can even look at each other in a human way.” (*ibid.*)

According to Tünde Virag (responding to this report), the role and the position of Málta in the two case studies are “fundamentally different”:

“In **HU13** Málta is a national coordinator and mentor of the project, and tries to constrain the room for manoeuvre of the local office (the micro-regional association). In **HU14**, the local group of Málta is embedded in the local society, having implemented various development programmes in the last ten years. The social workers of Málta in Pécs have deep local knowledge and they can mobilise and use it in the implementation of the programme. The local groups of Málta also benefit from the strong institutional (and political) background provided by the national level of the organisation of Málta” (WP7, 2020).

This intermediation role, or “turntable position” in the **HU14** authors’ words, is seen as beneficial by the municipality: “the demanding *burden* of staying in touch with *problematic* families is taken off them” (p. 17). From the residents’ perspective, it “can also mean a relief, since they are guided and helped through the bureaucratic labyrinth of administrative issues” (*ibid.*). From the point of view of the authors, Málta’s “clear ambition to expand its authority (...) has met the central government’s strategy to outsource social service provision – and in general the *management* of marginalised communities – to non-governmental, church-related or religious organisations” (*ibid.*). In a crystal-clear manner, the authors describe a third type of intermediary role played in local

development by NGOs: a top-down outsourcing (the decision comes from the state and does not emerge as resistance from the locality) of the whole action (and not only of the control of the action).

The **FR17** case study we want to expand on here is about *Euralens*, a non-profit organisation, which can be classified, like *Málta* (**HU13**, **HU14**) and like *Second Attempt* (**DE2**), as a third sector organisation from a legal perspective<sup>17</sup>. However, in this case, the role of each actor in the government of the action is more a local public-civil mix, as *Euralens* presents itself as a “forum of actors in the Pas-de-Calais mining basin” (p. 16), gathering representatives of the “local authorities, but also (...) institutional stakeholders at different levels, civil society and private actors” (p. 1). Its president is the mayor of Lens, one of the main towns making up the territory of the 650,000 inhabitants that the association covers. The author emphasises that *Euralens*’s main originality is “its very nature: not being an institution *per se*, it has no direct power of decision-making” (p. 16). Nevertheless, with the support of two Project Management Assistants (in French: *Assistance à Maitrise d’Ouvrage*), *Euralens* produces strategic documents on the basis of recommendations formulated by external experts and of material collected through local actors’ forums. The concerned areas are all local public competences: energy, health, culture, tourism, economy and education or urban planning. They are all addressed from the local perspective. Besides this local expertise, *Euralens* has set up “a local initiatives labelling process” which 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” (p. 17). The principle is quite simple. Any local initiative holder can voluntarily apply for the *Euralens* label. If its activity complies with *Euralens*’ (main) objectives listed above, the local initiative holder is selected. He/she signs “a support agreement with *Euralens*, through which they commit themselves to respecting these objectives; in exchange, they benefit from the administrative support and the visibility conferred by *Euralens*” (*ibid.*) To that extent, **FR17** is a case closer to **HU13**, as *Euralens*’ role in the Pas-de-Calais mining basin has some aspects in common with *Málta* in Encs. None of the associations are acting directly on the territory. They concentrate more on building and/or reinforcing horizontal networks between local stakeholders. They also check and assess whether the initiatives implemented by other local stakeholders (which include small associations) correspond to their strategic perception of the development of the territory. Nevertheless, the initiative is closer to a bottom-up process (the idea of *Euralens* comes from the region, its leader is a local mayor and its members are mostly local stakeholders). It thus constitutes the fourth situation of our model: a bottom-up outsourcing of the control of the action(s).

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<sup>17</sup> It is important here to underline that we certainly do not want to equate *Euralens*’s, *Málta*’s and *Second Attempt*’s legal status, roles, financial means or objectives, but quite the opposite. Our aim is to present four different third sector actors that are, to a certain extent, a representative sample of the diversity of the RELOCAL situations.

Association / NGO role in the action  Association / NGO form of legitimacy and accountability	Conduct of the action	Control of the action
Bottom-up	<b>DE2</b>	<b>FR17</b>
Top-down	<b>HU14</b>	<b>HU13</b>

Table 4: Modelling of NGO intermediation in the relocalisation of action  
Realisation: UL

More than an attempt to model the NGO's mediation in the relocalisation of action, our intention here is to better grasp the different RELOCAL situations in order to be able to discuss the relationship between the evolving forms of autonomy of the locality and the reproduction of (and the fight against) spatial injustice. Or to put it more directly, what does the strong presence of NGOs and local associations of various sizes produce in terms of spatial justice?

First of all, it seems that most of the RELOCAL case studies mention a similar achievement. In **HU13**, the authors declare that the greatest impact of *Give Kids a Chance* defined by local stakeholders in Encs is “the re-strengthening of professional cooperation and networks” (p. 20). The local agents witnessed the “remobilisation of developmental networks”, which contributes to strengthening “the local institutional system of child welfare services through more permanent ties and cross-sectoral cooperation” (*ibid.*). The **FR17** report delivers a similar message, as its author reports having personally witnessed “a very significant level of work by Euralens to facilitate the communication and the cooperation between political and technical representatives of the different institutions” (p. 25). The authors underline that Euralens, “through the different committees that it established, is contributing to horizontal learning” (*ibid.*). In a similar vein, the **DE2** authors mention that the association *Second Attempt* not only develops its own projects but also welcomes “a number of autonomously organised activities taking place under the umbrella of the association” (p. 16). One interviewee quoted declares about the association: “It is really somehow the mother ship [...] with more experience, with a more developed structure, with a somewhat higher degree of possibilities, with a larger scale somehow” (*ibid.*). And to sum up, the authors say that those “autonomously organised projects can rely on the know-how and decision-making capacity of *Second Attempt*” (*ibid.*). Albeit with a slightly more critical tone, the **HU14** authors still emphasise the same kind of accomplishment: “Málta transformed the previous *chaotic* relation of the HD [Housing Department of the municipality of Pécs] and the residents of György-telep into a more stable relation of informal paternalism” (p. 16). Málta's role is described as “a proxy and translator between the municipality and the poor residents of György-telep [that] became inevitable” (*ibid.*).

Some case studies presented in 4.1 with similar forms of government of the action – by which we mean including NGOs and local associations in the conception and/or the implementation of the action – yield similar results. In the case of **FI12**, which is about the implementation of CLLD in Kotka (Finland), the authors also emphasise several times the positive role of the governance structure in supporting horizontal cooperation among the

different local stakeholders. The initiative provides “an additional platform for town to third sector and third sector to third sector collaboration” (p. 20). According to several of the interviewees quoted in the report, “without the action (or its continuation in a similar fashion), current activities and their impact would decline” (p. 19). The network is perceived as a stimulating support for “exchanging ideas and good practices between different third-sector organisations, including also some from the rural surroundings” (p. 22). The presence of several representatives of the municipal administration on its Urban Board is seen as a positive factor for third-sector actors, giving them “more opportunity to articulate their interests and viewpoints towards local decision-making bodies”, as well as providing “an avenue for a more direct access to information about governance processes, particularly related to their fields of interest” (*ibid.*).

But this portrait does not remain ideal, as limitations to this “new” form of governing the action are also pointed out. Staying with **FI12**, the authors underline that “the action has, at least so far, not resulted in new modes of governance and decision-making with and on higher levels of government” (p. 20). To put it differently, if the horizontal cooperation is improved, the vertical is not. They also note that the CLLD urban board seems to “focus on the day-to-day running and monitoring of the project and the creation of collaborative linkages between its members and third sector organisations rather than engaging in a more strategic discussion on what community-led development could be in Kotka” (*ibid.*). What the authors of **FI12** report seem to imply is twofold, and both aspects appear quite similar to points made by the **FR17** author. The first point that our UEF colleagues highlight is that the third-sector local knowledge is still not mobilised in the construction of a larger territorial strategy. In the **FR17** report, the author points out that “Euralens develops actions based on a sharp, place-based knowledge of institutional habits” (p. 26) but ignores another form of place-based knowledge that is the knowledge of the local associations and the inhabitants (p. 28). In the report, he asserted that Euralens has tried to integrate this knowledge into the making of a territorial strategy by integrating some of the local initiative holders into the organisation of forums (in particular the most recent ones about participation and youth). However, he also noticed that those latter are still not integrated into decision-making processes: “the democratisation of Euralens through its real opening to civil society and inhabitants is not simply a question of accountability and transparency (...). One may hypothesise that the public action works better by mobilising the social knowledge of the place of those who inhabit it” (*ibid.*). To that extent, and in a similar vein to **FI12** (and this is the second point of comparison), the author of **FR17** regrets that “if Euralens appears as a real tool for improving a more shared decision-making capacity, it does not seem to change the distribution of power and the mode of leadership so much” (p. 21). The author is even more assertive and sharp a bit further in the report:

“Our one-year observation of the functioning of Euralens on a daily basis tends to demonstrate that most of the decisions are still taken in close little political circles, in particular between heads of cabinet and heads of services, sometimes with the AMO [Project Management Assistant], and always in close relation to the politicians they serve. Rather than offering a clearly distinct practice of power, most of the time Euralens actually reproduces the old patterns. For instance, no local association or inhabitants’ representative is part of the quality circle, as if they could not produce expert knowledge on their own territory. (*ibid.*)”

It is important to underline here that the point we are trying to make here is different from the point we tried to make in 4.1. The issue is not simply the

representation of the local population in the government of the action (i.e. what we mean by government by the people). The issue is also about how the government of the action is beneficial to the locality and its inhabitants in terms of power-sharing. In other words, we affirm that the involvement of (in particular marginalised) inhabitants and of civil society organisations in taking action and making decisions would not only be a political symbol of inclusion but also a guarantee that actions, by including their local knowledge, would be more profitable to them. As in the **FR17** report, and it is important to underline it, we do not argue here that “the inhabitants or the association leaders would be more legitimate [or more accountable] than elected politicians or usually well-intentioned civil servants, but they would not be less so either” (*ibid.*).

This being said, the integration of civil society organisations in the decision-making process is not an achievement *per se*, as it definitely raises a democracy issue. To that extent, the **DE2** case study is an important contribution to the debate.

In **DE2**, the authors note that some among “political actors, the media, other civil associations, and parts of the citizenry [... challenge] the legitimacy of the action” (pp. 19-20). What is not justified, according to their point of view, is that:

“the municipality supports a Centre which will only address a minority of people instead of the citizenry as a whole (...). In their opinion, a professional assessment of demands should have been conducted by the municipality to legitimise the opening of a Centre that requires large amounts of funding.” (p. 20).

We note here that the local knowledge of the association is challenged in comparison to more classical expert knowledge. Reinforcing our preceding claim, and in response to that aspect, one may regret that the local civic knowledge is still yet not considered by a part of the (local) stakeholders as legitimate. We will come back on that question in the section 5. Nevertheless, we can already align our position with the one defended by Lowe, Phillipson, Proctor and Gkartzios “supporting a democratisation of knowledge” in the sense of a “more extensive and equal collaboration between “scientific, professional and non-professional sources of expertise” (2019, p. 36).

Another aspect of the criticism comes in particular from other local associations that criticise *Second Attempt's* too significant role in building a youth centre in Görlitz. They point out (and this is precisely what we want to discuss here) that the association is simultaneously the project manager and the main beneficiary of the project. To answer this criticism, the **DE2** authors indicate that *Second Attempt* took the initiative in 2016 “to organise open and chaired dialogue events to which mainly town council members and civil actors were invited” that resulted in new commitments and enhanced cooperation between civil actors of the city (p. 20). One of the authors of **DE2**, Viktoria Kamuf, specifies for the purpose of this report that it was the case in the context of *Second Attempt*: “the problem for the action is that while the municipality wants *Second Attempt* to serve the whole citizenry, other associations actually want to divide tasks so as not to create a “monopoly”. *Second Attempt* has to find a balance between these two demands” (WP7, 2020).

Nevertheless, it seems to us that this second aspect of the criticism is a bigger issue, questioning the conditions of a “just” outsourcing of local development actions to local associations and NGOs. This transfer of responsibility should not come without a certain guarantee that they would not use the action only or mainly for their own benefit. We have claimed previously that the involvement of those actors in designing action and taking decisions is a way of checking that local public authorities engage local development in the interests of the territory and its citizens. But conversely, we claim here that the delegation

of (some) public services to local associations and NGOs should come with obligations and commitments that they serve the “general interest” or the “common good” in the same way that local authorities are supposed to<sup>18</sup>.

The question one may ask based on the **DE2** case study is: who is controlling *Second Attempt*'s use of the public money? And maybe more importantly, who should be? Our point here is to leave this question open. This aspect probably needs stronger legislation to structure outsourcing to the third sector. More importantly, it probably requires a change in the way the control of the action is conceived and in the way its impact is measured. The **DE2** example proves that measuring the effects of the transfer of a service to a local association is not simple. Our general point is that outsourcing a service to a local association is not *per se* a guarantee that it would benefit the territory and at least a proportion of the inhabitants (in particular those who are marginalised). But immediately, this raises other questions we cannot answer here: what do we define as a benefit? How many (marginalised or not?) inhabitants should be impacted for the action to be considered as “successful”? According to which criteria? Nevertheless, we claim here that measuring the “benefits” for the local population, the “impact” on the development of a territory, requires much more than the actual quantitative remote control that most of the administrations perform. What we argue here is that public funding (in particular the most important, such as European and national funds) should not necessarily be subject to more control, but it should be controlled differently, including qualitative measures of the impact of an action, in order to better estimate its consequences on spatial justice. Since this is as yet an exploratory claim, this may start by first funding more qualitative social science research on how to do such a thing.

To make this point clearer, we now come to one last example, by mobilising again the **HU13** report. The authors also point out the potential slide that results from giving too much power to an NGO (in this case, Málta) while weakening the local public authorities' potential say in the action. The authors note that the room for manoeuvre of the local office of *Give Kids a Chance* is limited: “their actions were guided by striking a balance between local needs expressed by stakeholders, mandatory programme components defined at the level of the central state, and the recommendations of Málta compiled in the Micro-Regional Mirror” (p. 20). Wishing to withdraw itself from social care in a peripheral locality, the state has endowed Málta “with informal discretionary rights”, giving them “the mandate to approve or reject local decisions on micro-regional programme design, despite the original principle of the priority scheme being merely to facilitate decision-making among micro-regional actors based on collaborative platforms” (*ibid.*). This created tensions, as programme implementers and the local office “often felt that Málta directly influenced decisions on the basis of particular interests,” making recommendations they perceived as “unfounded” or “unjust” (*ibid.*).

The question of accountability for NGOs is especially prominent given that there is no direct democratic control of them. If their involvement in the government of the action

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<sup>18</sup> What we mean by general interest and common good differs from one cultural (and legal) context to another and would probably need a whole section to be fairly discussed. Nevertheless, to stay concise, our point of view is that the general interest is not necessarily the direct and immediate interest of the majority of the population. Taking again the **DE2** context as an example here, our point is not to call into question the public support for the young people of Görlitz because this latter does not represent the majority of the population. Our point of view is that the general interest may be interpreted as the support for a specific population, with specific needs, in particular if this specific group does not have the means to support itself.

appears to be carrying potential benefits described above in this section, it should not be considered as an end in itself. One may hypothesise that other forms of control would be required in order to be involved in the government of the action. To the civil democracy embodied by NGOs and local associations could be added the classical representative democracy represented towards public authorities and the direct democracy that citizens could exercise if they were involved in greater participation in the formulating action and making decisions.

All of this seems to demonstrate that a more spatially just government of the action for the (local) people calls for something that public authorities have increasing difficulty in delivering: a structural long-term commitment. Such a claim is also made in other contexts. During the local autonomy workshop conducted within **RO26** case study in September 2019, the representatives of the Local Action Group expressed their worries in regards to the autonomy of the action and possibly the action itself. The news of potential funding cuts cause them to claim that the whole institutional construction might be endangered (cf. **Annex 4.2**).

To make our point perfectly clear on this, we include a long (but highly necessary) quote from the **HU13** report:

“Structural constraints deriving from institutional incongruities, instability and disinvestment in child welfare policy instruments held back *Give Kids a Chance* in the district of Encs from permanently improving socio-spatial inequalities. Due to serious disinvestment of the Hungarian state in public education and child welfare policies[1], inefficiencies in service provision and delivery have been prevalent in the whole country, but especially in deprived localities with low human and financial capacities. The district of Encs has been struggling with the outmigration of its elite, especially teachers, child welfare and social care professionals for over a decade as a result of the tension between low prestige and low salaries of these occupations and mounting social and educational problems on the other hand. The scarcity of public service deliverers often paralysed the programme, while the programme elements that *Give Kids a Chance* introduced temporarily supplemented those missing services that the central state has resigned from providing. In this sense, the programme rather meant an oxygen tube for settlements in the district of Encs that temporarily resuscitated life into tragically weak child welfare services, but it came short of triggering more pervasive institutional changes dedicated to spatial justice. In the absence of a long-term and stable institutional and financial framework, the short time frame – 2.5 years – of the local *Give Kids a Chance* programme could only temporarily supplement missing services and institutions without permanently changing them. It is the permanence of parallel institutional and financial stability in the mainstream policy regime that can trigger long-term institutional changes” (p. 25).

Certain marginal and peripheral territories cannot simply be abandoned, as their very situation does not allow them to face their problems alone and requires distributive justice at a larger (national and continental and probably global) scale. Certain areas that used to be qualified as sovereign functions, such as education, health or urban planning, cannot simply be abandoned to the interests of the market. Otherwise, this would result in accentuating socio-spatial inequalities, as the interests of the market are rarely the interests of the weakest and the poorest.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1 Revisiting the relation between autonomy and spatial justice on the basis of RELOCAL theoretical and analytical material

Bringing autonomy of the action and autonomy of the locality together, what can we say about the right and capacity to enhance spatial justice in a locality? How can different degrees of regional autonomy affect the outcomes and future prospects of spatial justice as a cohesion objective? (GA, p. 23) Which aspects are essential for enhancing people's and locality's enablement as a means to spatial justice? In contrast, what are the limits of autonomy, what can it not achieve when it comes to tackling spatial injustice?

The previous section demonstrated contrasted approaches towards local development across Europe and contrasted outcomes in terms of spatial justice. Applied to the 33 case studies (section 4), WP7's relational understanding of autonomy (section 2) has allowed us to point out a systematic matter for consideration: i.e. empowering the local. In many cases –although the action might in the best-case scenario make a positive contribution to distributive justice– the local is, as a whole, hardly in a better situation to tackle spatial injustice on its own. And our results prove this comes mainly from the weak attention given to empowerment of local stakeholders, and in particular of local inhabitants, from the beginning to the end of the local development action. Or to put it differently, the autonomisation of local development is also a matter of bottom-up procedural justice. Let us recall Barca's definition of the "place-based approach": "giving people in places stuck in an under-development trap the power and the knowledge to expand their 'sustainable freedom' by improving their access to, and the quality of, essential services, and by promoting the opportunity to innovate, thus reducing economic, social and recognition inequalities" (Barca, 2019). Place-based development requires allowing the local to think, initiate, drive, evaluate and sustain its own development. This involves a wide range of measurable means (e.g. financial, legal, organisational), partly reflected by the LAI, but also non-measurable means (e.g. creativity, human resources), technical competences and more specifically the capacity of the locality to capture its specificities, its positioning within a broader context, thus allowing it to frame a specific territorial strategy. This process relates to the locality's capacity to conceive its own development and to articulate it in cooperation with formal and informal stakeholders. Many actions have referred to strategies or visions that have been developed (to a certain extent) *for* the locality, rather than strategies developed *by* localities, in cooperation with the local inhabitants, taking into consideration their "vernacular knowledge" (Bailleul, 2009; Deboulet and Nez, 2013; Lowe *et al.*, 2019). Lowe, Phillipson, Proctor and Gkartziotis describe this knowledge as place-generated: "expertise (...) is derived within the locale, through place generated experience and experimentation" (2019, p. 36). This nuance is crucial, as it shifts the perspective on notions such as responsibility, accountability, participation.

In connection with this, we suggest adding the notion of *vernacular/inhabitant knowledge* as an important dimension of the place knowledge when it comes to thinking of autonomy as a possible means to pursue spatial justice. This results from three main considerations. Firstly, questioning the development imperative (section 2.2.) requires thinking of development from the perspective of local needs. Questioning it from the perspective of spatial justice requires being attentive to spatial injustices. Even though a number of injustices might have common patterns in the EU, a place-specific approach seems appropriate to define adequate measures. This perspective seems promising to answer the question "what kind of local development and for whom?" (Pike *et al.*, 2012).

As a consequence of this, secondly, participation can be instrumental in channelling place knowledge. Academic literature has pointed out a number of limits to citizens' participation. For instance, it can be challenging for people to commit themselves to participatory processes and come together around a shared vision (Cochrane, 2004), and one should not underestimate the strong power relations that cross localities (Featherstone *et al.*, 2012). We understand participation as a way of fuelling actions of local development with place knowledge. As Bolton pointed out as early as 1992: "It is a matter of capturing a sense of place and adapting projects to it. (...) Sense of place is a sense of community and co-operation that is shaped by a particular geographical setting, including natural and built environment, culture and past history" (Bolton, 1992, p. 186). Sense of place is closely linked to the knowledge of place. Recognising the knowledge of place as a constitutive part of framing and implementing local development projects seems essential to providing a dedicated role to what usually falls under "inclusion of local residents and associations". Providing them with a dedicated role in sharing their experience and knowledge from the ground next to technical experts and political representatives could be more constructive than reducing them to an adversary / passive / recipient role into which they are usually locked. Indeed, knowledge of the practice (i.e. inhabitants) is complementary to technical knowledge (i.e. expert) (Flyvbjerg, 2001). This technical knowledge is another kind of expertise, "which is drawn from extra-local scientific, professional and regulatory knowledge" (Lowe *et al.*, 2019, p. 36). For this reason, it "must be adapted to specific contexts" and linked to the vernacular knowledge of the inhabitants.

Legitimising place knowledge and providing it with a dedicated role in the participation process would also benefit acknowledgement of the role and expertise of local communities that might otherwise be marginalised. Enabling and framing/channelling this participation should directly contribute to procedural justice and should contribute to providing communities with the means to conceive and articulate their own development path. As such, it contributes to the previous point – enabling the locality to conceive its *own* place/locality development. As a consequence, as suggested by Garnier (2011, referring to Lefebvre), participation "should be conceived as a must be, a permanent and perpetual intervention of the interested parties, i.e. they are, in fact, user-based committees with a permanent existence." This perspective also allows a clarification of who should be involved. Although this issue would require further consideration and probably more research, it seems from the RELOCAL case studies that those having an interest (i.e. in a locality's development, the action) and those holding place knowledge (i.e. by living or working in it) should be able to participate or to be represented in the decision-making processes designed to tackle specific spatial injustice or to design the locality's development strategy.

Thus, recognising place knowledge in complementarity to other forms of knowledge (e.g. expert, scientific) and giving it the *right* to be represented in decision-making processes through adequate participation processes would allow a rethinking/reframing of the notion of legitimacy of local development strategy.

Thirdly, as a consequence, this understanding of place knowledge that invites reconsideration of participation (i.e. not merely as an information process, but rather as a partner in the process) contributes effectively to feeding into the input legitimisation ("government by the people"). It reinforces the legitimacy of the decision-making process and therefore the output legitimisation ("government for the people"). Ultimately, (following Kaina's logic outlined in Section 2), this should contribute to reinforcing the democratic character of the decision-making process. Indeed, by involving people and

trusting their knowledge, the process fosters self-determination, thus also “giving responsibility” to the different stakeholders.

These considerations are certainly useful for thinking of autonomy in operational terms, to tackle spatial injustice in a specific locality. Yet, as we have seen earlier, the empirical material available has addressed to a lesser extent the impact of the actions on reducing inequalities between localities. In fact, several case studies have emphasised the need for localities to constantly feed networking and cooperation with neighbouring localities or localities facing similar specificities (**SE29, Spain national report**). In addition, and as a consequence, these considerations call for renewed thoughts on the role of (supra)-national frameworks (i.e. EU, OECD, World Bank). Numerous case studies have demonstrated that a number of top-down or even bottom-up initiatives are best able to tackle some aspects of spatial injustice. In many cases, the sources of injustice result from processes either anchored in natural or economic exploitation systems relying on injustice (**FR17, FR18, NL19, EL3**). It also often results from market liberalisation and austerity measures, and state withdrawal from the provision of public services or the impact of the financial crisis (**RO25, HU13, UK national report, Spain national report**), or even to unequal access to land ownership (**UK33**). In such cases, local development initiatives can “only” at best limit some negative impacts and contribute to rethinking local development. There, a more effective approach would require action from the national level or supranational level.

Therefore, when taken almost literally, a place-based approach can be instrumental in tackling spatial injustice since – as such – it entails an understanding of autonomy that enables people’s strategic thinking and its articulation with more classical forms of expertise. Together with the autonomy of the locality, it can help to address injustice. Yet if this direction is to be pursued, better articulation with complementary strategies to address inequalities at interregional and international levels seems necessary.

## 5.2. WP7 policy considerations

In this last section, our intention is to answer the research question specific to WP7: under which conditions can autonomy favour greater spatial justice? What is at the centre of our attention here is the capacity of the local to manage the production of space in a fairer way (DeFilippis, 1999). However, our intention is to do it in a way to prefigure policy considerations that would feed the WP9 report (**D9.5**, to come in July 2020). Based on our results, we have identified five sets of changes needed, in order to use *autonomisation* of the local action as a tool for greater spatial justice:

### 1. Implementing a more inclusive and balanced (internal/external) government of the local action

Including more, and *differently*, the local people (those carrying vernacular knowledge) interested in/by the actions, at each step including conception and evaluation, seems a prerequisite. This would help restore trust and dialogue between the external and internal stakeholders (professionals/inhabitants) concerned by and engaged in local development. Or to put it differently, representation of the different groups living and intervening in a place matters, not only to change the content of the action but also how this latter is locally perceived. This requires adding the idea of “legitimate interest into taking part” when reflecting upon enhancing spatial justice.

## 2. Adopting a (decolonial) approach to rethink the way (local) development itself is conceived

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The concept of development should be decolonised. It should no longer be considered as an intervention enacted upon peripheralised objects (territories, people) on which externally (“upper”) conceived “solutions” are elaborated by a disconnected elite that perceives itself as knowing better. Alternatively, we offer to reconceptualise development as a co-constructed process in which the way the local policy is (collectively and locally, with upper-level support) conceived is as important as the result that is targeted. This requires legitimising the notion of place-based/vernacular knowledge in complementarity to other forms of knowledge. It also requires accepting the need to take time and accepting failure in the beginning, as most of the stakeholders are stuck in this colonial/modern conception of development.

## 3. Adopting a more progressive way of imagining the objectives of the local action

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Most of the time, in the case studies under scrutiny, actions are more reactions to consequences of injustice than actions targeting the injustices itself. It is in particular the case in territories for which development models used to be based on the exploitation of natural resources. Whether the exploitation has stopped or not, the territory ends up in a situation in which it has to face the enormous long-term negative consequences of the exploitation without having the financial means to do so any longer. Hence, a more autonomous form of development may be one that takes greater consideration of the strengths of the present and imagines possible innovative assets for the future than one centred on the perpetuation of the illusion of a greater past (that one may perceive in the quite ineffective patrimonialisation of local development). This is connected to the change in the government of the action listed above, as this latter would result in the share of responsibilities that may also impact the sustainability of the action implemented under those new rules.

## 4. Re-articulating the local action with ambitious long-term public policy

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The most interesting RELOCAL actions (in terms of contribution to greater spatial justice) were often the ones the most embedded in place, often (and this is also connected to their embeddedness) initiated by NGOs and local associations. Nevertheless, those actions were also usually quite limited (short and poorly funded). Their (re-)articulation with an ambitious public policy is crucial. As most of the cases have proved, local action cannot replace an ambitious long-term public policy; it can only complement it by adapting it to the specific needs of each territory and to the needs of the most marginalised groups. For instance, several actions have demonstrated that digitalisation can be instrumental for rethinking public service provision (e.g. health, social, local economy) in rural and/or peripheral areas. For these actions to have greater impact, it is however necessary to fully reconsider their articulation with existing public services, in particular by paying attention to *how* they are delivered, to ensure they meet all peoples’ needs.

## 5. Reinjecting of trust, flexibility and social control to measure the impact of the action

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Most of the case studies reinforce the impression that international, EU and national funding of local actions is highly but poorly controlled. Administrative burdens for initiatives-holders are so important that they contribute to discourage local development. The project ideology described in Section 4.1 demonstrates that each step of the action needs to be entirely planned before it happens, costs anticipated, potential impact made quantitatively measurable. This administration of the action may be efficient for a big organisation such as a state or the European Commission for instance, but definitely does not correspond to small-size action at the local level. For this reason, we argue for more attention to be paid on the way the action ought to be governed (as expressed in points 1 and 2) and less to what the action is about. Or to put it differently, local development actions need more trust and flexibility from their funders in order to be adapted to the specificities of the territory and its inhabitants, but also to the imponderable surprises that any action encounters. It does not mean no control but a renewed control focused mainly on two aspects. The first one is the question of the general interest or the common good: to what extent is the action aimed at those latter, and not the initiative-holder's own benefit? Secondly, it calls for control to be less administrative, more social, and at the same time, to get closer to the locality. Concretely, it means that the "funds controller" (e.g. the EU civil servants) should probably be also decentralised for each programming period, in order to technically and socially guide the actions under its responsibility (**France national report**). It means also that the impact should be measured with more realistic qualitative indicators, defined and adapted externally and internally.

All those points define a rather ambitious political, fiscal and social path for local development to become more autonomous and fairer at the same time (GA, p160). But it seems to us that the context of rising nationalism everywhere in Europe requires such an ambition of democratisation, relocalisation and reinforcement of territorial development policy.

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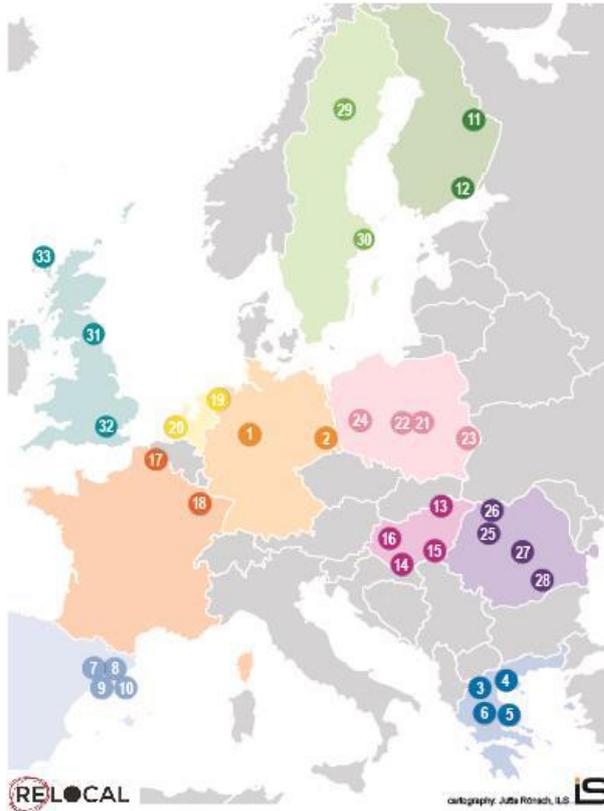
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## 8. Annexes

### Annex 1: The RELOCAL Case Studies



	action location	action name	
1	Ostwestfalen-Lippe Region	Smart Country Side	DE
2	Görlitz Town	Youth Centre	
3	Western Macedonia Region	Post-Mining Regional Strategy	EL
4	Thessaloniki Region	Alexander Innovation Zone	
5	Volos City	Overcoming Fragmentation	
6	Karditsa Region	Ecosystem of Collaboration	
7	Monistrol de Montserrat Town	Local Strategic Plan	
8	Neighbourhood of Premià de Dalt	Llei de Barris	ES
9	Neighbourhood of St Adrià de Besòs	La Mina Transformation Plan	
10	Eix Riera de Caldes Municipalities	Association of Municipalities	
11	Liekša Town	Liekša Development Strategy 2030	FI
12	Kotka Town	Activation of Youth	
13	Encs District	Give Kids a Chance	HU
14	György-telep, Neighbourhood of Pécs	Urban Regeneration	
15	Szentes Town and Szentes District	Producer Organisation	
16	Balaton Uplands	Balaton LEADER	
17	Pas-de-Calais Mining Basin	Euralens	FR
18	Lorraine-Luxembourg Border Region	EPA Alzette-Belval	
19	Northeast Groningen Region	Induced Earthquakes	NL
20	Neighbourhood of Rotterdam	Rotterdam South on Course	
21	Łódź City	Participatory Budget for Łódź	PL
22	Brezeziny Town	Social Cooperative	
23	Maslomecz Village	Goth Village	
24	Domachowo, Potarzyce, Stara Krobia Villages	Rural Public Spaces	
25	Neighbourhood of Cluj	Pata Cluj Project	
26	Maramures County	Mara-Natur LEADER	RO
27	Neighbourhood of Codlea	Mălin-Codlea Project	
28	Neighbourhood of Bucharest	Pfumbuita PIDU	
29	Västerbotten Region	Digital Västerbotten	SE
30	Stockholm City	Stockholm Commission	
31	Northumberland Uplands	NULAG LEADER	UK
32	Lewisham, Borough of London	Homelessness Project	
33	Isle of Lewis	Strengthening Communities	

Map 3: RELOCAL actions and case study locations.

Realisation: Weck *et al.*, 2020. [D.6.4](#)

## Annex 2: Guidelines for WP7 local workshops

Authors: Cyril Blondel & Estelle Evrard (UL); 2019

### Overall ambition and objectives of WP 7 local workshops

The main ambition of WP 7 is to explore several dimensions of the possible link between local autonomy and spatial justice. To this end, it deals in particular with the following research questions:

- How do communities/interest groups organise themselves in localities to address spatial injustice and push this issue on policy agendas?
- What do these autonomous actions spatially produce and do they “make a difference” in terms of spatial justice *in* localities and *in relation to* other scales?

In relation to WP4, we also question the influence of perceived spatial injustice in the mobilisation of local stakeholders. In relation to WP3, we in particular focus on the institutional mechanisms at the local level permitting and encouraging bottom-up initiatives.

The empirical work conducted in the framework of WP 6 will allow drawing preliminary conclusions on those two research questions. These conclusions will be documented in case study and national reports.

In complement to this and to go further, the University of Luxembourg oversees the organisation of local workshops in the framework of WP7. Those aim at specifying and narrowing down our first conclusions. We would like in particular to investigate **whether more autonomy for the action (power of initiative) and more autonomy of the locality (power of immunity) lead to more spatial justice (procedural and distributive)**. The workshops shall help **characterising the importance of the two main variables in achieving spatial justice, but also to elucidate how these influence each other**, i.e. how local initiatives interact with their respective institutional environment and to what extent the latter adapts to them. The objective is to focus on two main aspects:

- how locally driven initiatives emerge in a specific locality; i.e., from a bottom-up perspective, to what extent is the locality receptive to the expression of the needs of the local people and take them into consideration? To what extent does the locality support the locally driven action-making and adapt its own agenda to include them? To what extent is there a correlation between the anchorage of the locally driven initiative and the perceived needs to address spatial injustice?  
This aspect will be named in this document *the autonomy of the action* – usually described in the literature as the “power of initiative” (Clark, 1984), or the “government **by** the people” (Scharpf, 1999; Ladner et al., 2016);
- how autonomous is the locality to address the local development of the territory under its jurisdiction? In particular, to what extent the local institution(s) is/are (legally, financially) in capacity to organise itself/themselves? What do the European / national / regional laws and norms allow in the specific case under scrutiny? To what extent are they (or not) translated and adapted by the locality to promote, launch and support initiatives of local development that seek to address spatial injustice? How do they (if they do) associate the inhabitants/citizens and, more broadly, the civil society to the decision-making?

This will be named in this document the *autonomy of the locality* – usually described in the literature as the “power of immunity”, or the government **for** the people (Scharpf, 1999; Ladner et al., 2016).

The ambition of this part of WP7 is both to refine empirical findings resulting from WP6, to ensure the robustness of the analytical results and to work on territorial governance models in relation with WP 9. The following set of considerations are at stake:

- As to the action: under which conditions local initiatives can best flourish in localities (e.g. more practical aspects to support local initiatives holders, their integration in the decision-making and their informal organisation)?
- What more symbolical forms of increased autonomy would allow empowering the action (e.g. trust, awareness of local specificity, recognition of know-how)?
- As to the locality: under which conditions can the locality best support local development (e.g. more formally in terms of legal/institutional capacity, financial and/or technical support and partnership)?
- On the contrary, would less autonomy and increased steering of the action and/or of the locality from upper levels increase spatial justice (using for instance distributive means)?
- More generally, how does the degree of autonomy conferred to the locality influence the situation of other localities in the same country?

WP 7 local workshops will make a direct contribution to the discussion on what autonomy means concretely in a specific locality. This shall help to defining whether the degree of autonomy can be put in relation with a better (distributive and/or procedural) spatial justice. Besides a direct contribution to WP 7, local workshops will contribute to the reflection on which local governance measures can best tackle spatial injustice.

### **Operationalisation of WP 7 local workshops**

**WP 7 local workshops are meant to be local and reflexive.** They are organised by RELOCAL partners in the continuation of the fieldwork undertaken in one particular case study (WP 6). They will cover the different welfare regimes as identified in the project: society-based (Finland, Sweden), liberal (UK); State-based (Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands); familial (Spain, Greece) and mixture of models (Hungary and Poland). This means that at least one workshop will be organized in each welfare-regime, but not necessarily in all 33 case studies. The research team are ought to invite a small number of local stakeholders directly interested in the action under scrutiny - be it “successful” or not - to reflect on the impact of “autonomy” on the conditions of emergence, success and/or failure of initiatives in the specific context of the locality.

**The following sections are *indicative* guidelines for the organisation of the workshops.**

#### **Three groups of participants**

Group 1: actors in charge of locally driven initiative(s) in the context of the action *in* the locality;

Group 2: institutional actors that try to encourage the development of locally driven initiatives through the action *in* the locality;

Group 3: other actors supporting locally driven initiatives in the same territory but in the context of another action/policy, or from another territory and another organization action (i.e. it can be another RELOCAL case studies in the same country).

**The three groups of participants come into the discussion. They exchange their respective experience on locally driven action and potential for change.**

**Group 1 perspective:** the experience of initiating a locally led development action and its reception when trying to reach institutional support.

State of the art: What did facilitate and what did not facilitate the emergence of the action? Were the technical, administrative, financial (and other kind of) support sufficient? If not, how could it be improved? To what extent their voice and their advice were listened to and their opinion taken into account by the institutions? To what extent are locally driven initiatives and their holders integrated in the decision-process of the locality, and in particular about the local development plan? Do they have the impression to make a difference? On what?

Potential for change: What may be improved? What was important and worked well?

**Group 2 perspective:** the point of view of the institutional actor in charge of promoting locally driven development in the locality

State of the art: To what extent do institutions integrate locally driven initiatives? Why? What difficulties do they face? What seems to work well? Is it a local political will? Do they have institutional support coming from upper levels or external state or private agencies? Do they have enough financial and technical capacity?

Potential for change: What is it possible to make better and how, what can't be changed and why?

**Group 3 perspective:** the opinion of externals, participating to parallel initiatives in favour of local development in the context of another action/policy, or from another territory and another organization action

Specificities of the locality and of the actors from that locality: What seems to facilitate locally led initiatives in the case study? What does not? What comes from the (high/low) capacity of the local institution (legal, financial)? What comes to the local procedural organisation between the local initiatives' holders and the locality institutional environment?

Potential for change: How can it be improved according to your own experience? How to maximize complementarity between different processes?

### Method and format

University of Luxembourg (UL) ran an exploratory workshop in the case study Euralens (4<sup>th</sup> April 2019). More detailed advice on the practicalities was provided via email and on the RELOCAL platform on April 16<sup>th</sup> (document "Operationalising WP7 Guidelines: experience from the Euralens Workshop"). In general, however, RELOCAL partners conducting a local workshop are in the position to define the best format and methods to be used, based on the specificities of the case studies. Here are indicative guidelines:

Possible methodologies: role-play games, World Café etc.

Format: Half day / one day workshop

### **Where to conduct the local workshops?**

Overall, the intention is to have a balance both in geographic terms and in respect to the welfare regimes represented in RELOCAL:

- Liberal (UK)
- State based (NL, LU, FR, DE)
- Society-based (SE, FI)
- Family based (EL, ES)
- Mixture of models (HU, PO, RO)

In total, 5 local workshops need to be conducted for WP7.

### **Expenses**

The budget forecast allows the organisation of a half day workshop in each partner's budget for the purpose of WP 7. Any special need should be discussed with UEF and UL. Also, at least one person-month on WP 7 is foreseen for each RELOCAL partner.

### **Timeline**

**20th February 2019:** RELOCAL partners inform UL on their willingness to run a workshop.

**6-7th March 2019, Łódź:** The final list of local workshops is agreed among RELOCAL partners.

Local workshops are conducted in:

- Highlands and Islands region (UK), (Strengthening communities action)
- Nord-Pas de Calais region (FR), (Euralens action)
- Västerbotten region (SE), (Digital Västerbotten action)
- Western Macedonia region, Thessaloniki region, Volos city and Karditsa region (EL), (all four actions)
- Romania, (Micro-Regional Association Mara-Natur)

**4th April 2019:** UL runs the first local workshop in case study Euralens

**16th April 2019:** UL sends complementary methodological advice to RELOCAL partners running a workshop (document "Operationalising WP7 Guidelines: experience from the Euralens Workshop" available on RELOCAL platform).

**May-Early September:** WP7 local workshops are conducted.

**12th August:** UL sends draft final version of the Guidelines for WP7 local workshop

**30th September (latest):** RELOCAL partners running a workshop deliver their 5 pages synthesis document to University of Luxembourg as well as the names of one or two participants that would join the final WP7 workshop in Brussels (see section 4).

**January 2020:** University of Luxembourg submits D 7.1. "Empirical findings from case studies on regional autonomy and spatial justice".

**February-March 2020:** University of Luxembourg runs the WP7 discussion workshop in Brussels (see section 4). Organisational details will be provided to RELOCAL partners running a workshop early Autumn 2019.

### **Expected outcomes and follow-up**

**For local stakeholders:** in attending the workshop, participants are in capacity to discuss concrete measures allowing governance to better address spatial injustice from the local.

**For RELOCAL partners.** Depending on the action under scrutiny in the case study, organising a local workshop under WP 7 can be a good opportunity to deepen the empirical work, crossing perspectives between several case studies.

**For WP 7:** RELOCAL teams conducting a WP 7 local workshop are invited to provide a synthesis of the main results (answering questions under A) to WP 7 leader (UL) in form of a **5 pages document**. They are also invited to think of one or two participants who could join the final WP 7 discussion workshop in Brussels dedicated to autonomy and spatial justice. Travel costs for participants will be covered by the project budget, they however will have to be discussed with UEF and UL prior travel arrangements are made. This workshop will gather stakeholders from some RELOCAL case studies and policy makers from various EU-related institutions involved in local development and cohesion policy. This final “empirical step” aims at refining findings from WP7.

### **Guidance for the 5 pages synthesis document**

A synthesis of the main results in form of a 5-8 pages document (answering questions under A) is due by 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019. This document should be structured as follows:

#### **Objectives of the local workshop (one page)**

First, based upon the outcomes of the case study report (WP6), address the following aspects:

- What works in the current situation

Which elements relating to autonomy of the action allow achieving greater spatial justice?  
Which elements relating to autonomy of the locality allow achieving greater spatial justice?

*EXAMPLE (we put here an illustration of what kind of information is expected on the basis of the local workshop conducted in Euralens.*

*(Euralens example): the structure itself includes civil society (private actors, associations) in the general assembly. The flexibility of Euralens is also a positive aspect as it allows Euralens to integrate actors according to needs and to define its own agenda.*

- What does not work in the current situation, on what aspects relating to autonomy should stakeholders work to achieve greater spatial justice:

Which elements related to autonomy of the action would allow achieving greater spatial justice?

Which elements related to autonomy of the locality would allow achieving greater spatial justice?

*(Euralens example): A fairer and more consistent opening to local communities, association and inhabitants, but also a greater representation of the components of local society inside the decision-making (to renew the very weak trust of inhabitants in their local institutions). Since the locality faces a dramatic situation (i.e. poverty, unemployment, low level of education), all that cannot be achieved without the clear and continuous support of upper-level of governments and their financial support (i.e. Hauts de France region, French state, Europe)*

Then, based upon the latter two aspects, outline the objectives of the workshop considering the following aspects:

### What are the objectives of the workshop?

*(Euralens example):* Procedural side: On participation, one objective was to discuss & test ways to better associate informal stakeholders (local communities, local associations, inhabitants) inside the decision-making at every step of the action (i.e. conception, implementation, evaluation). Another one was to prove the legitimacy of such actors to participate to the decision-making. The format of the local workshop (i.e. one-day open parliament) aimed at demonstrating the value of their contribution in the decision-making. Oppositely, by being transparent on the decision-making towards those usually not associated, the workshops aimed at demonstrating them the complexity to take decision for the common good. The objective was also to find balanced (between different interests) measures for implementing local development policy.

### What framework have you set-up to achieve these objectives?

*(Euralens example):* Genuine – tailor made workshop organised in partnership with Euralens (in a spirit of trust and independence in setting up the workshop). The framework does what the results of the analysis suggests: put formal and informal stakeholders with equal rights and access to decision making. This is facilitated by a neutral moderator external to the region.

### Results of the workshop (2 pages)

- To achieve greater spatial justice, on which autonomy related aspects should the action or the locality focus? On which aspects did the stakeholders agreed, which aspects remain contentious among stakeholders?

*(Euralens example):*

*Stakeholders agreed on the following:*

#### **Autonomy of the action**

- Decision making should be made more transparent, including on who sits on the decision-making table
- Access to the decisions should be available for all (not only somewhere on the website)
- To be legitimate, the decision-making process should not only involve elected representatives (legitimacy through democratic election), members of the Euralens association (i.e. technical expertise), experts from outside (i.e. scientific expertise), it should associate more broadly “place knowledge” (i.e. representatives of the inhabitants).
- People involved in the decision-making process should be regularly renewed and made accountability for their decision.

#### **Autonomy of the locality**

- A more consistent and long-standing support from the State is needed,
- In general, a better definition of the relation of the locality with the upper scales needs to be elaborated
- More coordination between institutions at the level of the locality is required in order to lessen competition. Possible mergers have been discussed but no agreement could be reached.

- How operational was the selected format? (Do not hesitate to be reflexive!)

*(Euralens example):* Very effective framework:

- Independent & professional moderation is key.
- Upon registration, people were invited to commit themselves to participate for the half day workshop. People did stay for the entire workshop.
- It was decided not to invite political representatives to facilitate the dialogue between participants.
- Representatives of the 3 groups categories defined page 5 have been invited and participates to the workshop. The availability and the commitment of main fieldwork actors (not only institutional, but also civil society and inhabitants) is the key. We have made sure that the voices of the civil society and the inhabitants will be listened to. We had direct exchange with them (i.e. phone) prior the WP7 workshop.
- The rules for the organisation of the workshop (i.e. how to take the floor, how long one can speak) have been discussed and agreed with and between the participants at the beginning of the workshop to ensure “ownership” and commitment of the participants. This was called “constituent assembly” in the agenda. The assembly was then responsible for defining and implementing the rules of the game together with the moderator. This ensured horizontal discussion between the participants. Several rules were elaborated for nobody to monopolise the discussion (e.g. listening and asking the permission to have a say). Institutional actors had been briefed prior the workshop through informal talks to listen more than usual. All this worked very well in the end.

### Results of your analysis on autonomy in the locality (2 pages)

- Going back to the results of your case studies, are there some autonomy related elements that the workshop allowed you to specify, understand differently? For example, in terms of how the action is initiated, implemented and then used. And, for example about the characteristics of the autonomy in the locality and its capacity to adapt).
- How does the autonomy of the action shape the autonomy of the locality and vice versa?
- In the locality under consideration would more autonomy of the action or autonomy of the locality allow achieving greater spatial justice? If yes, specify which form of autonomy would be required? If no, specify which form of greater guidance from other levels of governance would be required?

*(Euralens example):* Not necessarily more autonomy for the locality would be necessary but better coordination between different levels of governance, more coherence and more consistency in the state interventions, more long-term visibility on the state’s programmes for support to local development (distributive side), more trust and respect from the upper levels of governance in the locality’s abilities. More attention of the local institution on the integration of inhabitants and associations inside the action (as partners, not simply as receivers but oppositely not as in charge of helping themselves either). Representation matters, transparency matters, legitimacy matters, in order to renew trust of the local population in the local institutions.

Less “doing” and more “doing with” and “doing for”. Support for local development needs to be thought with the locality and its population to be well implemented (procedural side).

## Annex 3: Operationalising WP7 Guidelines: experience from the Euralens workshop

Author: Cyril Blondel, Estelle Evrard (UL), 2019

### Introduction

This document is conceived as a support to complement the “*Guidelines for conducting local workshops*”. WP 7 local workshops rest on the results of the case study analysis while allowing to go beyond them on the specific aspect of autonomy. To do that, local workshops should be conceived in such a way that their design (i.e. agenda, organisation) allows stakeholders reflecting upon the most significant aspects of autonomy that the researchers have identified from the case study analysis. Stakeholders’ knowledge is understood as complementary to scientific knowledge.

Based on the experience made with the Euralens Case study, we suggest implementing the following steps to prepare a WP7 local workshop:

- A. Based on the main case study findings, identify on which aspects the locality could improve the autonomy of the action and the autonomy of the locality;
- B. Define a framework for the workshop allowing stakeholders to discuss and define possible avenues for increased spatial justice;
- C. Running the workshop;
- D. Document the results.

### A. From the Euralens Case Study findings to the formulation of aspects to focus on during the workshop

The Euralens case study analysis demonstrates that increased spatial justice could be achieved by working on specific aspects of autonomy:

1) From the abstract of the case study report (in grey), we highlight these **aspects of autonomy on which the workshop can concentrate** (in blue). 2) From there, we assess the research results in the light of WP7 Guidelines and formulate the key questions for the workshop (in orange):

#### 1) Euralens Case study abstract

##### Background

The Pas-de-Calais mining basin is a predominantly urban conurbation of approximately 650,000 inhabitants, situated in the North of France, about 35 km south of Lille and at a reasonable distance of Paris, London and Brussels. The territory have been facing since the end of the mining activity in the 1980s an alarming socio-economic situation, ranked last in France for most of the indicators.

Against this background, local and regional actors have created in 2009 a local association, Euralens, in order to use the implementation of the antenna of the Louvre in Lens as a catalyst for territorial development. **The association has today two main missions: to prepare and to facilitate the emergence of a metropolis institution; to foster local development by supporting innovative local initiatives through a label process.**

## Findings

Created in 2009 at the regional level, Euralens is neither a classical (in France) top-down state intervention nor a genuine bottom-up local initiative. The association has taken a rising importance in the organisation of the territory, favouring the cooperation between local authorities, but also between institutional stakeholders at different levels, the civil society and private actors. Doing so, it gives the Pas-de-Calais mining basin a clearer and louder voice. The recent creation of a specific state policy towards the Mining Basin is a good example of such an assertion and demonstrates the clear redistributive impact of Euralens for the benefit of the locality in the national space. On the question of the distribution of territorial engineering, another accomplishment of Euralens is its capacity to mobilise external national and international expertise to imagine, with local stakeholders, policies supporting social and territorial development.

## Outlook

However, the effort seems still insufficient over time. The enormous environmental impact of mining activity as well as the deep social impact of the collapse of this activity have let the territory dry. Albeit positive, the action of Euralens is relatively modest in comparison to the extent of the needs. At the social level in particular, the rebuilding of individuals trust is a long-term policy that deserves more attention. Too often, **Euralens disregards the social and the procedural dimensions of injustice**. It does not pay sufficient attention to the **integration of the civil society to the decision-making** in a time of democratic crisis. Yet, **symbols, power balance, transparency** should be cornerstones of Euralens action in the territory in order to better exemplify change in the locality.

### 2) WP 7 Guidelines

**Power of initiative [government by the people]** is incomplete.

As an association of local actors, Euralens is *per se* a structure of government by the local people. Nevertheless, the institutional actors keep most of the power in their hands. They do not share it with the civil society and the inhabitants (participation of the inhabitants to the decision-making process is weak).

- ➔ The workshop shall associate equally formal and informal stakeholders.
- ➔ Together, they shall reflect on how the civil society and the inhabitants could be better involved in the organisation of Euralens.

**Power of immunity [government for the people]** is incomplete.

Euralens is an association, not an institution, which gives the structure a great possibility to innovate on territorial development issues. On the minus side, its budget comes from local agglomeration communities (that receive most of their own budget from the State); which means that Euralens remains very dependent on the State's willingness to redistribute money to local institutions. On the plus side, the idea to group local institutions and local actors together inside the Euralens association has proved itself efficient to raise external attention on the territory and to bring European engineering to work on the territory.

- ➔ Stakeholders shall reflect on the anchorage of Euralens within the broader governance system of the locality,
- ➔ how support to local initiative can be thought and handled more effectively.

## **B. Defining a framework for the workshop allowing stakeholders to discuss and define possible avenues for increased spatial justice**

### Ambitions of the workshop

The workshop is conceived to contribute to the evolution of the Euralens label, in coordination with Euralens itself that perceives (and welcomes) the workshop as an evaluation of its policy. More concretely, we have three main targets based on the conclusions of the RELOCAL Euralens Case Study report:

- to reposition the label as a possible coordination tool of the very fragmented institutional support to local initiatives dealing with territorial development,
- to integrate initiative holders within the decision-making process of the local policies supporting territorial development, in other word to share the power on local development with the civil society and the inhabitants;
- to set up a structure that encourage and facilitate horizontal sharing of experiences of competences.

**We reformulate the three targets in three shorter questions:**

- **How to improve procedural justice in this action?**
- **How to integrate more the third sector inside Euralens process?**
- **How to better articulate Euralens action with similar actions on the territory?**

### Rationales and methodological choices

We have decided to work with a professional facilitator (expense covered by the RELOCAL credits). To avoid the position of the researcher pretending to be an expert, we decided it would be better that none of us is speaking and controlling the discussion. Nonetheless, we have prepared the workshop with the facilitator and with Euralens (i.e. rationale, list of the guests: mostly people interviewed during the RELOCAL research, targeting in priority “constructive” people). The registration was compulsory and on invitation only. We made clear in the invitation that the presence was compulsory from the beginning until the end. This was planned as a collective exercise. Consequently, none of the most important political representatives were present. They were not invited. We targeted instead technical representatives of institutions.

### **Main characteristics of the workshop**

**Title:** How to articulate local initiatives and territorial development: sharing experiences and constructing perspectives

**Duration:** 1/2 day

**Envisaged deliverable:** 1 printed booklet for the 1000 Euralens partners to be distributed during the Euralens conference in June 2019. **Audience:** 45 participants including organisers

**Partnership:** RELOCAL University of Luxembourg & Euralens

**Facilitation:** pOlau, Urbanism & Arts Pole (<http://polau.org/>)

**Budget:** 3000€ paid by the University of Luxembourg (RELOCAL budget): pOlau 2000€ paid by Euralens: food (600€) + hotel (350€) + printing of the booklet (~1000€)

**Invitation** made by Euralens in the name of Euralens + RELOCAL University of Luxembourg

**Information** on internet (Facebook, official websites) organised by the pOlau

## C. Running the workshop

Program : The “Unforeseen Parliament of Euralens” (results below)

8h30 Breakfast

9h Presentation and icebreaker

9h10 Constitution - What are the common rules for the day?

9h30 Reading of the concerns

10h30-11h Coffee break

11h Parliamentary session- Draft laws

12h30 Vote of the resolutions and decrees

12h45 Conclusive speeches - Cyril Blondel (Uni Lux) and Gilles Huchette head of Euralens)

13h Lunch

Participants (following WP 7 Guidelines)

1<sup>st</sup> group

Grassroots actors, civil society members that initiate local development whether or not they receive Euralens labels (14 participants)

- NGOS & associations labelled (6) and non-labelled (3)
- Inhabitants participating to actions labelled (2) and non-labelled (1)
- Local mayor of municipality labelled (1)
- Social Housing labelled (1)

2<sup>nd</sup> group

Institutional actors in charge of local development public action, in that case those participating to the Euralens labellisation (15 participants)

- Euralens and associated to Euralens (7)
- Local institutions (3)
- Local development agency of the Mining Basin (2)
- State decentralised services (2)
- University (2) = 1 local researcher and the head of cultural development service

3<sup>rd</sup> group

Others: leading comparative policy inside and outside the CS territory (12 participants)

- Other local development policy officers not connected to Euralens (2)
- State representatives (Ministry of Transition, Budget) in charge of local development policies & of research on local development policies (3)
- AEIDL (Katalin Kolosy) (1)
- Other local development officers working in other territories (3)
- University of Luxembourg (2), Cyril Blondel & Estelle Evrard
- pOlau, Arts & Urbanism Pole (1), facilitator of the meeting

**Results** (translated from French)

**Part 1: Constituent assembly** (i.e. rules for the day as defined and agreed upon by the participants) ☑ Everybody listens to each other

- ✗ Each participant introduces oneself the first time
- ✗ No barging-in

- ✗ Demands for details are authorised
- ✗ Each participant expresses him or herself by using “I” and not “one/someone” ☑ Pascal Ferren (pOlau) is responsible for the rules ☑ Speaking time limited to 2 minutes and 30 seconds ☑ Each participant speaks up by raising his/her hand up
- ✗ No quick-fire retorts (that is, no debate polarized between two people who answer to each other without letting the room participates)
- ✗ Respecting the programme (and the timetable) ☑ Possibility to add a rule during the morning

**Part 2: Register of grievances** (i.e. everyone may express his/her satisfaction or dissatisfaction towards the Euralens label)

Grievances (as mentioned during the session and written on the broad, see background of picture 2):

- ✗ Euralens does not help enough project holders ☑ I regret not being able to join Euralens
- ✗ I regret that it is my 1<sup>st</sup> means of communication today ☑ I regret that it is too late
- ✗ I notice that the label helps improving project quality
- ✗ I regret that the label does not fall within territory strategies/projects ☑ I regret my lack of knowledge of the label’s criteria ☑ I regret that the inhabitants of Lens are privileged in the support
- ✗ What is the use of the Euralens Label? ☑ The Euralens Label’s added value
- ✗ I am satisfied with the thematic group work and with the criteria ☑ I regret the lack of a variety of levels of labelling
- ✗ I wonder about the complementarity between the different support initiatives and between the different labels
- ✗ I regret that the labelling is not more known
- ✗ I notice that the label gives a positive image of a changing territory ☑ I notice that the expression of the inhabitants’ place in the projects can be improved
- ✗ I cannot read the interactions with other facilities existing on the territory ☑ I regret that the Grand-Oral (“Big Speaking”) was not a dynamization/revitalization moment; it was unsuitable for our way of working. I regret that we were not listened to enough
- ✗ I regret that we do not have enough time to examine the projects ☑ I regret that the elected representatives have too great a place in the final decision
- ✗ I am satisfied with the fact that an exceptional researcher is interested in our transitioning territory
- ✗ I think that very few citizens are cognizant about what is going on; I regret that we do not take it into the *cités*
- ✗ I regret that citizens do not involve themselves more when they are invited to ☑ I regret no to have met the other projects enough, because we could help each other
- ✗ I regret that a Euralens community does not exist ☑ I wonder about Pop School not setting this community up ☑ I regret not knowing labelled projects
- ✗ I am curious about the point of view of the financiers of labelled initiatives about the Euralens Label
- ✗ I regret not having enough feedback on labelled projects, and the label’s effects ☑ I regret that there is no Euralens representative covering the projects of the territory

- ✘ I regret that the label is only a full-time person and not more
- ✘ I note that there is a lot of longing on the Euralens Label, that many people want this label
- ✘ I regret that the president of Euralens is absent ☑ I am satisfied with the Euralens Label ☑ I regret that we do not have enough cash
- ✘ I regret that there is no clear political position about the resources ☑ I regret that the engineering is hiding a lack of resources for the projects ☑ I notice that the Euralens Label had been a 'sounding board', and a communication board
- ✘ I notice that the resources that have been put to accompany the projects are not up to the job
- ✘ I regret that we focus too much on the label, and not enough on the actual support
- ✘ Euralens has an enormous ambition for an extremely weakened territory ☑ I think that the elite have long since abandoned us
- ✘ I think that it is up to us to work together the most collegially and horizontally possible, and that it is up to us to change this
- ✘ I think that Euralens has been doing a great job
- ✘ I wish Euralens to become, as a label, the governance tool for local development ☑ I notice that there is engineering on the territory
- ✘ I would like there to be a better coordination so Euralens can pass on the baton ☑ I regret the lack of collective mobilization ☑ I regret us lacking financial resources
- ✘ I greet the existence of Euralens, and the work that is being done there ☑ I note that we are in a transition period, and that our qualitative exigency is diminishing because of a lack of resources
- ✘ Networks between inhabitants, between labelled actors ☑ Why do not people come?
- ✘ I notice that this parliament is very useful to report grievances ☑ I wish that we create horizontal and vertical porosity ☑ I notice that we never thought that the Euralens Label would have such a stir (externally) with such a small team

### **Part 3: Law Proposals: how to make Euralens label better?**

*The debate (i.e. including the formulation of the law) lasts up to 8 minutes for each law proposal. If no agreement is reached, the law cannot be submitted to vote (i.e. #nodeal). After all the law proposals have been drafted by the assembly, the moderator puts all of them to vote by a show of hands).*

#### List of debated laws and result of the vote (when applicable)

#1 no consensus to write it. #nodeal

- Reinforcing the quality and exceptionality criterion to make the label evolve towards a labelling by quality
- Transforming the label towards a labelling by o 1) levels of progress o 2) typology o 3) excellence?

3 Levels: at the project stage, in the making, at the implementing stage

Existing label topics: economy and training, culture and tourism, chain of parks

#2

In labelling committees of candidate projects, there should be one third of citizens/inhabitants, one third of external experts, and one third of partner technicians, representative of all the territories involved

Yes: 32

No: 7

Abstention: 0

#3

In the labelling committee of candidate projects, there should be 50 % of citizens (cf. "LEADER" selection procedure)

Against: 20

In favour: 9

Abstention: 7

#4

Citizens and/or initiative holders should have access transparently to the share of public funding (attribution criteria)

In favour: 15

Against: 5

Abstention: 16

#5

Citizens should have access to the deliberations of selected projects

In favour: 38

Against: 1

Abstention: 0

#6

Euralens should bring information about public and non-public policies' available fundings

In favour: 17

Against: 9

Abstention: 10

#7

Reinforcing, in the labelling criteria, the fact that the project respects the main objectives of territorial strategies

In favour: 25

Against: 7

Abstention: 4

#8

The local institutions should (i.e. EPCI, PMA) define a territorial strategy

In favour: 33

Against: 2

Abstention: 4

#9

The project should respond to the inhabitants' needs as identified by initiative holders

In favour: 29

Against: 0

Abstention: 10

#10

Adding to the labelling criteria the taking into consideration by initiative holders of the explanation of the benefits/impacts of their project and of the creation of bridges with/on neighbour territories and/or at a metropolitan scale

In favour: 14

Against: 10

Abstention: 13

#11

Obligation for the initiative holders to demonstrate the impact of their initiative on the neighbour territories and/or at a metropolitan scale

In favour: 5

Against: 27

Abstention: 4

#12

Guaranteeing initiative holders and labelled ones a support that enable them to fulfil the label's exigencies

In favour: 36

Against: 2

Abstention: 1

#13

Euralens should open up the space to enable the creation of a self-directed citizens' agora in charge of accompanying it

In favour: 16

Against: 8

Abstention: 10

#14

Euralens should open up the space to enable the creation of a self-directed citizens' agora in charge of participation in the examination, support and evaluation of the label and of proposing perspectives for the evolution of the latter

In favour: 9

Against: 27

Abstention: 4

#15

Euralens should also promote the visibility of non-labelled initiatives of citizens In

favour: 38

Against: 2

Abstention: 0

## #16 – Elisa Law

Projects holders should organize themselves in order to better structure the network of labelled actors enabling to meet, to pool their means, their resources, their advice In

favour: 35

Against: 0

Abstention: 4

## #17 – Gilbert Law

By benefiting from the labelling, the holders of a project become the relay-ambassadors of the information pertaining to Euralens towards its own territorial partners and towards inhabitants In favour: 32

Against: 1

Abstention: 6

## #18

Organizing, encouraging, and facilitating discussions between development projects in Europe; help labelled projects take inspiration from other European projects

In favour: 34

Against: 5

Abstention: 0

## #19

Setting up a patronage between labelled project holders and aspirant ones

In favour: 36

Against: 1

Abstention: 2

## #20

Favouring the diffusion of Euralens's approach to neighbour territories (i.e.: le Nord)

In favour: 8

Against: 6

Abstention: 24

## #21 –

Merging the *Mission Bassin Minier, Euralens* and *Louvre Lens Tourisme*

In favour: 10

Against: 7

Abstention: 18

## #22

Accompanying project holders in their search for financing

In favour: 37

Against: 0

Abstention: 2

## #23

Fixing the number of labelled projects to 100

In favour: 8

Against: 7

Abstention: 20

#### **D. Document the results**

**For local stakeholders:** the workshop has offered all stakeholders a genuine platform to reflect - on equal foot - upon Euralens, its functioning, added-value and pitfalls. It allowed everyone involved and not involved outlining their experience made with Euralens before defining possible improvements in terms of governance. More generally it allowed also reflecting upon local development in the locality. It provides Euralens avenues for rethinking its label.

**For University of Luxembourg,** it provides a good opportunity to deepen the empirical work, to outline some of the empirical results and to engage in a common reflection with the locality.

**For WP 7:** A synthesis of the main results in form of a **5 pages document** (answering questions under A of the Guidelines will be elaborated in September 2019).

## Annex 4: Local workshop reports

### Annex 4.1: Report on the WP7 workshop on local autonomy in the case of Local Action Group Mara-Natur (Romania)

*Authors: George Iulian Zamfir and Enikő Vincze, DESIRE*

#### 1. Objectives of the local workshop (R026)

LAG Mara-Natur was legally born in 2011 as part of the EU LEADER program and constitutes the result of direct involvement and support coming from the public administrative side in the area. It covers a territory of 1250 square km and close to 70 thousand inhabitants. The action itself is part of a complex, highly bureaucratized, and seemingly rigorous institutional mechanism produced to accommodate the EC funding flow to local actors across the rural territory of the EU. Thus, the issue of local autonomy must be addressed with a consistent dose of reservation: how much autonomy is left out to local initiatives fostered by one of the most bureaucratic systems to date? The hypothetical answer is: less than intended by policy promoters and less than desired by local actors. More so in the case of one of the last joining states, as the structure has been well set in place prior to 2007. In many ways, the Romanian state had to `catch up` as swiftly as possible in regards to the *acquis communautaire*, particularly those required to access EU funding. The consequences are widely present at every institutional level in every possible combination, yielding institutional schizophrenia, contradictions, gaslighting, and other malaises. All of them reverberate and impact local actions that aim at least broadly at spatial justice. Overall, they depict the decomposition and only partial reconfiguration of the state apparatus.

Some of the **elements that work towards achieving spatial justice** primarily refer to a range of opportunities. Most of the territorial administrative structure in Romania has been virtually unchanged since 1968. A wave of radical deindustrialization occurred in the 1990s and early 2000s. In the case of the area of Mara-Natur, the effects have been crushing, as mining was the main industrial activity. As was the case for the rest of Romania, emigration rates - predominantly to Western Europe - rapidly increased. In the meantime, counties and urban/rural territorial units maintained their form. The idea of LEADER LAG provides an opportunity to reassess the potential of local and regional organizing towards territorial development by producing a new level of interaction. Key is that the opportunity is provided, as well as strongly amended by the EU, whose perceived civilizing force is one of the last legitimate and untainted political driver. More importantly, the initiative comes with funding attached. In many ways, the funding level is meagre, at just 2.5 million Euro in the case of Mara-Natur. It is sufficient only for a range of small scale projects of around 50 thousand Euros.

A key element working towards spatial justice is represented by the funding measure targeting the 17 LAU. As such, the territorial spread of some funding, as well as involvement, is increasingly evened out. The continuous engagement of local administrations is viewed by the LAG team as quintessential for the success of the LAG. An important reason relates to the history of territorial development: while villages closer to

the county capital already enjoy substantial economic benefits, those further away from major urban centers are deprived of significant socio-economic activity. In those remote villages, the main permanent administrative/managerial capacity rests in the town halls. While the rural public administrations apply to funding and manage their own projects (in various degrees), they also act as hubs for local private entities. Practically, up to a point, they can support business development or any type of activity by disseminating information through events or other means. For the LAG, having them as partners means both offering them access to some direct funding through an already implemented measure; and that the local public administrations act as relays who spread information further. This could be interpreted both ways: private parties (NGOs, economic actors, etc) are few, scarce, less determined and less administratively equipped; or that rural public administrations are more determined to be the front-runners in the LAG. The data produced so far through the case study points to the first interpretation. Overall, the concept of having available funding to cover small local needs (particularly to support small local business development) in the assigned territory is regarded as a main element of spatial justice, as this approach is almost inexistent through other development policies. Even though the bureaucratic density is overwhelming, a couple of issues worked well so far in terms of the autonomy of the action. The Local Development Strategy, the core document of the LAG, has been updated several times according to the local needs and the changes have been accepted by the Ministry of Agriculture. The LAG also benefits from a welcomed degree of autonomy when setting up their points system for selection criteria of funding applications.

Overbureaucratization and rigidity are among the **main culprits affecting local autonomy**. For example, even if the LAG would decide that they want to adopt a more equal territorial distribution of funding, regulation regarding competition would prevent them from doing so.

The requirement of co-funding deters numerous applicants from the territory. Besides, the lack of sufficient administrative capacity, or, inversely put – the burdening bureaucratic processes, discourage potential applicants.

On the same matter, an increased budget would definitely support a fairer spatial distribution of resources. However, in somewhat procedural views, the matter of programmatic documents remains a major reason of concern, as there is insufficient connection between strategies between themselves, as well as a disconnection between adopted strategies and necessary funding lines.

### **Workshop framework and objectives**

In various forms, discussions on European funding and territorial development are widely present in Romania. Thus, RELOCAL does not come as a major surprise, although most interviewees have been pleasantly surprised (and intrigued in some cases) by the angle of approach. However, while preparing the workshop, we decided that the most fruitful attempt for our guests, and, overall, to Mara-Natur, was to present it as a discussion on local autonomy in territorial development, with the purpose of transmitting their recommendations to the upper decision levels – European, as well as national. We invited the following institutions to join the meeting at the headquarters of Mara-Natur, where the whole team joined us: Maramureş County Council (present), Maramureş Prefecture (not

present), ASSOC Association (not present) – the largest private provider of social services in the county, GEOMMED (not present) – a key NGO in ecological management and environmental protection, the town halls of three villages (one was present) and the city of Baia Sprie (present). From RELOCAL side, Enikő Vincze and George Zamfir conducted the meeting.

The meeting had three main sections. It started with an open debate on local autonomy, which was followed by a discussion on the operation of Mara-Natur and ended with a set of recommendations agreed upon by the participants.

## 2. Results of the workshop

### Autonomy of the action

According to the present EU-wide debates on the future of funding distribution, the LEADER program appears to be highly vulnerable to funding cuts. The workshop participants are worried that the whole institutional construction is in danger of being severely affected, if not wholly dismantled. Two main reasons might lead to the foreseen deterioration: the decrease of both the overall nationally allotted funding and of the allocation percentage. Now, 239 LAGs cover circa 90 percent of the eligible territory in Romania. They differ in several dimensions: slightly in the number of employees, the level of funding, as well as the territory and the number of partners and LAUs involved. Consequently, not all of them could survive an incoming austerity policy.

Thus, the fate of the program lies at way higher levels than the action itself. What can be done in this context is to put into motion every available means to pressure the national level decision makers, who are deemed primarily accountable for showing potentially insufficient support of the program when cuts and funding reshuffling will be decided. The National Federation of Local Action Groups is at the moment doing an extensive intermediary evaluation of the whole program, with the intent to present the results to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD). If cuts will be imposed, those LAGs who managed to obtain other types of support (e.g. the partnership with the County Council in the case of Mara-Natur), have higher chances of survival. Others might not, even if some funding will still be available, because there is no incentive and rationale to maintain an institution which will only support small scale projects for, let's say two years, instead of seven.

So the news of potential funding cuts comes as a shock and a disappointment, particularly because LEADER has been enthusiastically supported at every institutional level, including the MARD. In the vein of postsocialist decentralization policies, it was highly welcome. More so, a total of 239 new teams had been formed in the field of local and regional territorial development. Their potential loss would drastically roll back any future efforts in the domain, particularly because drawing professionals in rural areas is, in general, a challenging and often unsuccessful task.

Overall, this potential direction is in direct opposition to the needs and requests formulated through the LAGs. Higher degrees of financial autonomy and higher funding

levels are deemed necessary to further the LAGs impact and benefits on local development.

One other relevant observation noted down related to whom do the EU policies bear in mind when devising new policies. Workshop participants underlined that it feels like numerous core concepts and policies, particularly in rural development, are designed with Western European areas in mind. For example, the looming „innovation” and „climatic” thematic areas are simply inadequate for most of the Romanian rural parts for a couple of reasons. One would be that pollution has been reduced simply as a result of deindustrialization. The other is that „innovation” requires significant academic activity, which here is at best insufficient, or simply unavailable. The present gap between the material realities of Romanian rural areas and Western rural areas is much wider than the EU-wide official vocabulary implies. As one workshop participant points out, the introduction of sewage in some villages could be considered an innovation in the respective setting. So, at the moment, LEADER seems to be applied in Romania as the Romanian villages had merely experienced the same development trajectories as Western villages. It is obviously not the case.

### **Autonomy of the locality**

Decentralization played a key role in post 1989 territorial development. The process unfolded during a wave of discontent towards what were described as overly centralized socialist state policies. However, while counties, cities, and villages gained some administrative autonomy, the workshop participants highlighted a main caveat: state resources come with extensive restrictions. Besides access to actual state funding, the management of that funding brings in a set of problems related to autonomy, such as the ineligibility of numerous available superior technical solutions to local problems. Often, decision makers have to implement solutions that are more complex and expensive in terms of both installation and long-term running costs, just to comply with regulation. At the end of the whole series of efforts lies the final beneficiary, who is, more often than not, a regular person adapted to subsistence livelihood and who finds the price of overwhelming bureaucracy as too costly to even bother.

The pre-EU accession mechanisms of tackling territorial inequalities provided much needed benefits to the Maramureş area. „Disadvantaged areas” were an instrument of governmental policy backed by international institutions such as the World Bank as part of a strategy to support the newly deindustrialized areas, among them Maramureş, where it brought significant benefits.

Overall, the present funding management regulations are not just overbearing; they turn into an instrument of control. The reason is the lack of any real guidance offered during the project cycle and the almost exclusive focus on rigorous verification and evaluation. Rules change too frequently during project implementation. However, while it is expected that regulation suffers adaptations, the speed and complexity of the unexpected changes provokes a surplus layer of uncertainty and stress. The end result is a general decline in enthusiasm for potential applicants to EU funding. Apathy is not the main explanation, but the fear of mistakes done during implementation, which can instantly translate into grave

personal and/or institutional effects: The Romanian Court of Accounts could penalize them in various forms, and the anticorruption institutions could abruptly call them personally to their headquarters for interrogation.

The issue of detrimentally excessive focus on control, instead of guidance and collaboration, is also visible when local needs are not taken into account at central levels. Drafts of nationally relevant guides for future funding are not open to the public; and most local knowledge, however well-documented that is, is not really taken into consideration at central levels.

The maneuvers could be interpreted as a result of insidious top-down political power schemes, but they might partly be a side-effect of a rather clear process: the lack of assumption of responsibility of the national institutions involved in the process. Concretely, for example, EU regulations are seldom adequately transposed in intelligible guidelines which can easily be applied by funding recipients. Thus, the debate on autonomy ascends to another level, as workshop participants pointed out. The question of why the relevant ministries hastily adopt and implement EU regulations without significant negotiation with the European Commission, as other states often do, needs answers from other sources. Yet, the issue reverberates and amplifies at lower levels. From this point of view, the workshop participants portray a colony-metropolis relation between the Romanian state and the EU institutions, as orders from above are simply being obeyed.

As pointed out in the case-study report, personnel and competences are a central concern to people involved directly and indirectly in Mara-Natur. During the workshop, the participants emphasized it once again. Autonomy in spatial justice processes is unattainable without the required human power able to steer it through development projects. But the whole set of procedures launched by the European funding schemes favors by design the externalization of human resources to private consultancy firms, who bear no accountability and suffer no consequences during the actual implementation and evaluation of projects. Thus, instead of becoming a stone at the foundation of local autonomy and spatial justice, it shatters them.

### 3. Analysis of autonomy in the locality

The required level of local and regional autonomy is not absolute, because it would act against solidarity, as participants explained. An adequate level of autonomy required for spatial justice would mean an overall policy focus on consistency, predictability, partnership, guidance, and consultation. Local needs have to be properly integrated in regional, national, and European policy levels. Complementarily, financial solidarity needs to be increased and development strategies should benefit from specifically designed funding.

Consolidated institutions would be better equipped to act towards a more equal territorial development. Concretely, if local public administrations could permanently employ motivated teams of specialists in funding management and other fields related to

territorial development, their capacity to roll development projects would greatly improve.

The LAG would better serve the territory by obtaining the required support to hire people who would bring the necessary expertise. For example, a permanent architect and an urbanist would serve those LAUs who cannot afford to hire them independently.

Social inclusion per se is not a major point of interest for the LAG. The statement calls for a reevaluation of what autonomy actually represents, particularly in a debate on spatial justice. The workshop participants conveyed that the main solution for the present territorial problems is economic development, whose success will inherently trickle down. Participants did not focus on how the procedural aspects of the action – the LAG – could be improved, preferring instead to extensively describe and underline how external entities negatively impact the distributive aspects.

In this case, the autonomy of the action and that of the locality are inherently dialectic, as the action itself produces territorialization. The new construction could be viewed neutrally, although a drastic bias towards private initiative is clearly embedded in the whole LEADER program. We could wonder why are counties, which are established TAUs, less adequate territorial units to act as promoters of LEADER, which is public money? Is it a matter of bypassing regular politics and/or the state? And if so, to what ends, particularly in terms of autonomy? In the end, participants see it as a welcome initiative, especially for its potential to kick-off the much needed economic initiatives.

## Annex 4.2: Report on the WP7 workshop on local autonomy in Volos (Greece)

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### 1. Objectives of the local workshop

At the beginning of the event, the research team of the University of Thessaly presented to the participants (a) the philosophy and objectives of the RELOCAL project; (b) the content of the concept of 'spatial justice' in the present research; and (c) the characteristics of the four Greek Cases Studies and their basic findings. Then, with the help of the central coordinator, a very interesting and open discussion was conducted which the research team was constantly supplying with new triggers and material in order to have a continuous interaction. The accumulated experience and expertise of the participants in the discussion contributed to the successive discussion cycles of the topics that emerged each time, and ended with the formulation of the final conclusions.

Methodologically it was chosen to organize a workshop that had the character of a symposium and a focus group meeting. The purpose of this approach was to provoke a brainstorming of ideas and reflections through an open and free discussion, based on the critical questions of Package 7, with an emphasis on the association of spatial justice with autonomy and decentralization. The meeting was attended by local stakeholders, executives with experience in the design and implementation of European, national, regional and local policies, as well as representatives of the academic community, specializing in regional development issues.

In terms of terminology, it is initially clarified that for the Greek reality, the concept of "*spatial justice*" is more commonly understood as "*spatial inequality*" or "*inequalities*", while the concept of "*decentralization*" is more appropriate to convey the term "*autonomy*". In this context, evidence suggests that in Greece the regional inequalities are constantly widening, or otherwise putted, the spatial justice is decreasing, while the level of decentralization or autonomy remains quite low.

It is characteristic that about 65% of the country's GDP is generated in the broader Attica cluster, reflecting a strong model of metropolitan concentration. This picture is accompanied by a very centralized system of policies and governance, where most of the resources and powers are concentrated at the central level. On the other hand, efforts have been made at times to decentralize this system and to move to a more 'bottom up' level.

The question that arises in this context is whether in cases where there were opportunities for 'bottom-up' policies, the results in terms of spatial justice were positive or negative and why? In this context, looking at four different Greek examples, it is investigated whether transferring responsibilities and resources to the lower level has improved social justice, participatory governance and the effectiveness of planning and policies.

Focusing on the correlation of spatial justice with the degree, intensity and characteristics of decentralization, the empirical findings showed the following:

In the case of ***Western Macedonia (Post-Mining Regional Strategy) (EL3)***, the Specific Development Program was instituted by the central government (top-down), creating a

development tool designed to facilitate the transition of the region to a low or zero economy of carbon. This decision was the result of long-term pressures of the local community due to the environmental impact of energy activities.

The planning and implementation of the projects and interventions in the framework of this program was the sole responsibility of local authorities such as the region and municipalities.

In this sense, there was a considerable 'bottom-up' planning and implementation scope. However, the developmental footprint in the region is rather feeble as there was no clear roadmap for the transition of the economy, and most of the projects were small.

***Karditsa's Ecosystem of Collaboration (EL6)*** represents a purely 'bottom-up' initiative of local stakeholders in an effort to create synergies, economies of scale and further added value. With the catalytic role of Karditsa's Development agency and the spearhead of the Cooperative Bank of Karditsa, the ecosystem has managed to build trust among key local players. In practice, the ecosystem has functioned as a permanent mechanism for internal consultation with positive results, but which has not yet obtained the necessary critical size. At the same time, the institutional framework for the social and solidarity economy needs to be improved in order for the Ecosystem to prosper.

In the case of ***the Municipality of Volos (overcoming fragmentation) (EL5)*** it appeared that an initiative of the state to unite the fragmented municipalities into larger administrative structures, had results in the level of planning and achieving economies of scale. At the same time, however, intra-municipal concerns have raised issues of territorial injustice, as remote settlements and areas do not seem to enjoy the same benefits of this policy.

The case of ***Thessaloniki (Alexander Innovation Zone) (EL4)*** represents a purely state-owned initiative in an effort to attract innovative investments as a result of linking the knowledge with research and entrepreneurship. The results show that scattered innovation enclaves are not effectively connected mainly due to internal competition and government interference. In addition, the management body lacks the staff it needs. At the same time, bureaucratic delays in the spatial setting of the zone and the introduction of specific investment incentives run the risk of revoking the project and its vision.

## 2. Results of the workshop

While it is a universal demand to decentralize responsibilities and pursue policies at a local level that are closer to the citizens and take into account their needs, when this is the case, the results are not always encouraging.

Why is this happening and what needs to change in the 'bottom-up' policies? What was on debate was that the causes should be investigated, and appropriate policies should be identified to cure this pathogenicity. It cannot be overlooked that both European policies and strategies developed by the OECD recommend bottom-up policies, which are as close to the citizens as possible since at that level they are considered to be more effective.

Based on this debate, it was emphasized that ***the institutional framework*** is one that reflects the priorities of a political system in each state on how it wants to allocate powers and resources at national, regional and local level. It has been widely accepted that the center-region model is dominant in almost all aspects of state administration and development planning. It was underlined that this model has a great margin for

decentralization, leaving the central state with the responsibility of designing, controlling and implementing only critical national interventions. All other implementation responsibilities should go to the regional and local level. However, there should be ensured that the responsibilities of each level are clear, without any overlap and they are accompanied by guaranteed resources capable of assuring their independence and autonomy.

Juxtaposing the existing institutional framework with the four Case Studies, it became clear that in all cases the institutional framework did not favor decentralization and spatial justice at the local level as much as it could. In the case of Western Macedonia, the failure to provide clear and measurable targets based on a strictly defined transition road to the post-mortem period could be attributed to the vague institutional framework for the implementation of the Specific Development Program. In Karditsa, magnifying the impact of the cooperative ecosystem would be much easier if there was a proper institutional environment for the social and solidarity economy. In the Municipality of Volos the results would be far more significant if the increased responsibilities were accompanied by the corresponding financial resources, which were reduced by 60% during the crisis. In Thessaloniki, the effects on innovation investment are likely to be much more positive if specific incentives were introduced in the Innovation Zone or if there was a metropolitan institutional governance framework for the metropolitan center.

Another issue raised is the impact of bureaucracy on the effectiveness of decentralization and spatial justice policies. The existence of an increasingly complex and overregulating institutional framework, the simultaneous existence of excessive powers and responsibilities, the non-functional exploitation of digital technology, coupled with the daunting framework of public procurement, ultimately have a significant negative impact on development. In Western Macedonia, although the administration model was not particularly bureaucratic, the requirements for planning and implementing a project were particularly time-consuming. In Karditsa, bureaucracy was mainly found in the interactions and synergies of the ecosystem with the central mechanism. In the Municipality of Volos, the complex system imposed by the Kallikratis program in the name of transparency, coupled with restrictive control measures during the crisis years, significantly undermined the degree of effective decentralization. In Thessaloniki it is interesting to note that the spatial designation of the special area of innovation by the central state took more than 10 years to complete.

It was emphasized that a key parameter that can give substantial content to decentralization and thus to spatial justice is the existence of **capable leadership** based on a vision that will answer the collective question “*where do we want to go*”. For that to happen, it means that people who are leading are more results-oriented and looking from a long-term perspective and less for the short-lived political benefits. Such leadership at national, regional and local level does not hesitate in the name of political cost to make radical decisions and cuts, even against personal political gain. In respect to this, development planning, stakeholder consultation, democracy and participatory governance are essential. Otherwise all the above are just pretexts, either because they just must follow certain procedures or to legitimize politically-minded decisions. Most of the participants agreed that in practice and in most cases, what seems to be dominant are the actions and strategies that look forward to the next election cycle, actions that are more about visibility and have less substance as well as a lack of a cooperation spirit for a common goal.

In Western Macedonia, local leaders have never given a clear vision and a clear roadmap for 'where', 'how' and 'when will the region move to a different development model beyond lignite'. Indeed, following the Greek Prime Minister's recent announcement that after 2028 all lignite activity will be permanently stopped due to international climate obligations, this deficit of vision became even more apparent. In Karditsa, one can see a clear vision behind the people who designed the project. In spite of significant difficulties, the ecosystem has withstood at least the level of low-scale collaborative interventions. Here ANKA's role was crucial as it kept low tones and at the same time gave space and role to all key players in the ecosystem. In the Municipality of Volos, promoting mainly showcase projects and less meaningful interventions that will provide solutions to long-term problems seems to have dominated as a strategy. In this context, public consultations are organized, development plans are drawn up, and various projects are implemented. All this effort is often made simply as an "institutional commitment" because it is required by a specific funding program. The competence and adequacy of human resources is also crucial to the implementation of this local policy. In the case of Thessaloniki, there were grandiose goals and visions, but they were not vigorously and consistently served by the actors of the metropolitan area. In other words, at the level of the declarations and objectives there was a statement to 'where we want to go', which however was incompatible with the local level of cooperation and practices for this vision to flesh out.

In its final part, the debate focused on the relationship between decentralization and spatial justice with the role and characteristics of the *political system* as expressed at national, regional and local levels. It was particularly emphasized that behind any institutional arrangements that determine the context of the relationships, powers, responsibilities and financial resources of public policy actors, there is the decision of a given political system that has democratic legitimacy to make decisions and ensure their implementation. Whether these political decisions and actions are effective, encourage decentralization and produce spatial justice is a function of the maturity of the political system itself.

In the case of Western Macedonia, it was clear that the ambiguity of the institutional framework might ultimately serve the local political system as it gave it considerable flexibility in choices, which in combination with the rationale for the aforementioned political benefits, led to poor results. In Karditsa, the political system with its interventions probably created rather resolved problems, as efforts were made to exploit the ecosystem to develop customer relationships. In the municipality of Volos, the intra-municipal political system has created disparities between the city of Volos and the remote settlements, while in relation to the state, the margins of political intervention from above have not been eliminated. In the case of Thessaloniki, the rather negative role of the political system was evident, as most interventions were exhausted at the level of major declarations during major events such as the Thessaloniki Exhibition. The political system at the metropolitan level has also proved unable to produce positive results by practicing decentralization.

### 3. Results of analysis on autonomy in the localities

This section attempts to re-evaluate the findings in the four Greek Case Studies on decentralization and spatial justice, taking into account the results of the workshop discussion in Package 7.

At first it becomes clear that the degree to which decentralization is related to spatial justice depends on the institutional characteristics of decentralization itself. There is no doubt that decentralization will fail to produce spatial justice if it is not legally enshrined in the form of a specific institutional framework. The characteristics, efficiency and depth of any decentralization effort will be correlated with the degree of bureaucracy and complexity of the administration system, the existence or not of a visionary leadership at national or local level, and the political system itself as expressed centrally and locally. In other words, by attempting to explore the critical parameters of 'bottom-up' policies, one could conceivably identify a cycle that begins with the initiatives of a political system and concludes with a specific institutional expression of decentralization. This cycle is redefined every time a new initiative is taken by the political system at every spatial level.

It is interesting to note that decentralization strategies often conflict with the principles of the effectiveness of public policies. There are strong arguments from several sides that top-down planning is much more efficient and faster and requires less human and financial resources to be involved. On the contrary, the 'bottom-up' approach is much slower and requires complex consultation procedures between many actors who often have competing interests. This favors the interventions of the political system at the local level by creating paternalistic dependency relations that feedback a vicious circle. In addition, the adequacy and competence of local leaders seems to be insufficiently responsive to the development of strategies and objectives that go beyond the next election cycle. For this reason, the local political system often prefers to refer to decisions that have political cost at the top level or to technocrats and experts who know better. From this perspective, which places greater emphasis on the outcome and less on the extent of the diffusion of power and participatory democracy, it seems that decentralization is not the only way to achieve spatial justice.

On the other hand, of course, it is argued that the institutional framework that defines rules and roles is determined by the central political system. At this level there is all the possibility for this framework to specify responsibilities, resources and participatory processes so that there is eliminated any weakness to pursue effective policies at the local level. The extent to which this framework is clear, therefore, reflects the true will of the central political system to concede substantial powers in the context of a decentralization strategy. In these cases, the processes may be slower, but in the end, they will produce results and mainly political legitimacy. This perception recognizes the essential role of politics in policymaking and calls into question the overestimated role of technocrats and experts, as it sees the danger of establishing a 'neo-Weberian state' where processes and specialists dominate the politicians who have the democratic legitimacy of decisions.

But beyond the limitations or inadequacies that the institutional framework or political system may have, there seems to be room for the local political system to guarantee a significant degree of decentralization and autonomy when the local political staff, civil society, the entrepreneurs and research and knowledge actors are effectively coordinated through a quadruple approach. In Karditsa's case, for example, one could recognize the dominance of a development activism in the philosophy and motivation of key players such as Karditsa's Development Agency. The result was a widespread social recognition and political legitimacy at the small spatial level. To the question, however, how this influence can be expanded to a larger extent so as to be able to multiply the value added factor, the answer is unclear as obstacles of a mainly political nature arise.

Another interesting issue concerns the relationship between autonomy and distributive justice with the effectiveness of development policies. Redistributive policy with the logic

of transferring resources from developed to less developed regions has been a key pillar of European cohesion policy for decades. Correspondingly, the request for decentralization of power to the level closest to the citizen was accompanied by the request to transfer not only the responsibilities but also the corresponding resources. Interesting in this regard is the view recorded in empirical research that to the extent that this process takes the form of simply a 'conveyor belt' from the wealthiest to the weakest areas, there is a risk that this kind of decentralization will act as a deterrent to the development. The argument that underpins this view is that this logic will 'drive' the incentives to stimulate endogenous growth and local comparative advantages. For this reason, the mix of decentralization policies should be geared mainly towards procedural justice rather than distributive justice.

Furthermore, the local ownership of policies and accountability for implementation is an important missing part of the puzzle. In centralized systems (as is the case of Greece) there is neither local ownership nor accountability. On the contrary, there is a belief that no matter what the local stakeholders do locally, it is the decisions that are taken centrally that matter to their problems. This reduces the participation of qualitative local actors and human resources and leaves without orientation the local resources (hence showcase projects or politically cycled). Thus, no matter what the local level do, it is the cavalry (the central state) that will solve the problem in the end.

Finally, can anyone formulate an ideal policy mix that will produce spatial justice in any case? The answer is, obviously not. Each case, each region and each issue that has to be resolved has its own characteristics and its own peculiarities. Many times the nature of the problems that arise at the local level requires the central government to act in order to resolve them quickly and effectively. For example, the introduction of favorable incentives for the establishment of businesses in the Alexandria Zone, could be solved only by the central state in cooperation with the European Union. However, the issue of effective cooperation between all the local actors (public sector, academia, business community and civil society) needs to be resolved locally in order to bring results. In other words, decentralization policies must be tailor-made in order to be effective.

Since it is impossible to formulate a universal model of decentralization and territorial justice, what might be of interest would be to attempt to lead to a typology of different decentralization models and practices that encourage spatial justice. Also, given that the concept of convergence seems to be slowly receding from the terminology of European cohesion and regional development policies, the question that arises is that to a greater extent spatial justice could be objectively measured as a spatial expression of social justice. Moreover, in the present research, spatial justice is examined through a holistic approach of allocating economic and social resources and opportunities in space.

Experience generally shows that the more top down a policy is designed, the more difficult it is to have a clear picture and to adapt to regional and local specificities. As a result, in development planning, the indicator that appears to be dominant is more the absorption index and less the output indicators in the local production system and social environment. It has been argued that ultimately, in order to build 'bottom-up' policies that operate effectively in terms of spatial justice, this is not an easy task. It requires maturity of key involved parties of each local system. It has also been argued that despite the fact that consultation and participatory dialogue are preceded, often the specifications and regulations of the policies chosen do not meet the specificities of the local environment. It was typically reported that most of the time 'people try to adapt to programs and less so to people'.

### **Annex 4.3: Report on the WP7 workshop on local autonomy in Vilhelmina, Västerbotten (Sweden)**

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#### **Introduction**

In the end of august 2019 Nordregio organized two workshops in the municipality Vilhelmina in the inland of Västerbotten in northern Sweden. The workshops were conducted to confirm and further develop the results from the case study “Digital Västerbotten” (SE29). The case study is focused on the regional action *Digital Västerbotten* with aim of facilitating the implementation of municipal e-services. This is done to meet economic challenges due to low tax revenues because of depopulations and aging demographics, centralisation of companies and public offices as well as large areas and long travel distances. Vilhelmina municipality is one of the inland municipalities part of the study, why we decided to zoom in on this locality.

For the first workshop we invited groups of pensioners and discussed their perception of spatial justice, of digital services and of their ability to affect their locality. In the second workshop municipal employees working with digital solutions in different ways were invited. Many of them are also part of the “digitalisation group” that is working with the project “Digital Västerbotten”. In the second workshop the focus was on autonomy and citizen participation.

#### **1. Objectives of the local workshop**

What works in the current situation?

Which elements relating to autonomy of the action allow achieving greater spatial justice? Digital Västerbotten is a top-down initiative. Therefore, there is very little room for autonomy of the action in general. Since Vilhelmina is a small municipality there are a lot of informal contacts between local politicians municipal officials and citizens. Some interviewees for example express that they can discuss important matters with municipal employees in line to the local food store. In that sense, the closeness between the citizens and municipality/politicians increases the autonomy of the action, as opposed to how it might be in a bigger municipality. It allows the municipality to understand what the citizens want and implement what is locally needed.

We know from interviews that the municipality is meeting different civil groups, but we don’t know to what extent and the implications of it.

Which elements relating to autonomy of the locality allow achieving greater spatial justice?

The Swedish municipalities have considerable autonomy in the areas of their competencies such as education, home care, social services, building permits etc. What we gathered from interviews is that the municipalities don’t want more autonomy but instead more cooperation with other municipalities. The local authorities have autonomy over what digital services are implemented in the municipality. As discussed later, the autonomy is however obstructed by limited resources.

The collaboration with other municipalities is said to increase autonomy, both in the sense that they have more resources but also since it unites the inland municipalities’ voices in negotiations with the bigger coastal municipalities.

What does not work in the current situation?

Which elements related to autonomy of the action would allow achieving greater spatial justice?

More involvement from civil society and citizen participation would allow achieving greater spatial justice. According to interviewees it is difficult to implement citizen participation because of limited resources and it is in general difficult to have an active civil society in small municipality. Some groups exist but the municipality must often seek the right target groups. It is usually the same people who are heard. Why civil participation is not used more is something that should be deliberated on. There seems to be very little citizen organization around digitalisation. It is only the pensioners' group that the municipalities mention as active.

Which elements related to autonomy of the locality would allow achieving greater spatial justice?

More financial support is requested from above to be able to exercise the autonomy. As for now the autonomy is secondary without the resources.

More cooperation and sharing of resources with other municipalities are also requested.

#### Objectives of workshop

- Verify results from case study and go deeper. Inform about case study results and the RELOCAL project and receive comments.
- Discuss the pensioners' and the municipal employees' perceptions on autonomy and the implications of increased or decreased autonomy.
- Discuss and come with suggestions on how the municipality can arrange for more citizen participation.
- Understand how the citizens (pensioners groups) want to participate and where the challenges for spatial injustice lie.
- Deliver comments from the pensioners groups to the municipality.

#### Framework to achieve objectives

- Two well planned and tailored workshops for the two different groups of participants.
- The first work shop with pensioners is more focused on listening to their ideas and letting them talk freely about how they perceive spatial justice and digital services.
- The second workshop is more targeted with people involved in the action "Digital Västerbotten" and working with digitalisation within the municipality. Hence the workshop was more focused on discussions and concrete outcomes and ideas for the future.
- A presentation of citizen participation was held to provide a scenery for the continued discussion of possible ways for citizen participation.
- Politicians were strategically not invited to enable the participants to speak freely.

## 2. Results of the workshop

• To achieve greater spatial justice, on which autonomy related aspects should the action or the locality focus? On which aspects did the stakeholders agree, which aspects remain contentious among stakeholders?

Agreements:

- More cooperation and sharing of resources is a clear way forward for the municipality.

- The need for more support from regional and state actors. Both in form of resources but also in form of steering documents about digitalisation. For example, all 290 municipalities in Sweden are now digitalizing their organisations, why not streamline it more from state level? This change must happen on state or regional level.
- The need of financial resources (for example from a change in the “equalisation system”<sup>19</sup>). This change must happen on state level.
- Creation of community rooms<sup>20</sup> is discussed as positive for spatial justice.
- The differences in demands between rural and urban areas need to be discussed in a more nuanced and solution-oriented way.
- Involve citizens in an efficient way. The municipality need to know what the citizens think.

Disagreements:

- There are different opinions among stakeholders about the extent to which digitalisation is the solution to resource and distance related issues. It is neither agreed upon how large the problem of the digital divide is.
- The pensioners groups and the municipality do not seem to agree on the speed or extent to which the municipal services should be digitalized. The municipality want to do digitalize more and faster than the pensioners group.

• How operational was the selected format?

Relatively effective:

- The discussion of citizen participation was a good idea since it allowed us to talk about autonomy while at the same time giving the municipality incentives to participate in the workshop. It gave us insight to how the municipality had worked with citizen participation while providing them with ideas to improve their communication with citizens.
- People signed up, were active and stayed for the entire workshop.
- Over all questions and aim of the workshop was sent out to participants prior to the workshop. This made the participants think about the issues before the workshop.
- It was important to separate the two workshops and to have the workshop with the pensioners before the workshop with the municipality. In that way we could discuss the results from the first workshop in the second workshop.

Things to improve:

- More people conducting the workshop. We were two researchers from Nordregio that travelled up to Vilhelmina and conducted the workshop. In retrospect a third person would have been helpful since it was challenging to instruct, listen and take notes at the same time. An independent moderator (as the one used in Euralens)

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<sup>19</sup> The municipal equalisation system is an existing structure that transfers money and resources from richer municipalities to municipalities with limited means. This is under political debate at the moment.

<sup>20</sup> A community room is a place usually located in a remote area where citizens are provided with public services, for example e-health, e-education or other services.

- might have provided more time for us organisers to reflect during the workshop, as well as provide more objectivity.
- In the second workshop it was a challenge separating the discussion about digitalisation from the discussion about spatial justice. This was probably due to the fact that the participants are working with digitalisation every day and because the project “Digital Västerbotten” was a big part of the subjects discussed. It is difficult to say how this could have been avoided by doing anything differently.

### 3. Results of analysis on autonomy in the locality

- Going back to the results of your case studies, are there some autonomy related elements that the workshop allowed you to specify, understand differently? For example, in terms of how the action is initiated, implemented and then used. And, for example about the characteristics of the autonomy in the locality and its capacity to adapt).

We knew that there was very little participation from citizens in the regional action. We also knew that most inland municipalities relied on results developed by the bigger municipality to understand what citizens want in general. We had little information on additional citizen participation from each individual municipality in the region. From the workshop we now know that the municipality of Vilhelmina strategically decided not to include citizens in the implementation of e-services. Digitalisation is still a new subject for them, and they wanted to be informed and prepared before inviting the citizens to participate. As for now they are investigating ways citizen participation can be efficient (both costs effective and targeted). They mean it is ineffective letting the citizens speak freely about needed digital solutions before the municipality know what is possible to implement. They therefore want to present the citizens with options when discussing the digital transformation. At the moment, there are some communication and meetings between the municipality and different civil groups, for example the municipality is meeting a pensioners group once every month.

We knew from interviews that the municipalities do not request more autonomy but instead more municipal collaboration and support from regional and state actors. At the moment they can choose what services to implement and how to divide resources in certain areas. However, their autonomy is obstructed by limited resources. Part from requesting more financial resources, the municipality in Vilhelmina is also requesting more streamlining and steering from regional and state actors regarding digitalisation. Since all municipalities in Sweden are now going through similar transitions of digitalisation it would be much more resource effective to streamline it.

We knew that the collaboration with other municipalities was very successful from the inland municipalities’ perspectives. In the workshop this was nuanced, and some collaboration partners were perceived better than others. The “better” partners were the ones that has a “sharing culture” where they informed and included all municipalities. According to Vilhelmina this provided the municipality with higher levels of inclusion and autonomy.

From the workshop with the pensioner groups we also dived deeper in the digital divide. The pensioners talked about difficulties of using digital services, but surprisingly none of them had asked for help at the digital service centres<sup>21</sup>. This implies that the digital transformation is about much more than just technical skills. A change in mind set it also

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<sup>21</sup> A public centre, often located in collaboration with the library, where citizens can receive technical support.

needed to narrow the digital divide. It also conforms with perceptions from the digitalisation group at the municipality who says that the understanding of “why” when it comes to digitalisation was the most important learning from the project. This also tells us that information about the bigger picture of digitalisation must be provided to citizens and also towards targeted groups.

- How does the autonomy of the action shape the autonomy of the locality and vice versa?  
Action → locality

When it comes to digitalisation, the public are in general not vocal about what they want. A few senior groups fight to keep some services analogue and to keep the ability of paying with cash. Regarding this issues, the municipality must consider the opinions of the senior groups, and thereby is the autonomy of the action affecting the autonomy of the locality. However, in this small municipality there are informal channels towards politicians and municipal employers everywhere. This makes the decision makers more aware of what is needed in the locality in comparison to the situation in a bigger city. The line between municipality and citizen becomes blurrier and understanding what affects what becomes more difficult.

Locality → action

In form of competences of the municipality, the autonomy of the locality is high. The situation of limited resources of the municipality however restricts the possibility to act. If the municipality had more resources they could afford creating more citizen participation, but it is because of resources and not because of autonomy.

The informal contact between citizens and the municipality/politicians place the citizens closer to decision making. From the work shop we also hear citizens say that the municipal officers and local politicians listen to them. On the other hand, citizens are aware that the hands of the municipality are tied because of economic restrictions. The critic and target of dissatisfaction is therefore often aimed at the regional or national level. For example through petitions such as “inlandsupproret” and “bensinupproret”. Petitions created to spread light on injustices in rural and remote areas.

- In the locality under consideration would more autonomy of the action or autonomy of the locality allow achieving greater spatial justice? If yes, specify which form of autonomy would be required? If no, specify which form of greater guidance from other levels of governance would be required?

More autonomy of the municipality, in form of more competencies would probably not result in more spatial justice. Swedish municipalities already have high levels of autonomy, such as responsibility for primary and secondary education, home care, social service etc. At the moment, the municipalities have difficulty delivering services because of limited resources. More economic resources, either from regional or national authorities or from sharing of resources with other municipalities, would probably result in greater ability to act for the locality.

The municipality is also requesting more long term funding from regional, state and EU level. This would increase the practical autonomy of the locality and allow the municipality to regain control over the needed transformation in the municipality. Long term funding will also give the local politicians room to make big and brave decisions needed for digital transition.

For more spatial justice to be achieved, the digital divide must be narrowed. The first question to decide upon is “who is responsible for educating the citizens regarding digitalization?”. Within the municipality this seems to be unclear and the resources are missing. As mentioned, a digital service centre does not seem to be enough. The

implications of digitalisations as well as the societal benefits need to be discussed with citizens to engage them for real.

## Annex 4.4: Report on the WP7 workshop on local autonomy in Lewis and Harris, Scotland (UK) – Strengthening Communities

Authors: Mags Currie, Annabel Pinker, HUTTON

### The UK Workshop: Lewis and Harris, UK33

#### Workshop introduction

Lewis is one of thirty-three case study areas considered in Work Package 6 of the RELOCAL project and one of three case studies in the UK, which is categorised by RELOCAL as “liberal”. The case study research sought to understand the extent to which Highland and Island Enterprise’s (HIE) *Strengthening Communities* programme (one of their core priority areas) addressed spatial injustices on Lewis, both through supporting land buy-out processes and building the capacity of (land-owning community) Trusts on the island. The workshop adopted a slightly different focus – to understand the challenges and future prospects for Trusts on Lewis and Harris. Thus, it was focused less on HIE’s work (i.e. the action) and more on Trusts’ activities (i.e. the locality).

In the case study, we considered how place-based interventions carried out under the remit of *Strengthening Communities* have tackled spatial injustices on Lewis. One of the key objectives of the case study report was to understand the contribution that *Strengthening Communities* had made in facilitating community land buy-outs and the formation of community landowning trusts, which are a relatively new form of autonomous community governance in Scotland.

#### Summarised key findings from WP6

It was found that over the past ten years, there has been a trend towards centralization in the Western Isles. This shift in decision-making was felt to inhibit HIE’s ability to respond with versatility to local needs and desires. However, the *Strengthening Communities* programme was felt to be crucial to the survival of Community Trusts. Trusts felt that HIE’s enablement and support of Trusts was uneven and that associated funding was not necessarily always best tailored to local needs. The logic of HIE decision-making was also not clear or well-understood by those outside HIE. Nonetheless, it was clear that those Trusts receiving HIE funding benefitted considerably from it, whilst Trusts not receiving funding suffered greater challenges in progressing their work. As such, despite its limitations, *Strengthening Communities* was seen as a key enabling factor to allow community trusts to develop greater autonomy.

#### Workshop objectives

The workshop sought to address the following questions:

- What do community landowners and community development trusts on the Western Isles need to thrive under current conditions?
- What kinds of organisations are (community land-owning) Trusts seeking to become over the next 10-15 years?

- What kinds of support from local and regional partner organisations are needed to ensure that they fulfil their aspirations within this timeframe?

The workshop adopted a slightly different focus from the case study; as rather than specifically focusing on *Strengthening Communities*, it sought to understand the challenges and future prospects for Landowning Trusts on Lewis and Harris, thus it focused more on the locality than on the action.

## Results of the workshop

### Autonomy of the action

Predominantly the workshop was designed to focus more on the issues facing community landowners rather than on HIE's work. However, the following points were raised with regard to the action:

- A key challenge for Trusts is to make a sustainable income. The current three-year funding model in *Strengthening Communities* doesn't give Trusts enough time to build a sustainable future. Trusts ultimately want to be in a position where they are not reliant on external support and are entirely self-sustaining (this would match with HIE's goals too).
- There is a mismatch between what the community wants from funding and what the funders want from funding. "*We don't really want innovation; we just want a sustainable community*", one workshop participant noted. Arguably, HIE would like sustainable communities too but there is an emphasis on innovation.
- Consistency of approach – Trusts felt there were inconsistencies in HIE's working practices with different communities.
- When HIE are evaluating the success of their support to Trusts, there should be more of an emphasis on softer, less easy to measure factors – such as happiness and a sense of connection – that make for a solid community rather than simply a financially secure one.

### Workshop set-up and rationale behind its organisation

RELOCAL researchers spoke to Trusts (who had been interviewed as part of WP6) about the focus of the workshop. It was agreed that the focus should be on community landowning (rather than development) Trusts, in view of their shared challenges and aspirations. Trust actors who participated in the workshop were already empowered to enact change; whilst the non-Trust actors (i.e. the key public body and agency representatives) were those who already have a role in enabling and facilitating these processes of empowerment into autonomous action. The workshop thus focused on individuals with the greatest combined ability to promote autonomy in the locality. Collectively the Trust and non-Trust actors represent a layer of autonomy (as defined by the RELOCAL project) as they are delivering action through routes of empowerment (the Trusts) and enablement (key public body and agency representatives).

RELOCAL researchers also spoke to HIE about the format of the workshop and which representatives from key public body and agencies it would be appropriate to invite. Invitations were sent out to eleven Trusts from across Lewis and Harris, including both smaller, more recently established trusts (Barvas, Bhalto, Paic, Keose Glebe, Great Bernera, Gallan Head, and Carloway) as well as the larger trusts (West Harris, North Harris, the Stornoway Trust, and Galson). If potential participants did not respond to initial emails, we attempted to contact them via telephone. Trusts with employed staff were in a better position to send a representative, and were more likely to attend; Trusts without the resources to employ staff had much greater difficulty in attending as their directors had work commitments. Ultimately, the Stornoway Trust, North Harris, Galson, Carloway, Barvas, and Paic sent representatives. Aside from the Stornoway and Carloway Trust, who sent directors and board members, all the trusts sent employed staff rather than board members. Three trusts sent two participants (Stornoway, Carloway and Galson). Key public body and agency representatives who were invited included members of Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), the local authority (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar - CnES), Community Land Scotland (CLS), and all organisations participating in the local Community Planning Partnership (CPP). Representatives from all these organisations attended the workshop's afternoon session as non-trust actors (two from HIE, two from the local authority, two from the CPP and one from CLS). Two of these non-trust actors were representing two bodies: one was employed by the local authority to co-ordinate the Community Planning Partnership, and another was a director both of a community trust and of Community Land Scotland.

In the morning two sessions were held. The first focused on the "timelines" of the trusts and the second focused on three questions designed to look at what the trusts aspired to do in the future and the ways in which these aspirations could be realized<sup>22</sup>. In the afternoon, these aspirations were shared and discussed with non-trust actors and finally a number of collective concrete steps regarding how best to collaborate in the immediate future were agreed. Much of the format of the event involved group discussions. During these group discussion participants were split into two groups on a pre-allocated basis to allow for a mix of different types of trust and non-trusts actors and to avoid duplication of organizational representation or the predominance of certain voices. Mags and Annabel facilitated the two groups; Estelle and Mark acted primarily as observers. When we wished to compare and contrast findings, one of us wrote notes on flipcharts, which participants would reflect on and discuss.

In advance of the workshop, it was agreed that the first part of the day should be reserved for Trust actors alone in order to facilitate more open dialogue concerning aspects of their future. This decision proved to be of merit because when the non-Trust actors joined the workshop in the afternoon, the majority of Trust participants did not speak as freely or with as much conviction as they had in the first part of the day. Workshop participants reflected after the workshop that the Trusts had come together to discuss similar issues in the past, but that it had been beneficial that in this case external actors (rather than representatives of Trusts or agencies) had facilitated the discussion

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## Results: Autonomy in the locality

The establishment of Trusts has substantially contributed to the empowerment of community members, particularly those directly involved in the Trust in some way. Community land buyouts have been promoted at both local (community and local authority areas) and nationally through substantive changes in the Land Reform Acts in Scotland. around how land can be bought. Autonomy Government rhetoric in Scotland<sup>23</sup> applies to the empowerment of communities rather than how they should be enabled by key public bodies and agencies. Recent government rhetoric tends to place increased emphasis upon communities on becoming responsible for their own development and has been accompanied with State withdrawal of key service provision. Lewis and Harris, have, arguably, more enablement processes in place (in large part through *Strengthening Communities*) than other Scottish contexts outwith the Highlands and Island region. HIE have thus been instrumental in assisting the Land Reform process in the Western Isles – most Trusts reflect they would not have been able to develop as they have done without this support. The workshop further clarified that *Strengthening Communities* was a key enabling factor in the Western Isles, but the workshop provided a more nuanced understanding of this process and focused more on the work of Trusts in the locality rather than the action.

Lewis and Harris are not yet entirely community-owned and Trust actors did not aspire for 100% community ownership, but rather for all communities to be happy with who was managing the land. It is worth noting that the Land Reform process and the development of associated community Trusts are still in their early stages. It was evident from the workshop that although land reform has helped to empower communities, autonomy is generally existing through (predominantly *Strengthening Communities* promoted) enablement. Trusts aspire to a future where they are more autonomous (in that they require less or no enablement than is currently the case). In such a circumstance there is the potential for spatial justice would be further enhanced in the locality. However, the workshop reinforced findings from WP6 case study work that the Western Isles continue to struggle with depopulation, and the social, economic and political effects that arise from that. National policies are often sectoral whilst many issues the communities deal with are cross-sectoral, involving more complex and holistic approaches than are currently offered by policy. Brexit also poses an underlying current of uncertainty, which could affect future funding prospects

The workshop highlighted that key issues affecting the current autonomy of the Trusts include:

1. **Austerity and political uncertainty** – particularly in relation to public service withdrawal and centralisation. Brexit was another implicit underlying factor. However, it was felt that Trusts have a role in resisting increased imposed autonomy relating to austerity. Further, the perceived requirement to provide services may offer Trusts with a valuable income stream in the future. Delivery of services may thus become more spatially just and place-based.

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<sup>23</sup> if applying the RELOCAL definition of autonomy where autonomy = a balance of empowerment and enablement

2. **Governance and planning:** current funding mechanisms mean Trusts are predominantly reactive rather than strategic. Governance arrangements may not be fit for purpose. A collective network of all Trusts may help with more strategic planning and the Community Landowners Network may offer a space to do this.
3. **Contrasting priorities and practices of public agencies and Trusts** – Model of how trusts should practice is, to some extent, determined by *Strengthening Communities* – as Trusts who do not conform risk not being funded. However, this may not be fit-for-purpose.
4. **Community engagement and empowerment:** some community members don't get involved as they don't have the skills. Others are frustrated by how long it takes to manifest change. Not all community members can be empowered to be involved or influence Trust decision and a few people were found to do multiple roles in order to continue the Trust's existence. There thus exists a lack of diversity and representation amongst Trusts. To promote spatial justice and participation, members of local communities should be encouraged to recognise the ways they can contribute to Trusts and the Trusts should accept more diverse and representative views from the community.
5. **Trusts are unequal:** it is important that Trusts are not all perceived to be the same; Trusts are at different stages of development and have wide variations in terms of capacity e.g. some Trusts have established income generation whilst others have not; some Trusts are more established than others, some Trusts are staffed whilst other Trusts are not. Best-practice shared between the Trusts could assist them all.
6. **Funding:** Short-term funding does not allow Trusts to make strategic decisions. There is a mis-match between the needs of communities and funders' models. Trusts aim to be sustainable whilst funders require the community to be innovative. Funding is more of a challenge to the Trusts that do not have established funding streams such as through community energy.

Going ahead, some of the key aspirations expressed by Trusts were:

- We want to still exist
- We want to be landlords that develop and employ people
- We want to be positive organisations
- We want to be forward looking
- We want to be linked to all generations in our community
- We want communities to be confident and vibrant
- We want to manage the land in an environmentally friendly manner
- We want to see policy help to support community land ownership and help it and help it to grow
- We want empowered communities that become involved in Trusts' work

Many of these were linked to aspects of increased autonomy. Trusts felt that to realise these aspirations they require: financial security, a clear vision communicated and agreed upon with the community; an outward looking approach that situates them within wider contexts, clear language and communication from key local public bodies and agencies, bottom-up actions – Trusts have to (get better at) mitigating top-down tendencies by making their voice heard more effectively, have a capacity to attract and retain staff, have

effective representation from and communication with communities and have good structure and governance.

The Trusts felt that these processes could be enabled by finding out more about the roles of key local public bodies and agencies and what they were able to do i.e. more effective communication about how the key local public bodies and agencies could enable the most effective community engagement as determined by the Trusts.

In the afternoon when both trust and non-trust actors were present together in the workshop, participants agreed on a number of “concrete steps going ahead” that were felt to promote aspects of autonomy in the locality. These were:

- To complete the formation of a Community Land Forum, as this was seen to provide an avenue for Trusts to be able to learn from each other. Trusts are at different stages; there are wide variances in capacity. Some have income streams; others don't, and smaller trusts have few, if any, staff. *“We meet at meetings like this on an equal footing, but when we go back home again things are very different”.*
- Better communication about what the Community Planning Partnership is. It was suggested that this could include a formal and regular communication channel between the Community Planning Partnership on the Western Isles and the Community Land Forum (this should be two-way and will highlight that the Community Planning Partnership are being open as to what they do).
- A collaborative event for community development officers from within and outwith Trusts.
- Shaping a one-stop shop to address the communication points being brought up (within the key public bodies and agencies).

Many of these suggestions related to two key themes emerging from the afternoon: first, that Trusts had not previously recognized the value or usefulness of the Community Planning Partnership prior to the workshop<sup>24</sup>; second, that there was a need for more effective communication.

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<sup>24</sup> One of the findings from the WP 6 Case Study Report was that the Community Planning Partnership was not needed as it attempts to facilitate communication between different actors in different key public bodies and agencies and that this was already implicitly happening; however the workshop raised that whilst this was still the case, the communication could at times be more formal. Also it should be noted that the workshop may be responsible for facilitating future action between the Trusts and the Community Planning Partnerships.