



Resituating the Local in Cohesion and Territorial Development



Case Study Report
Monistrol 2020
Local Strategic Plan in a Small-Scale Municipality,
Spain

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Abbreviations

ARSA	<i>Agrícola Regional, SA.</i>
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DIBA	<i>Diputació de Barcelona</i> – Barcelona Diputation
EC	European Commission
EFRD	European Fund for Regional Development
EGTC	European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation
ESF	European Social Fund
ESDP	European Spatial Development Planning network
ESPON	European Observation Network
EU	European Union
FGC	<i>Ferrocarrils Generalitat de Catalunya</i> – Catalan Government Railway
IDESCAT	<i>Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya</i> – Catalan Statistical Institute
LAU	Local Administrative Unit
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
SME	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

Executive Summary

“Living in the shade of Montserrat mountain prevented us from properly valuing our assets and attractive. In fact, we are now just beginning to understand that we can take advantage of Montserrat. We need our citizens to get back their self-esteem and to value what we are and what we have”. Mayor of Monistrol de Montserrat

Monistrol de Monserrat is a 3.000 inhabitants town located in the outer Barcelona metropolitan region. Traditionally, Monistrol was a town with strong industrial activity in the textile sector but it suffered from deep economic re-structuring, and today industry is residual. Territorial complexity (accessibility deficits, lack of suitable land) partly explain why Monistrol, despite its past, has not been able to reconduct industrial activities. Economy and employment is mostly based today on the tertiary sector, constituting a residential economy to a higher extent.

In this context, the close presence of Montserrat Mountain and monastery is locally perceived as an opportunity for social and economic development of the town, linked to the development of tourism. Today a few hundred local neighbours work at the monastery facilities (restaurants, bars, shops, museums...). Being erected in the 12th century as the civil base of the Montserrat Monastery and hosting the Priorate Palace, siege of political and economic power of Montserrat monks, nowadays large tourist flows head to the mountain (more than 2,5 million yearly) but few visit Monistrol itself. This, despite the fact that most transit infrastructure heading the mountain is located in town, even if somehow peripherally and somehow with poor designs.



Figure 1. Montserrat Mountain and monastery seen from Monistrol’s main square, so close and so far at the same time.

Relatively lower living conditions, weaker industry, aging population, old fashioned retails, aging housing stock, rigorous local landscape and climate, low attractiveness for young people to live in town, lower economic or social perspectives than other surrounding towns, represented elements of pessimism for local residents in the late 2000s, despite of the strong economic performance of Montserrerat. In this sense, spatial injustice can be argued is not that much about one’s self position in absolute terms (economic, social, or spiritual...) but about one’s position compared others in the neighbourhood. This is even stronger when the sense location is yet another constraining element.

In this context of general pessimism, the Monistrol town council promoted in 2008-2009 a Local Strategic Plan, Monistrol 2020, aiming at fostering local economies and developing endogenous potentials to overcome spatial injustice, while increasing local self-esteem and fostering positive dynamics. The initiative aimed at the following objectives:

- identifying local potential for place-based development strategies, and already existing bottom-up initiatives with potential to positively impact local communities both socially and economically
- facilitating horizontal governance mechanisms establishing communication / collaboration structures between the public and private sectors and the organised civil society (cultural and social associations)
- integrating initiatives in a formal policy Action Plan that could provide institutional support to ongoing initiatives, and also constitute a roadmap for negotiations with higher administrative levels (e.g. County Council, Provincial Deputation and Catalan Government).

The Local Strategic Plan proposed three action lines, 1) transitioning to more attractive townscape by upgrading the general quality of urban space and addressing precarious housing conditions; 2) promoting a more vital and dynamic town, more diversified in terms of economic activities and commerce; 3) gaining in regional recognition and visibility, especially promoting tourism and attracting visitors.

The process of elaboration of the Local Strategic Plan involved the active participation of all departments of the town council (economic promotion, social affairs, architecture and mobility, patrimony, environment, culture). It also involved main local economic actors (industries, restaurants, hotels, and retails), and the civil society. This was done through a number of participatory activities, stakeholder interviews and expert workshops. At the end of the process, proposals were discussed with higher administrative levels, including the provincial deputation and the regional roads department, and with the Benedictine Montserrat Monastery.

A decade after the implementation of the action, the analysis of this case study discovered that:

- In broad terms, the Action Plan designed was implemented in relatively high degree. Even if some of the most complex actions are still under way or being negotiated with relevant agents, especially when decision-making involves higher administrative levels (e.g. finding solutions for better locally accommodating large transport infrastructures), most actions depending on local action were successfully implemented. Today Monistrol appears to be 1) physically more attractive 2) relatively more dynamic and 3) working for being more regionally recognized.
- The general mood and self-perception of citizens and institutions on the current socio-economic situation of Monistrol seems to have improved, according to conversations held with local agents, being now more positive than back in 2008. This cannot be associated directly or strictly because of the Plan, but it has probably contributed to it to some extent.
- The Plan itself did not become a steering force of local public policy after 2009. However, over time, in the mid and long term, the current political team considers it a useful tool for monitoring the evolution of local policy and political action over the last decade, including implementation of key projects and evolution of main challenges. The Plan, read today in 2018, is a valuable witness of the late 2000s pre-crisis political momentum, and most relevant challenges existing at the time.
- The lack of political transcendence of the Local Strategic Plan can partly be explained because of a complex balance of political forces in office both at the time of drawing the Plan, and in the

following election periods, and because of the typical non-binding character of strategic planning processes. Strategic Plans tend to maximize their impacts when promoters are looking forward to use them as a tools for drawing consensuses to capitalize mid-term socio-territorial projects with a strong citizen capitalisation. When leadership is weak or sceptic on the tools themselves, such materialisation appears more difficult.

- The plan was a reflexive process involving social and economic actors of Monistrol, public and private institutions, and the citizenship in general. In this sense, the Plan facilitated the different agents and actors in town to get to know each other better and to promote trust between them, a key element for local policy making.
- Simultaneously, the Local Strategic Plan allowed the public sector, and especially civil servants working for the town hall and not necessarily being local residents, to increase their contact and complicity with social and economic local actors, thanks to meetings and work done in common during the elaboration of the plan. The Plan provides a chance to better know each other, establishing a basis for further future collaborations in the mid-term. At the end, the Action process is meant to transform the reactive attitude of the municipality office and of local actors, in the direction of more pro-active extroverted attitudes, better anticipating future challenges. Still, the degree to which stakeholders make use of this opportunity, in particular public servants and local policy makers, depends on the personal involvement of each one of them.
- Civic structures created during the elaboration of the Plan did not have a continuation after the finalisation of the plan, neither for monitoring action plan implementation nor for continuing midterm activities of strategic thinking and forward thinking.

1. Introduction

Monistrol de Montserrat is a town of 3.000 inhabitants located 50km west of Barcelona in the Bages County. It is a town with a vast history linked to the mountain and monastery of Montserrat, and with a strong industrial past in the textile sector. Like many other areas of Catalonia, Monistrol suffered from deep restructuring process of the textile industry in the 1970 and 1980s, resulting in the closure of many long-standing factories, some even dating back as far as from the 1800s. It still keeps some agricultural properties, in particular linked to regional products having a quality stamp (endemic tomato kind, local cheese...), but agriculture is in fact a residual activity.

The average family income in Monistrol is 7% lower than in the Barcelona province. Unemployment accounts in 2017 for 14%, much lower than in 2014 when it reached a maximum of 21%. Local employment transitioned in the last 15 years, increasing the weight of services from 62% to 75%, and decreasing the weight of industry from 35% to 25%. Industrial companies went from 25 to 12 during the same period. Construction is currently almost residual, with all 8 constructing companies existing in 2001 now closed. Although 2,5 million people visit the neighbouring Montserrat Mountain and monastery yearly, Monistrol struggles to divert part of this flow into its local restaurants, hotels and shops.

Such relatively lower living conditions and weaker industry than neighbouring towns, aging population, old fashioned retails, aging housing stock, rigorous local landscape and climate, low attractiveness for young people to live in town, lower economic or social perspectives than other surrounding towns, simultaneously to strong economic performance of Montserrat but resulting with low benefits for Monistrol, all in all represented elements of pessimism for local residents in the late 2000s.

Spatial injustice can be argued is not that much about one's self position in absolute terms (economic, social, spiritual...) but about one's position compared other's in the neighbourhood. Monistrol was never a marginal town, nor had marginal neighbourhoods, but could not perceive a clear direction, and was somehow struggling more than other neighbouring towns. Moreover, location itself was is yet another constraining element for Monistrol.

In this context of general pessimism, the Monistrol town council promoted in 2008-2009 a Local Strategic Plan, Monistrol 2020, aiming at fostering local economies and developing endogenous potentials to overcome spatial injustice, while increasing local self-esteem and fostering positive dynamics.

The initiative aimed at the following objectives:

- identifying local potential for place-based development strategies, and already existing bottom-up initiatives with potential to positively impact local communities both socially and economically
- facilitating horizontal governance mechanisms establishing communication / collaboration structures between the public and private sectors and the organised civil society (cultural and social associations)
- integrating initiatives in a formal policy Local Action Plan that could provide institutional support to ongoing initiatives, and also constitute a roadmap for negotiations with higher administrative levels (e.g. County Council, Provincial Deputation and Catalan Government).

The chosen approach was very much in line with European policies at the time, in particular proposed policy aims and mechanisms for stimulating rural and transition areas with declining agriculture, mining and industry. The initiative considered diversifying rural economies (as proposed by the 3rd and 4th reports on Social and Economic Cohesion), with special focus on the promotion of tourism activities (4th reports on Social and Economic Cohesion) based on the outstanding natural and cultural heritage of the areas (as suggested by the ESDP and the EU Territorial Agenda). It also stressed the need for upgraded infrastructure quality in line with aims by the EU Territorial Agenda and the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion.

Being so close to Barcelona (50km), yet spatially segregated (situated in a narrow fluvial valley, permanently at the shade of the mountain during several months a year, and bisected by a main road with a traffic flow above 26.000 vehicles / day), urban-rural partnerships with close-by Barcelona Metropolitan Area and Manresa county capital were observed strategic. This included physical, social and economic relations and governance structures to implement initiatives of common interest. This topic was also being extensively debated at the time (e.g. 6th progress report on social and economic cohesion, SPESP, ESPON 1.1.2, DG Regio seminars on sustainable development, and urban-rural linkages in 2009).

The process of elaboration of the Local Strategic Plan involved the active participation of all departments in the town council (economic promotion, social affairs, architecture and mobility, patrimony, environment, culture...), as well as main economic actors (industries, restaurants, hotels, and retails), and the civil society, through a number of participatory activities, stakeholder interviews and expert workshops. At the end of the process, proposals were discussed with higher administrative levels (including the provincial deputation and the roads department) and with the Benedictine Montserrat Monastery.

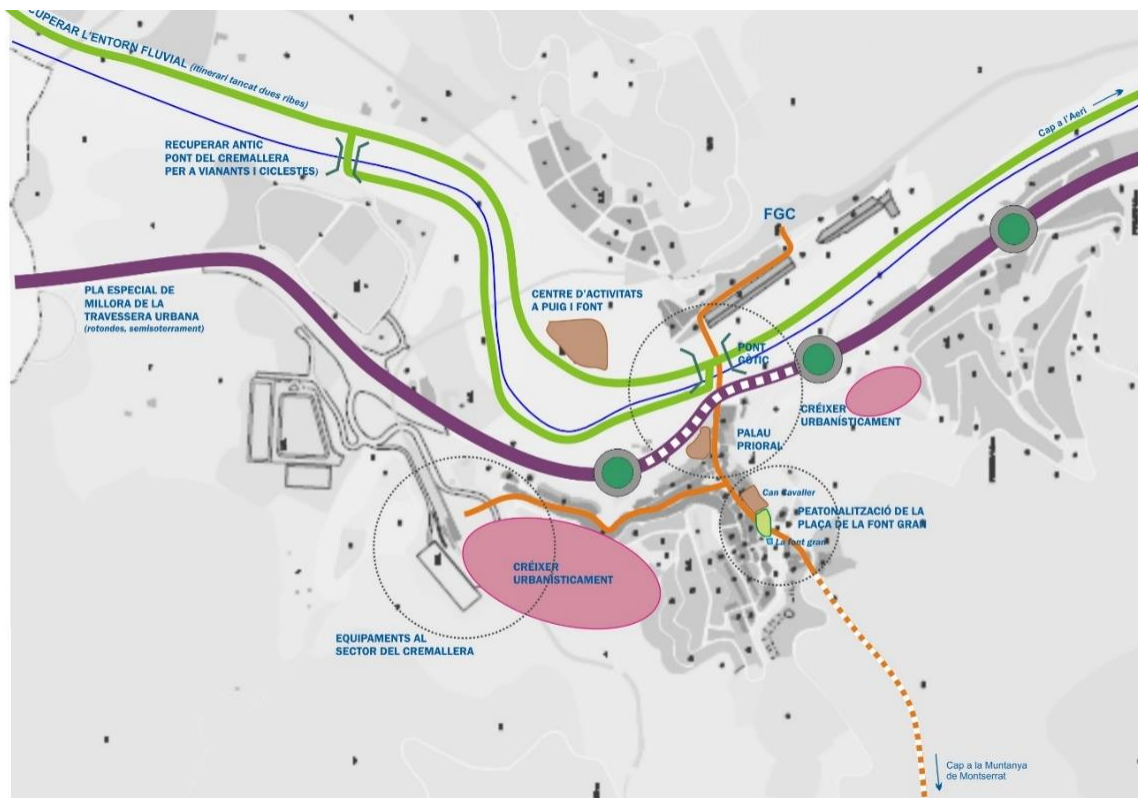


Figure 2. Graphical synthesis of Monistrol de Montserrat Strategic Plan 2008-2020, including main strategies and projects, as well as local assets to be promoted. Source: Monistrol Strategic Plan (2008)

2. Methodological Reflection

This case study was elaborated following the general principles of the RELOCAL case study guidelines.

Documents produced in the frame of the Local Strategic Plan were recuperated and analysed, considering the current focus perspective in 2018, ten year after initial elaboration.

Such process was then contextualised based on other processes of strategic forward looking developed at the same time involving neighbouring towns and counties.

The Local Strategic Plan was elaborated by the same team now reporting this case study, providing additional background knowledge on the local perceptions in 2008, of the challenges and controversies back at the time of elaboration of the Plan, and on the nature of the actions and participatory process.

There has been an attempt to limit potential bias in this sense, by devoting as main author for this case study researchers not directly involved in the consultancy team back in 2008. Still, we believe that benefits rising from deep knowledge of the team on the locality outnumber threats for eventual bias.

The main actors involved in the elaboration of the Plan in 2008 have been consulted again in 2018, and asked to critically analyse their experience in 2008, identifying elements of success and elements of failure. Also critically discussing things that could have been done differently.

Work has also been done to assess the degree of application of the Action Plan proposals, to observe those actions and changes implemented over the last decade.

The current socioeconomic context has also been assessed to identify 2008-2018 evolution of a number of key indicators, where the Plan may have eventually contributed.

Perceptions between tourists and residents have been considered as well by a series of on-street questions, randomly performed. This processes aimed at gasping changes in local (self)-perceptions.

Perception surveys provide for qualitative directions for key trends, given that they were proposed to relevant stakeholders. They were not intended as statistically representative in quantitative terms. 10 random citizens + 5 random tourists were passed the surveys on the street. The survey was also passed to all local interviewees.

Work has been contrasted with technicians at the provincial level, working with a large number of Local Strategic Plans.

Findings of this case study have also been contrasted with input from fellow experts on strategic planning obtained from a series of workshops and surveys performed during 2017.

3. The Locality

3.1. Territorial Context and Characteristics of the Locality

The municipality of Monistrol de Montserrat is located to the limit between the counties of Bages, Anoia, Vallès Occidental and Baix Llobregat. His neighbouring municipalities are Esparreguera, Collbató, el Bruc, Marganell, Castellbell i el Vilar, Vacarisses, and a bit further, Marotrell and Manresa.

It is situated in a narrow Llobregat river valley, a natural and historical communication corridor between Central Catalonia and Barcelona and its Metropolitan region. The geography of the place increases difficulties for implementing large scale economic activities (low land availability, steepness of the territory), as well as to properly fitting transport infrastructure in ways that minimize externalities for citizens, so to say, making the municipality more attractive for residents and visitors.



Figure 3. Location of Monistrol de Montserrat. Source: Google Maps

Next table briefly characterises the case study area, as a reference.

Name of Case Study Area	Monistrol de Montserrat
Size	11,77 Km ²
Total population (2016)	2.867
Population density (2016)	243,6 (people per Km ²)
Level of development in relation to wider socio-economic context	Relatively disadvantaged in relation to surrounding highly

	developed urban region
Name and Identification Code of the NUTS-3 area, in which the locality is situated (NUTS 3 Code(s) as of 2013)	ES511 Barcelona
Name and Identification Code of the NUTS-2 area, in which the locality is situated (NUTS 2 Code(s) as of 2013)	ES51 Catalonia
Type of the region	Intermediate

Table 1. Basic socio-economic characteristics of Monistrol de Montserrat. Source: Idescat, 2017

Next, a number of socioeconomic megatrends are presented for Monistrol. Trends identified at the time of the Local Strategic Plan (approx. 2000-2008) are updated for the following period 2008-2018, a period characterised first by 6 years of financial and economic crisis in Spain, then by a period 2014-2018 of steady economic recovery and expansion.

- **Population, is now stagnated after sharp increases before the crisis.** Until 2003, the population of Monistrol had been around the 2.500 inhabitants. From this year on it increased attaining a maximum of 3.029 inhabitants in 2009. Then, population fell again to 2.867 inhabitants in 2016, mainly due to the crisis (2008-2014) that gave place to a migratory return of foreign families arrived in the 2000s back to their origin countries.
- **Immigration is relatively low and stable at around 8%.** In 2016 there was 8% of immigrants, 231 persons in total, 17% less than 10 years before (2006). Largest community is the Moroccan (137 residents), followed of the Polish (23 residents).
- **Unemployment rate went from 21% to 14% since end of the crisis, but is still higher than before the crisis.** In November 2017, unemployment was 12,2%, much lower than in 2013 when it reached a maximum of 20,8%. In 2006, unemployment was around 6%. The unemployment for 55+ cohorts is still above 20%, showing structural patterns difficult to address.
- **Economic transition: going from industrial specialisation to a services economy.** Employment in the industry fell from 34% in 2001 to 25% in 2017, with industrial companies having gone from 25 to 12 in just fifteen years. In contrast, population working in the services sector went from around 62% in 2001 to 74% in 2017. Construction is almost residual today -it represented 4% of local employment in 2001-, all 8 constructing companies existing in 2001 are now closed.
- **Young people are increasingly staying in town for a living.** Youngsters are finding work opportunities in the proximity of town, in the Bages county or in Baix Llobregat county in the northern Barcelona metropolitan area. Quite a lot of them work in Monistrol itself, especially in the Montserrat mountain/monastery. Empty house stock in town has decreased from 300 buildings in 1991 (24% of the stock), to 285 in 2001 (22% of the stock) and to 253 in 2011 (16% of the stock), possibly indicating better housing conditions and upgrading of the historical town centre. The housing stock is composed mainly by single-family homes.
- **Agriculture, being a residual activity, it has managed to promote quality seals for local products, which are increasingly recognised as an economic asset.** Despite low weigh of agriculture in the local economy, this activity plays important role as it helps ecologically maintaining the surroundings of river (horticulture) and improving local landscape. Some products have quality seals and are known across Catalonia (Montserrat tomato, cheese, honey...). Local products are increasingly used as tourism assets as well, integrating a culinary offer in the local restoration businesses.
- **Industries, not particularly involved in local governance.** There are two industrial sites adding together around 10 hectares, both located out of town. Most companies there are

SMEs employing workers that many times are not local. Most industry heads are living outside Monistrol. There isn't a dialog between industries and the town council, being collaboration between the public sector and industries limited to urbanism or environmental conditions of the industrial sites.

- **Renovation of local shops still needed.** Although the service economy represents above 75% of the active population, much of it corresponds to the relative contribution of the Monastery (hotels, shops, restaurants, transport). Reinforcing the local retail shops is a strategy to increase the attractive of the town, especially for young families.
- **Large tourist flows headed to close-by Montserrat are still bypassing Monistrol.** Monistrol has touristic assets and cultural heritage enough to capture a part of the tourism headed towards the mountain, it has a handful of restaurants and offers privileged views of the mountain and its natural surroundings. Monistrol is also hosting the large cable car station providing access to the monastery from the train station that connects with Barcelona. Nevertheless, tourist numbers are low, although increasing.
- **Town council budget is stable at around 2,5 million €/year.** The income mainly comes from taxes, from transfers from higher administrations (regional and national), and from loans of the Barcelona Provincial Deputation, as well as bank loans. Its investment capacity is relatively limited, around 200.000€ / yearly (5% of the municipal budget).

Next table synthesises quantitatively key local trends between 2001 and 2007 (before drawing the Local Strategic Plan), and up to 2017.

Indicator	2001	2007	2011	2015	2017	Trend	Observations
Total Population	2.559	2.903	3.009	2.901	2.935		Population, stagnated after heavy increases
% Children and Youths (0-15 / total pop)	12,4%	12,8%	14,5%	15,7%	15,6%		Increasing in a regional context of population ageing
% Immigration (foreign pop. / total pop)	-	9,7%	10,6%	7,8%	8,7%		Immigration, stable around 8%
Unemployment Rate (unemployment pop. / active pop.)	-	5,9%	18,0%	17,5%	13,3%		Unemployment rate, falling but well above pre-crisis levels
Employment Industry Rate (industrial employ. / total employ.)	34%	35%	25%	29%	25%		Economic transition, from industry to services
Employment Construction Rate (construction employ. / total employ.)	4%	5%	10%	1%	1%		Construction is almost residual today
Employment Services Rate (services employ. / total employ.)	62%	60%	65%	70%	74%		Economic transition, from industry to services
Industrial Companies	25	22	17	14	15		Industries, not particularly involved in local strategic governance
Services Companies	52	71	58	68	69		Large tourist flows headed to the Mountain and bypassing Monistrol
Gross Disposable Household Income	13.774€	17.293€	16.619€	18.188€	-		Increasing but below Barcelona metropolitan region mean levels.
Empty Houses Rate (empty houses / total)	22,35%	-	15,61%	-	-		Young people are increasingly staying in town for a living
Municipal Budget	2,3M€	5,2M€	2,6M€	2,4M€	2,6M€		Town council budget stable around 2,5 million €/year

Table 2. Megatrends at a glance in Monistrol de Montserrat, 2001-2017. Data source: Catalan Institute of Statistics, 2017

3.2. The Locality with regards to Dimension 1&2

Analytical Dimension 1: Perception of spatial (in-)justice within the locality

General pessimism in the turn of the 21st Century. At the time of implementing the action, the perception of spatial in-justice within the municipality was mostly related to the perception of lack of economic opportunities, scarce vitality of social agents, insufficient infrastructure and services, loss of visibility and collective identity. The general perception was of a general slowdown of the town vitality, a progressive decrease of public incomes making it difficult for social programs to be brought forward, a general industrial decline and reactive institutions.

Available family income was close to 10% under the average of the Barcelona province. The process of deindustrialisation initiated in the 80s and 90s resulted on loss of job opportunities, affecting directly the local economy. Industries were being substituted by new logistical activities of less added value. The scarce vitality of social agents did not help to revert this situation.

Urban infrastructures were somewhat precarious. The municipality centre was socially composed by elderly classes. The housing stock was old and deteriorated in many cases, one out of every four buildings was empty by 1996. This global setup was generating inequalities in relation to other towns, and young people were leaving the town, moving to others with better labour, commercial and leisure opportunities.

“Monistrol was not attractive for young people, and many of them decided to leave the town. There were not initiatives for them. Social life is still closed to few people, which in general is active but is ageing. There is no renovation of local associations, which are not attractive enough for young people, who are not interested in it. The associations are not interesting for new residents of Monistrol, who not involved in it.” Monistrol citizen

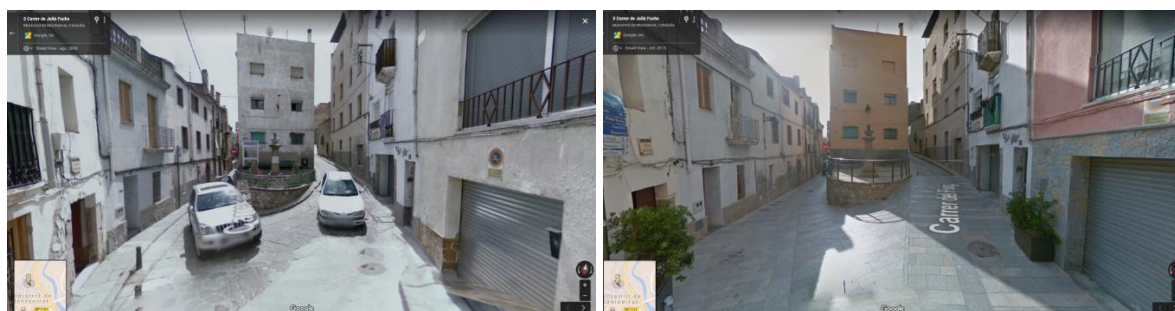


Figure 4. Deteriorated town centre (above, 2008), slowly being upgraded (below, 2015). Source: Google Maps

Persisting mind-sets: symbolic boundaries. First news of the municipality trace back to the year 888. By the 14th century, the town was erected in the foot of the Montserrat Mountain as the civil base of the Monserrat monastery. It was built surrounding the gothic bridge on the Llobregat River and of the Priorate Palace, siege of political and economic power of Montserrat monks. The priors of Montserrat were feudal lords of Monistrol during centuries. This implies that Monistrol has had historically a directly related existence with the sanctuary. Today, some two hundred people in Monistrol work on a regular basis for the tourist facilities in the Monastery. This long tradition of heraldically servitude (lord, peasant; 1.000 years ago / employers, employees; today) still represents symbolic mental boundaries.

In spite of more than 2,5 million people visiting annually the mountain, with all traffic and infrastructure servitudes that this generates in the municipality, Monistrol as a town does not still succeed in taking account of full economic potential of the mountain. In words of its mayor, *“living in the shade of Montserrat mountain prevented Monistrol from properly valuing its assets and attractive. Besides Monistrol citizens working for the Montserrat Monastery as employees. Monistrol is just now beginning to understand that it can also take advantage of Montserrat for its own benefit and interest. We need citizens to get back their self-esteem and to value what we are and what we have”*.

“The relationship between the Town Council and Montserrat Abbey should improve in the short term. The railway station is an opportunity for town to develop touristic initiatives related to Montserrat.” Local policy-maker in Monistrol.

Low entrepreneurship among Monistrol population to benefit from tourist flows. The tourism to the mountain of Montserrat seemed an opportunity for the town but there were no initiatives linked to the tourism. On weekends there are usually high influx of visitors to the mountain. It seemed that the municipality should benefit from such a large influx, but people would not enter the town, not knowing what they could find. Furthermore, all shops would be closed on Sundays. Only establishments located on the road crossing benefited from high flows of daily traffic. Only on days when the mountain of Montserrat became saturated with visitors, all the restaurants in town filled up.

The perception of opportunities offered by the Montserrat Mountain was shared among surroundings municipalities. Local stakeholders valued the natural environment, and everything that is related to Montserrat; cultural, tourism, sports and spiritual activity. Back in the late 2000s, many municipalities in the area were working in actions to promote the potential that Montserrat Mountain could bring in, and collaborated to some extent in a few shared initiatives. In general, there was at the time a perception of lack of exploitation of opportunities. The mayors of those municipalities emphasized that the tourism could become a main development driver for their economies by offering tourist services (accommodation, restaurants, guides ...) that could generate jobs.

“Monistrol does not render economically the two millions of tourists per year that visit Montserrat, but still it suffers the traffic and inconveniences that these flows generate daily. Monistrol is the base camp of the mountain but it does not offer sufficient and adequate resources for Montserrat tourists. There is still not a municipal strategy to coordinate properly and efficiently the advantages of being located in a touristic place.” Local stakeholder in Monistrol.

“The touristic activities have an incredible potential for the development of the county. However, the tourism sector has not been management properly. There are touristic resources but there is a lack of good management and no promotion. The development of a tourism linked to culture, hiking or rock climbing could be an economic base of any municipality” Policy-maker in neighbouring municipality



Figure 5. Tourists waiting for the Montserrat cable car in the new rail station, oddly situated outside Monistrol. Source: Mcrit.

Lack of institutional cooperation between economic sector and the local administration.

Dialogue was scarce between the economic actors and the public sector back in 2008. There were no regular contacts between the industries of Monistrol and the Town Council, neither personal nor institutional. Relations between the town council and the Association of Retails were not in good shape either. With local restaurants, relations were better as proprietaries had associated in a Montserrat common trademark, in collaboration with the town hall. The relationship between the town council and the Montserrat Abbey was slowly improving, overcoming long-time historical and geographic constraints.

Most company owners and managers were not even from the town, nor lived there, nor did they have any particular contact with Monistrol. The reasons why their companies were installed in the village were diverse, and the role played by the people themselves as factors of attractiveness remained limited. Contacts between companies themselves were also almost non-existent: employers are not grouped under any association, neither at the municipal level, nor at the sectorial level. Generally, the perception was that companies in the industrial areas did not have substantial impact in the town, neither in economic nor social terms. Local citizens considered that Monistrol would never be an industrial town anymore.



Figure 6. One of the industries in the industrial area of Monistrol, and Montserrat Mountain, behind. Source: Mcrit

Heavy traffic in the main road crossing stress spatial segregation in town. Traffic on road C-55 is around 26.407 daily (12% heavy vehicles) and 33.000 in peak periods. It bisects town into two halves generating spatial segregation within the municipality. Walking from one side of town to the other is a rather courageous task, although the itinerary improved in quality as the

bridge across the river was refurbished in 2012 (an action, which had been included in the Local Strategic Plan). The town council has been negotiating during last years, and it is still doing, the traffic-calming road C-55 throughout Monistrol with regional administration.

Assessment of local self-perception. Next table presents how Monistrol actors perceived municipal, social and economic aspects. The first table shows perception of stakeholders as revealed in a survey made in 2008. Next table displays changes in perception ten years later in 2018. Results displayed correspond to averages from individual (in some cases group) responses. Interviewees required to state how far or how close saw themselves from opposite pairs of features for the municipality.

"Monistrol is not a very nice town. It's a good town, but this is not the image that projects outside. Monistrol would be a good store which has a bad showcase. In this sense, the village should be transformed to become more attractive." Local stakeholder

In synthesis:

Perceptions on social aspects: Monistrol is now more autonomous from Barcelona, more able to take control of its own pathways. Its relations with Montserrat Mountain have improved, having increased dialogue with the mountain. Quality of life is still high in town. Still, the road and river bisects the municipality into two separated halves.

Perceptions on economic aspects: Monistrol de Montserrat is somehow better promoted and has increased a little in tourist visibility. The commercial and retail offer has improved. Economic vitality seems to be higher.

Perceptions on municipal services: Services to citizens were already perceived positively in 2008, and are still in good shape 10 years after.

Perceptions on social aspects

2008

	<i>Closer to left statement</i>		<i>Balanced</i>		<i>Closer to right statement</i>	
Monistrol is just a metropolitan town	1	2	3	4	5	Monistrol is autonomous from Barcelona
Well related to the Montserrat Mountain	1	2	3	4	5	Little relations with Montserrat Mountain
Segregated town	1	2	3	4	5	Integrated town
With high quality of life	1	2	3	4	5	With little quality of life
With a strong identity	1	2	3	4	5	Losing its identity
Advanced town	1	2	3	4	5	Slow town
In crisis	1	2	3	4	5	Rising-up

Perceptions on economic aspects

	Closer to left statement		Balanced		Closer to right statement	
Monsitrol is well promoted	1	2	3	4	5	Insufficient promotion
Gains touristic visibility	1	2	3	4	5	Loses touristic visibility
Sufficient commercial and retail offer	1	2	3	4	5	Insufficient commercial and retail offer
Predominantly cultural assets	1	2	3	4	5	Predominantly natural assets

Environmentally degraded	1	2	3	4	5	Environmentally restored
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Perceptions on municipal services

	<i>Closer to left statement</i>		<i>Balanced</i>		<i>Closer to right statement</i>	
Lack of municipal services	1	2	3	4	5	Sufficient municipal services
Modern municipal services	1	2	3	4	5	Obsoleted services
Congested services	1	2	3	4	5	Fast assistance
Efficient services	1	2	3	4	5	Inefficient services

Figure 7. Results of stakeholders' perceptions from survey 2008. Source: Mcrit

Perceptions on social aspects

2018

	<i>Closer to left statement</i>		<i>Balanced</i>		<i>Closer to right statement</i>	
Monistrol is just a metropolitan town	1	2	3	4	5	Monistrol is autonomous from Barcelona
Well related to the Montserrat Mountain	1	2	3	4	5	Little relations with Montserrat
Segregated town	1	2	3	4	5	Integrated town
With high quality of life	1	2	3	4	5	With little quality of life
With a strong identity	1	2	3	4	5	Losing its identity
Advanced town	1	2	3	4	5	Slow town
In crisis	1	2	3	4	5	Rising-up

Perceptions on economic aspects

	<i>Closer to left statement</i>		<i>Balanced</i>		<i>Closer to right statement</i>	
Monistrol is well promoted	1	2	3	4	5	Insufficient promotion
Gains touristic visibility	1	2	3	4	5	Loses touristic visibility
Sufficient commercial and retail offer	1	2	3	4	5	Insufficient commercial and retail offer
Predominantly cultural assets	1	2	3	4	5	Predominantly natural assets
Environmentally degraded	1	2	3	4	5	Environmentally restored

Perceptions on municipal services

	<i>Closer to left statement</i>		<i>Balanced</i>		<i>Close to right statement</i>	
Lack of municipal services	1	2	3	4	5	Sufficient municipal services
Modern municipal services	1	2	3	4	5	Obsoleted services
Congested services	1	2	3	4	5	Fast assistance
Efficient services	1	2	3	4	5	Inefficient services

Figure 8. Results of stakeholders' perceptions from survey 2018. Source: Mcrit

Analytical Dimension 2: Tools and policies for development and cohesion

The Local Strategic Plan of Monistrol was promoted in 2008 by the Town Council aimed at articulating a debate among the local society, including private, social and public stakeholders, to determine which projects and which strategies should be implemented in the mid-term, up to 2020, basically not to address problems of groups in need (local social justice), but to create new chances of economic and social development in the long term, to overcome local obstacles for development linked to the notion of place (spatial justice), also in relation to neighbouring municipalities.

The Plan was in line with other strategic initiatives taking place at the time in the region:

- **Strategic Plan of Montserrat Mountain (2006).** This aimed at increased dialogue between Montserrat Monastery and the municipalities surrounding the mountain to identify opportunities for collaboration, and for social uptake.
- **South Bages county Strategic Plan (2007-2015).** The Strategic Plan aimed to redefine the development model of the Bages region in order to improve the competitiveness of the economy, making a more cohesive society and preserving the natural environment of the region.
- **Tourism Strategic Plan of Bages County 2020.** This Plan included a strategic vision, lines of action and objectives of the tourism sector in Bages County.

The conceptual approach of the Local Strategic Plan was heavily embedded in EU Cohesion Policies in developing new local development policies; the municipality would foster the creation of jobs and economic activity, and would improve the general socioeconomic profile of the municipality. In particular, the plan considered policy aims and mechanisms for stimulating rural and transition areas across Europe with declining agriculture, mining or industry sectors. Already the 3rd and 4th reports on Social and Economic Cohesion put the focus on such strategies. Tourism and development of endogenous assets was pointed out prominently by the 4th report on Social and Economic Cohesion, the ESDP and the EU Territorial Agenda. Upgraded infrastructure and quality of urban landscape was in line with aims by the EU Territorial Agenda and the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion.

Being so close to Barcelona in terms of transportation, but also far in many aspects, urban-rural partnerships with close-by Barcelona Metropolitan Area and Manresa county capital were observed strategic at the time. This included physical, social and economic relations and governance structures to implement initiatives of common interest, as extensively debated at the time of the 6th progress report on social and economic cohesion, the SPESP, or the works of ESPON 1.1.2, and DG Regio seminars on sustainable development, and urban-rural linkages in 2009.

Regional administration in 2008 provided funding and technical support for initiatives related to strategic planning based on abovementioned policies and reports, in particular Barcelona Provincial Deputation.

However, funding obstacles have been increasingly important since the elaboration of the Plan. First, municipal income dropped heavily during the 2008-2014 crisis, especially with the paralysation of all building activity, which had been a financial motor of local administrations in Spain until 2007. Then legislative changes in 2013, and the passing of the Law of Rationalization and Sustainability of Local Administration, generated a more conditioned procedure in order to access to funds. *“Changes in the law was an indirect way to take autonomy out from municipalities. But towns councils are the first door knock of any complaint of citizens, therefore lack of autonomy puts municipalities in a very delicate condition”*, according to Mayor.

Specifically on programmes related to EU funding, again according to Provincial Deputation, *“the implementation of programs and processes of local participation in projects financed with structural funds is generally complicated. In our case, the decentralized system of fund management involves many different administrations. It has meant an increase of bureaucracy and administrative procedures in the management, justification and control of all the projects. These complex mechanisms have a direct impact on the promoters of the projects (in most of cases local government), that receive the funds with delays”.*

4. The Action

4.1. Basic Characteristics of the Action

In the Local Strategic Plan Monistrol 2020 there are proposed three strategic lines to be developed:

- Becoming a more **Attractive** town (urbanism, landscape).
- Promoting a more **Dynamic** town (economic activities)
- Succeeding in being a **Recognized** town (commerce and tourism reference...)

Attractive

Monistrol has important natural, historical, architectural and patrimonial resources to be valued. However, local initiatives to increase tourism in the past as a horizontal vector of economic activity failed often.

A few projects proposed by the Strategic Plan to upgrade the attractiveness of the town are listed next.

- *Traffic calming in road C-55.* The construction of an urban bypass road requires long time periods and investments. Therefore, the improvement of the urban stretch of the road was proposed for the short term. Despite the critical character of this action, the municipality had no competences to bring it forward, and required negotiation with the Catalan government road department.
- *Pedestrianization of Main Square.* It was proposed to upgrade of the urban space on Main Square, being the main and largest public space of Monistrol, the square where most social and cultural activities took place. Most of the space is used for car parks. The plan proposed to shift parking in nearby areas.
- *Gothic Bridge.* The Gothic bridge of the 14th Century built by the Abby of Montserrat is used as a secondary road, with narrow walkways. While negotiations for illuminating the bridge at night continued to enhance its monumentality. It was claimed the need widening sidewalks and increasing the quality of the involved urban space.
- *Recovery of the river landscape.* The surroundings of the river are an ideal place for leisure, practice of sports, as well as for the landscape discovery of Montserrat Mountain. The path bordering the river could become a tourist attraction, but was badly entertained at the time. The recovery of the river path meant stabilizing soil and properly managing riverside vegetation.
- *Improving general urban space.* Painting the facades, especially those are more visible from C-55 road, encouraging the owners to paint them following local chromatic criteria; eliminating parking areas in main squares and streets.

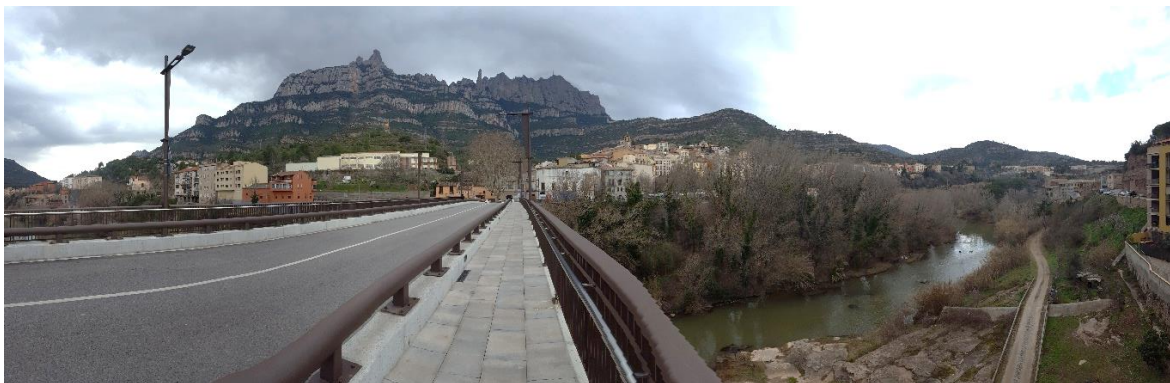


Figure 9. The gothic bridge has been restored in recent years, improving its appearance, calming traffic, widening walkways and improving illumination. Source: Mcrit 2018



Figure 10. Revitalization of Main Street of Monistrol. Source: Mcrit 2018

Dynamic

The second strategic line was increasing the economic dynamism of Monistrol. For that, it was important to attract new economic activities and public investment in supporting citizens to find new jobs and start their own businesses in the municipality. A few of the projects proposed by the Local Strategic Plan to upgrade the dynamism of Monistrol are listed next.

- *Organising new local fair.* The organization of the already existing Bread and Cheese fair (“Coca i Mató”) was a consolidated success. A second fair would be a good way to promote tourism in another season of the year.
- *Attracting specialised commercial retails linked to tourist activities.* New commercial activities like cafes or sports shops (e.g. rock climbing) on Main Square concentrating there a commercial hub for Monistrol. Local administration could facilitate their set up, eventually leasing municipal properties, such as the ground floor of the town hall.
- *Restoration of historical centre.* Growing demographically could be a good way to rehabilitate empty houses in the city centre.
- *Economic activities in abandoned Puig i Font factory complex,* enabling a centre for tertiary activities such as small scale offices and co-works, fostering new small and medium-sized enterprises.

- *Empowering local associations.* Local associations have an important social role in Monistrol. The Town Council could offer subsidies to those associations, which would be willing to develop projects or actions linked to the town Strategic Plan.



Figure 11. The action pedestrianization of Main Square has not been developed. Source: Mcrit 2018

Recognized

The strategy claimed for better dialogue with the Montserrat Abbey for creating new synergies between the mountain and the town, which could benefit equally both places.

- *Better promotion of Monistrol.* Creation of a local tourism webpage linked to activities in the mountain and town. With little resources, the impact could be important.
- *Creating a museum at the Abbot Palace,* a 14th century building with historical and architectural interest. Restoring this building and opening it to the public could become a new tourist attraction. The visit could be included in Montserrat visiting packs. The restoration of this building and the nearby gothic bridge would then become key elements for giving a more reasonable solution to the urban stretch of C-55 road by higher administrative levels.
- *Improving the surroundings of the cable car station.* It was proposed to create a commercial area in the surroundings of the cable car stop. It was a good location to create interpretative centres, shops or restaurants... with better connection directly to the town centre and facilitating the access to the town.



Figure 12. Monistrol Tourism webpage, implemented short after the Local Strategic Plan implementation. Source: Monistrol Town Council 2018

4.2. Assessment of key impacts of the action

Impacts on the locality

A decade after the implementation of the action, the analysis of this case study discovered that in broad terms, the Action Plan designed was implemented in relatively high degree. Even if some of the most complex actions are still under way or being negotiated with relevant agents, especially when decision-making involves higher administrative levels (e.g. finding solutions for better locally accommodating large transport infrastructures), most actions depending on local action were successfully implemented. Today Monistrol appears to be 1) physically more attractive 2) relatively more dynamic and 3) working for being more regionally recognized. The general mood and self-perception of citizens and institutions on the current socio-economic situation of Monistrol seems to have improved, according to conversations held with local agents, being now more positive than back in 2008. Obviously, this cannot be associated directly or strictly because of the Local Strategic Plan, but the Plan has probably contributed to it to some extent.

Next, table synthesises the implementation status of actions, 10 years after:

Project	Status
Atractivity. Infrastructure	
<i>Improvement of the road C-55 throughout Monistrol</i>	In negotiation process
<i>Pedestrianization of public space in town, including Main Square</i>	Partially implemented only
<i>Recovery of the river environment</i>	Partially implemented only
<i>Restauration of the Gothic bridge</i>	Implemented
Building of a second bridge and total pedestrianise of the Gothic Bridge	Not implemented
Quality of urban environment	
<i>Continue with the cleaning and painting of facades</i>	Implemented
<i>Elimination of car parks in the old town</i>	Implemented
<i>Concentration of rubbish bins and limitation of visual impact</i>	Partially implemented
<i>Urge the citizens to install antennas, air conditioning compressors and other similar devices on roofs, not in the facades.</i>	Partially implemented
Dynamic	
Organize a new local fair	Implemented
Attract new commercial activities linked to tourism on Main Square	Not implemented
Give continuity to the handcraft market	Implemented
Recovery of currently empty housing stock	Partially implemented
Centre of economic activities in Puig i Font factory	Not implemented
Subsidies to civic projects that have a clear benefit for dynamism of the municipality	Partially implemented
New urban development around the transit station to the mountain	Not implemented
Promoted	
Local tourism website	Implemented

brochure of the tourist and commercial attractions	Implemented
New social networking platforms to promote the municipality	Partially implemented
Implement tourism signs and information panels	Implemented
Creating a museum at the Prior Palace	Not implemented
Creating new public equipment around the transit station to the mountain	Not implemented

Table 3. Progress of each action according to the strategies. Source: Mcrit.

Impacts on the numbers of visitors

In relation to the third foot of the Local Strategic Plan, being more regionally recognized, progress has happened according to consulted stakeholders. Numbers of visitors during the local fairs organised have increased since 2008, especially *Mató (cream cheese)* and *Honey* annual fair, and five years ago, a second annual event targeted at regional visitors was also implemented with relative success (*Festa de Romeus*).

Activity at local restaurants seems that has also increased, according to local restaurateurs. Since 2014, local restaurateurs have recovered an old partly implemented initiative related to an association of restaurants around the mountain of Montserrat to promote culinary specialities based on recognized local products denominated with seals of quality (*Amics de la Gastronomia, Gastronomy Friends*). Recovering the association has been a particular initiative by the restaurateurs of Monistrol, attempting at dragging others back on board.



In relation to Montserrat visitors, during the elaboration of this case study, a survey (in the proximity of the rail station) revealed that work is still needed in this regards. Tourist signs are only written in Catalan and directions can be somehow confusing to foreign visitors, according Canadian tourist in Barcelona who decided to climb Montserrat Mountain from Monistrol instead of using the cable car.

"If you go visit the mayor again, tell him that I felt somehow lost, that is was hard for me to figure where main sites in town are located!"

Analytical Dimension 3: Coordination and implementation of the action in the locality under consideration

Local stakeholders point out the Local Strategic Plans being conceived as a bottom-up initiative to involve citizens in a forward looking exercise for better economic and job opportunities. The plan is also an important setup to promote and increase the level of cooperation between local actors, especially between the public sector and economic actors and organised civil society.

With this in mind, the following organisational structure was developed:

- **Town Council** was the body who promoted the initiative. As a promoter, it started all contractual and administrative processes, but then positioned itself just as another local stakeholder. No organisational nor technical responsibilities were attributed to it.

- **Provincial Deputation** provided methodological framework and technical support for the Town Council.
- **Territorial Coordination Team.** Constituted by an external consultant, this team was the responsible for managing the participatory plan, gathering local knowledge, structuring a narrative embracing existing and new initiatives, and validating proposals.
- **Reflection groups. Town council dimension.** All councillors and technicians of each different areas in the City Council participated in the identification of ongoing public initiatives and local policies, existing projects and any other proposals being debated. On the other hand, they also identified key concerns and challenges ahead for the municipality. They defined a perception on the general state of the municipality, and on their mid-term Vision for improving it. This was conducted through personal interviews and small group consultations and debates.
- **Reflection groups. Social and economic actors.** A representative selection of local stakeholders constituted the second reflection body, integrated by entrepreneurs, representatives of the industry, agriculture and catering sectors, a number of retail owners. They were asked about their own initiatives in relation to improving their businesses, their perception on local policies, and key concerns in relation to the town and town hall policy, and how they saw challenges ahead. They were also asked on their mid-term vision for improving the municipality (initiatives and goals). Once again, this was conducted through personal interviews and small group consultations and debates.
- **Community strengthening.** Proposals from both reflections groups were debated together, with open participation of citizens as well.
- **“Local Strategic Plan” action plan.** The Coordination Team gathered knowledge raised in these sessions, established links between ongoing initiatives and future proposals, complemented eventual gaps, and generated a logical narrative integrating action in the short, medium and long terms.
- **Validation.** The resulting Action Plan was validated with public, private and civil actors having participated, then raised to higher administration levels and institutions directly or indirectly involved in the process (Provincial Deputation, Catalan Government, and Montserrat Monastery).

Next chart synthesises the overall process:

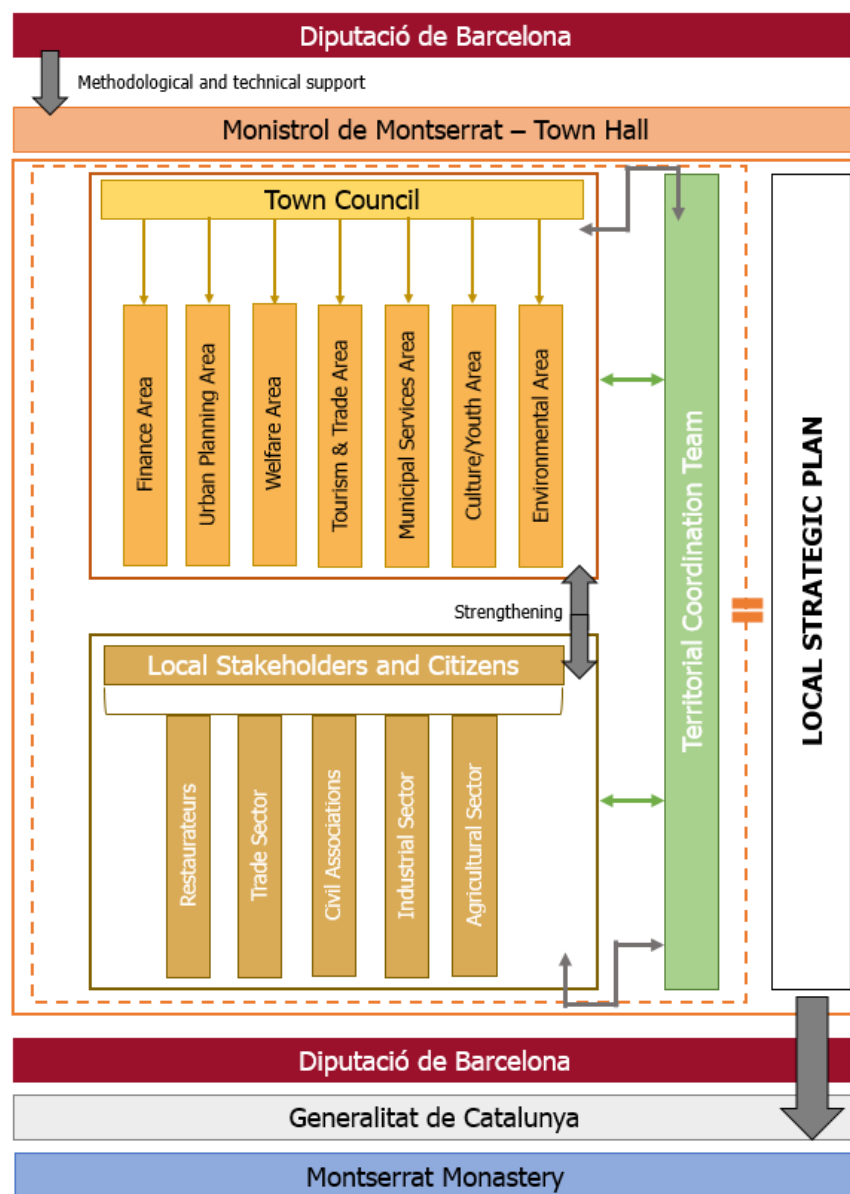


Figure 13. Scheme about coordination and implementation of the action. Source: Mcrit 2018

The process was meant not only to derive an Action Plan, but to assist possible transitions from being a reactive Municipality towards more pro-active attitudes, which ought to anticipate external and internal challenges in a constructive and strategic way, and promoting materialisation of existing opportunities.

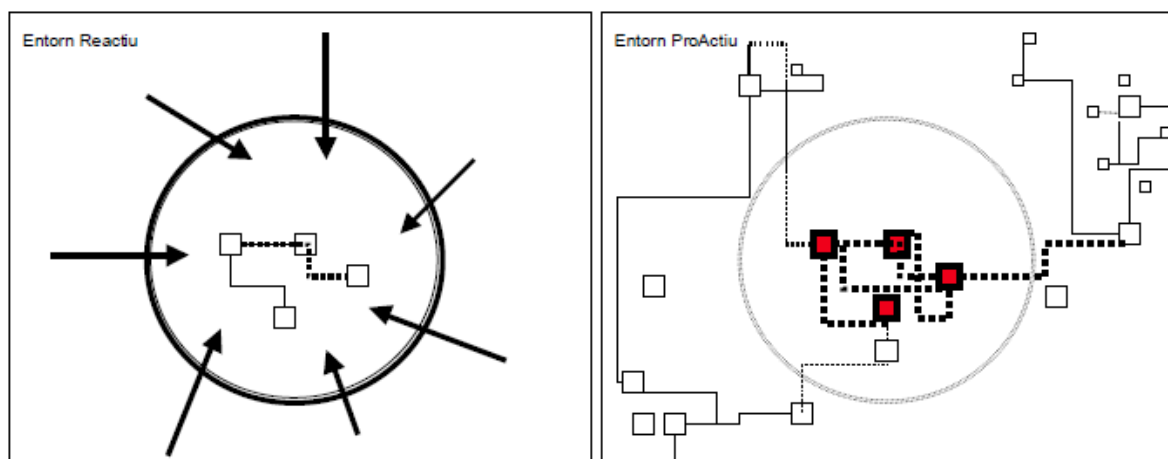


Figure 14. Reactive environment and pro-active strategies, subject to external threats, unable to govern its future, evolving toward pro-active environment, anticipating and mastering initiatives in bottom-up and horizontal approaches. Source: Mcrit 2018

Although the action followed all steps foreseen in the methodology, final goals of increasing cross-stakeholder interaction in the mid-term for future forward thinking were not achieved. Mid-term political transcendence of the Local Strategic Plan was relatively low.

The Mayor's office affirms that at the time of the elaboration of the Plan, its outcomes did not match the expectations. *"We had foreseen a disruptive proposal leaded by external consultants, providing us –Monistrol- answers to our problems. Instead, the Plan was an integration of ongoing or foreseen projects, and of the same long-time discussed initiatives and claims from population.* Because of typical non-binding character of the strategic planning processes, the Plan was not further considered. Strategic Plans tend to maximize their impacts when promoters are looking forward to use them as a tools for drawing consensuses to capitalize mid-term socio-territorial projects with strong citizen capitalisation. When leadership is weak or sceptic on the tools, such materialisation appears more difficult.

As the Plan did not become openly implemented (yet, many of the actions included in the Plan were individually developed over time), and participatory and forward looking activities not having pursued over time, local actors and citizens in general, neither saw the positive impacts nor negative impacts of the initiative. *"It was yet another initiative that did not lead to anywhere, like many others"* in words of a local entrepreneur.

The process of the elaboration and execution of the Plan partially conditioned this. Paradigmatic focus by the territorial coordination team set more on the strategic plan proposal and action plan dimensions, rather than on the process and structures created. This aspect is directly related to the size of the municipal structures. Given the small size of local administration structures (just a handful of technicians), it was not possible indeed the proper implementation of steering/governance structures.

However, seen with a 10 years perspective, Mayor of Monistrol claims to *"see new lights on the Local Strategic Plan. The document is a detailed picture of the reality of the municipality in the late 2000s, of our ambitions and concerns. It details the setup of a social and political action portfolio, which over time has been achieved to a high extent. It gives us more strength for negotiating the remaining pending initiatives with other administrative bodies."*

Analytical Dimension 4: Autonomy, participation and engagement

The participation in Monistrol was structured in two ways: externally, to involve the citizenship, through the entities and local associations; and internally, aimed at sharing the initiatives of each department of the Town Council. Thus, the participatory process that was developed tried to be as open, flexible and operational as possible.

Participants invited to participate were as follows:

- Political members and technicians from the Monistrol Town Council
- Social and economic stakeholders
- Municipal entities and associations
- Citizenship

The participatory mechanisms implemented were:

- *Interviews with politicians:* Mayor; Councillor of Touristic Promotion and Commerce; Councillor of Urbanism; Councillor of New Technologies and Festivities; Councillor of Culture
- *Interviews with municipal technicians:* Local auditor; Municipal Engineer; Municipal Architect; Local tourism technicians
- *Interviews with stakeholders from economic and social sector:* industrial managers, commerce owners, restaurants owners.
- *Political debate involving private and public stakeholders.*
- *Debate with local associations of Monistrol de Montserrat*
- *Debate with members of "Patronat de la Muntanya"*



Figure 15. Debate with local associations of Monistrol de Montserrat in 2007. Source: Monistrol Strategic Plan

Participation was articulated around the following topics and questions:

- Initial interviews with all the council areas to see which lines of work were being implemented by the government, as well as which projects. This was the starting point for identifying incongruities, incompatibilities and outstanding deficits.
- Contrast interviews with private and social agents through the approach of questions such as: what are the problems?; How government action can contribute to the improvement of the municipality? What additional proposals should be incorporated? ...

- Proposal of a narrative that makes sense and is a driver for the implementation of the several existing actions. It intends to gather expectations of the public and private sector, as well as ongoing public and private initiatives, in a rational and ordered way, establishing priorities, and cause-effect relationships. The narrative proposal, and resulting action plan, is then contrasted with the local public and private actors through a series of debates and working groups.

About citizen participation and involvement, the Town Council did not have at the time substantial previous experience, like many small-scale municipalities. Participatory culture is not simple to create. Some associations had previously participated in processes of strategic reflection at the supra-municipal scope, in particular in the occasion of the Montserrat Strategic Plan, but only sporadically. In addition, the town Council did not have any technician specialised in participation processes.

The associative fabric in Monistrol was weak and aging fast, contrasting with a past tradition of strong civil engagement and mobilisation back in the industrial times of the town (eg in 1936, Monistrol had 550 CNT anarchist trade union affiliates, for a 3.500 population). In Monistrol, almost half of the active civil associations were created many years ago and, generally, the participants were old and their operational framework quite complicated.

Citizen participation derived eventually in personal claims of individuals towards Town Council representatives, according to interview with public representatives. Proactive thinking about mid and long term futures is not always an easy task, participants tend to focus discussions on existing problems, and short term claims for the public sector.



Figure 16. “No a Tot” anonymous graffiti sign written on main road access Monistrol de Montserrat in the mid 2000s (translates *No to everything!*). Source: Vilaweb 2007.

Analytical Dimension 5: Expression and mobilisation of place-based knowledge and adaptability

The scope of the action was on a local scale, delimited by municipal boundaries. In this case, the focus of the action well defined by the city council, who launched the action. The action followed a territorial logic conditioned by the history of the place: the presence of Montserrat and the historical links with the municipality. Although the proposal could have influenced far beyond its limits, the economic development of Monistrol could, in the best of cases, impact on surrounding municipalities or also in the region.

The action has contributed to generate a collective learning process, in which local administration and local groups learn how to manage situations and challenges proactively.

On the one hand, the collective learning process within Town Council departments has been a way to get to know which actions were undertaking each of the other departments. Town Hall

technicians have seen this process as a good way to avoid eventual duplication of tasks and efforts, focusing technical and economic resources properly on the same municipal direction, and learning from each other possible collaboration areas and synergy potentials.

According to technicians from the Barcelona Deputation, the impacts of Local Strategic Plans in the province have been uneven, but they have let to boost and support strategic municipal and supra-municipal projects. They believe that these plans have promoted the identity of the territory, and have also been useful in promoting strategic thinking among the actors, or for discovering some mistakes or shortcomings in current policies.

With notable exceptions, strategic reflection is not yet a regular activity of public institutions, but rather an episodic effort that is difficult to continuously hold over time. The discussion with other planning experts linked to Local Strategic Plans reveals that a majority agrees to attribute a lot of relevance to strategic planning (up to 85%). Nevertheless, they also confirm that the efficiency of strategic planning is extraordinarily sensitive to the place, the moment, the way and the institutions, as well as the people who carry it out. They point out that there have been strategic planning initiatives that can be considered successful, while others have had little impact or even been to counterproductive.

"Although Strategic Planning is so important, there is a low use of the tools and institutions available to carry out processes of strategic reflection. There are many tools, but many politicians still not believe in these strategies, which they think are expensive and non-realistic" expressed an expert on strategic planning at local level.

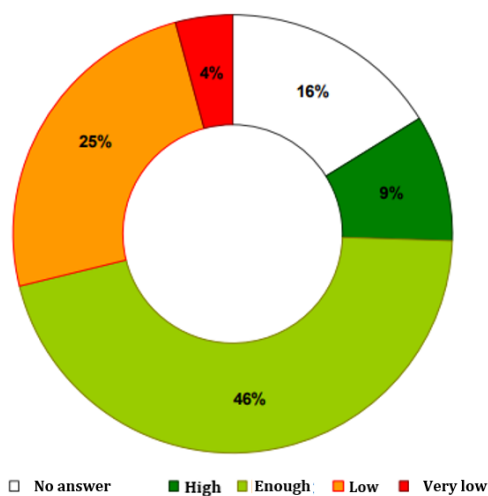


Figure 17. Public interest of strategic planning, according to planning experts. Source: Deputation of Barcelona, 2017

5. Final Assessment: Capacities for Change

Synthesising Dimension A: Assessment of promoters and inhibitors

Next, a number of key outcomes encountered by this research in relation to promoters and inhibitors of social and economic development, and community building:

- Support from higher administrative levels is a facilitator for organising processes of local strategic planning in small-scale municipalities, providing technical expertise, methodological framework, and expertise. It also provides better chances to accessing financial resources for promoting implementation of strategic projects identified in resulting action plans.
- Community networks. Strategic Plans have the objective of establishing frameworks of collaboration among stakeholders, private, public and social. In general, stakeholder cooperation is relatively low in small municipalities. Often, the level of communication (even of acquaintance) between private agents (industry, shopkeepers, etc.), and the public sector (both at the level of policy makers and civil servants) is very low. Such low levels are inhibitors of integrated action between private-public sectors. Examples of such mismatches can be found at all levels, e.g. lack of connection between public training programmes and industry needs,
- Networks of cooperation within town council departments. Even within the municipal council premises, coordination between initiatives of different sector areas can be low. Some projects terminate because they do not develop due to lack of common agreement between the parties involved in its implementation, in terms of forms and times of execution, due to lack of coordination capacity in the design and management of the projection. In this sense, local strategic planning aims also at coordinating action across council sector areas, and to streamline their relative communication channels.
- Leadership needed for positive implementation of Local Strategic Plans. The capacity for action and subsequent management is strongly subject to political stability and leadership. Given the non-binding nature of Strategic Planning, both in terms of action plan implementation and of participatory structure maintenance over time, the most effective initiatives are those where the public sector is especially involved and generates forms of leadership. Creating structures of leadership is important to favour positive implementation. Weak leaderships during the elaboration of a Strategic Plan threatens stakeholder participation, civil engagement, and cross-sector dialogue. .
- Finding windows of shared opportunity. Some of the actions identified in a Strategic Plan may exceed municipal competences. Some bottlenecks identified during the diagnosis phase may not be possible to be solved by the municipality alone (e.g. in the case of Monistrol, elements dealing with heavy infrastructure like C55 road or Gothic bridge refurbishment). In some cases, this may even entail a conflict of interest between administrations (e.g., whereas Monistrol wants to calm traffic on C55, Catalan roads department claims C55 is a basic road and traffic fluidity on it is a priority). In such cases, multi-sectoral bottom up Strategic Plans built upon the community, back up and provide additional legitimacy for local administrations when negotiating with higher administrative levels.

Synthesising Dimension B: Competences and capacities of stakeholders

Small local administrations, such as Monistrol, have difficulties accessing economic resources. They also have a lack of technical resources to promote and implement new actions. This situation triggers territorial inequalities between those municipalities with greater technical and economic capacity and those that cannot achieve sufficient economic solvency to develop actions or projects, such as Monistrol. The mechanisms to access resources are mostly difficult and require high technical resources to achieve them.

In terms of financial resources, small towns have very limited fiscal autonomy and are very dependent on the funding resources transferred by central or regional government. Local public expenditures have remained quite low after economic crisis. Faced with this situation, engaging local agents can allow local capacity to increase resources, and improve efforts to make a more effective action. Local governments have been in charge of public policies in the field of citizen participation: the public budget for citizen participation has increased over the past decades as well as the public staff responsible for managing and implementing citizen participation policies.

The development of the action was developed by a transfer of resources from the European Funds to the municipality of Monistrol. An indirect link between the EU and the lowest level of territorial organization in Catalonia is generated. The Provincial Deputation is the regional administration that receives funding from Europe and it is subsequently responsible for distributing the European funds between the municipalities of the province of Barcelona.

Stakeholder involvement can establish a shared vision for development, improve the assessment of investment needs, reveal the importance of cross-border linkages, strengthen trust in government and cultivate support for specific investment on the project. In practical terms, it means the capacity to engage in processes of stakeholder's involvement in policy development and needs assessment in the early stages of the investment cycle, and feedback and evaluation in later stages.

Citizen participation and cooperation between public administrative institutions and actors at local level (small and medium enterprises, unions, neighbourhood associations, cultural institutions, etc.) is one of the basis of participatory democracy. This is considered very important to understand the spatial injustice at local contexts, and therefore, how to overcome it. It is also believed that participatory processes have contributed to modernizing the local public administration by making it more transparent and receptive to the contributions of citizens.

However, the strategic plans are not legally binding. Plans like Monistrol's are strategic, and not normative. They seek to obtain a strategic vision of the territory in a given time horizon. Therefore, a good understanding between the public administration and the different local agents is necessary, since, they all have different interests and priorities about the territory. That is why its execution, and the viability and continuity of such action, should respond to the consensus among different administrations, which have implications on the territory. Thus, in these participatory processes the leadership of the action must be well defined, and in turn, the territorial, economic and social priorities that must be addressed throughout the execution of the action.

Many of the strategic plans, such as Monistrol's, present an uncertain stability and durability. This is because this type of action is driven by the local administration, which is subject to political changes every four years (a period of legislation). It may happen that after these four

years, there is a change of government, and the action may be abandoned or annulled by the new government, which may have other political interests.

Synthesising Dimension C: Connecting the action to procedural and distributive justice

Distributive justice

The action has sought to generate more economic activity in the municipality in order to reduce spatial injustice at local level for contributing to social cohesion. The perception of the quality of life and identity of local citizens has changed for good.

Positive progress in 10 years has somehow been achieved, despite the crisis. Citizens revealed so during perception surveys held locally, but it is difficult to attribute this progress to the Plan itself. Probably, urban planning actions and urban refurbishment actions have had an impact on this. However, some shops identified at the time of the elaboration of the Local Strategic Plan as strategic for promoting tourism, like *Balcó de la Lluna* (specialised on rock climbing material) closed during the crisis.

Comparing with other tourist areas, Monistrol seems still not taking sufficient advantage of Montserrat as a tourist resource. But perception surveys among citizens point out that the level of relation between Monistrol and Montserrat Mountain has improved.

Procedural justice

The local government was the main actor to work for favouring social cohesion at local level. The local institution is viewed as the closest actor for resolving disputes and allocate resources.

Nevertheless, it would not be possible without the collaboration of supra-municipal stakeholders, which have a bigger technical and economic capacity. They are the supplier of technical and economic support to local administration. The small towns need to work in cooperation with supra-municipal actors like Diputació de Barcelona or Generalitat de Catalunya.

There is a challenge in this conflicting relationship in terms of bottom-up and top-down force. While local actors raise problems and action initiatives to higher administrative levels, higher administrative levels tend to work top-down approaches, specially the regional government, having a more executive orientation.

Resolving these challenges involves negotiating strategies that are not always aligned. This requires time, resources and often strong political will.

On the other hand, the action plan is finally negotiated between the local administration and the civil society. In this sense, once again here there is a new challenge in the conflicting nature between top-down and bottom-up forces. Although the Local Strategic Plan heavily involves civil society, other elements such as the selection of invited participants or the formats and channels foreseen for discussions may influence in the materialization of bottom-up knowledge creation.

Strategic planning is after all about dealing with such challenges.

6. Conclusions

What is being achieved in terms of delivering greater spatial justice to the respective localities?

A decade after the implementation of the action, the analysis of this case study discovered that:

- In broad terms, the action plan designed during the Local Strategic Plan development was implemented in high degree. Even if some of the most complex actions are still under way or being negotiated with relevant agents, especially when decision-making involves higher administrative levels (e.g. finding solutions for better locally accommodating large transport infrastructure), most actions depending on local action were successfully implemented. Today Monistrol is clearly 1) more attractive 2) more dynamic and 3) working for being more regionally recognized.
- The general mood and self-perception of citizens and institutions on the current socioeconomic situation of Monistrol seem to have improved to some extent, according to conversations with local agents, being now more positive than back in 2008. Obviously, this cannot be associated directly with the action of the Plan, but the Plan could have contributed to it to some extent.
- The Plan itself did not become a steering force for local public policy until 2020. However, over time, in the mid and long term, the current political team in office considers it as a magnificent witness of the late 2000s pre-crisis political momentum and most relevant challenges existing at the time. In this sense, the Plan is now perceived as being useful for monitoring the evolution of local policy and political action over the last decade, including implementation of key projects and evolution of main challenges.
- The lack of political anchorage of the Plan can partly be explained given a complex balance of political forces in office both at the time of drawing the Plan, and in the following election periods. Also because of the non-binding character of strategic planning processes. In this sense, we have to conclude that better governance arrangements ought to have been designed to facilitate political stability of the action over time, only if considering recurrent difficulties in this sense encountered in other local actions of the same nature.
- The plan was a reflexive process involving social and economic actors of Monistrol, public and private institutions, and the citizenship in general. In this sense, the Plan allowed different agents in town getting to know each other better, a key element for local policy making. In many cases, and especially concerning the case of civil servants working for the town hall (and not necessarily being local residents), the Plan was the chance to better get acquainted with the diversity of local actors, establishing a basis for further future collaborations (public-private). At the end, the Action process was meant to transform the reactive attitude of the municipality towards more pro-active extroverted attitude, better anticipating future challenges and better serving the needs of its residents and businesses.
- The Local Strategic Plan seek to generate a network of local stakeholders that could facilitate in the future more horizontally organised processes of local governance. Civic structures created at the time aimed at a continuation after the finalisation of the plan, both for monitoring action plan implementation and continuing midterm activities of strategic thinking. This objective, like in many other municipalities that undertook processes of

strategic planning, did hardly stand over time, as stakeholder's involvement ceased after the finalisation of the action.

- In contexts such the one under study, where the local administration is very small, strong governance structures intended for the Plan execution are not possible, given lack of human resources. Indeed, the internal capacity of small local administrations is mostly related to the number staff members available, be it local policy makers, but more significantly, professional technicians which give them support. In small municipalities like Monsitrol, technicians are limited often only to a handful, many of them working part time, and are responsible for many short-term action needs which leaves little time for mid and long-term challenge management. Success on the implementation of a Strategic Plan in a small town is closely related to strong leadership capacity of (a) local policy-maker(s) and his/their ability to manage engagement of all actors. After all, actions in a Strategic Plan may be mostly cross-sectoral to attend a transversal vision, so involvement of several areas is often necessary. Without such personal leadership, Strategic Plans often show uneven results.

What are the policy changes ahead for bigger impact?

In the province of Barcelona, 160 strategic plans have been started since 1988, and currently there are active 60% of them. Over these years, a total of 304 municipalities in the province have participated or continue participating in some territorial strategic planning experience at local or supra-local level (almost 97% of the provincial territory).

The regional experience in strategic planning in Barcelona province has been important since the implementation of the first strategic economic and social plan in the late eighties. However, new methods of strategic planning may have been suggested to adapt them the spatial planning to new social, technological, economic or environmental circumstances.

A strategic plan such as Monistrol Local Strategic Plan has unequal impacts, but in general it is considered a relevant tool in the frame of local policy. In a relatively weak local system, a plan of these characteristics is useful to summarise the basic objectives of local development. The methods of strategic planning should be able to integrate both the evolution of local development models, as well as promote greater citizen participation and the involvement of social and economic agents.

The plans have allowed formal reflections beyond administrative limits and beyond short term concerns. Thus, the plans have been privileged forums for the creation of local geostrategic visions. The plans have also been instruments of participation. In this sense, they have been a good tool to incorporate citizens into public policies. Strategic processes have contributed to create local identities and generate territorial bottom-up projects.

From the perspective of public policies, the plans have influenced different levels but, especially, have provided an in-depth vision of local policies. Frequently the socioeconomic agents of a territory do not work under a common vision. In this way, it has allowed for concerning actions in win-win scenarios, where "everyone wins". Through this strategic vision, it is possible to discover some errors or serious shortcomings in those local policies in progress.

The effectiveness of a territorial strategy is based on focusing the action according to the capacities of the agents involved. For this reason, the agents, the leadership capacity and institutional coordination of the Plan are important elements for achieving the successfully of the action. In such context, the legislative changes in 2013 due to the new *Law of Rationalization and Sustainability of Local Administration* conditioned the local bodies' capacity to manage funds

and execute actions as the strategic plans. For the mayors, changes in the law were seen an indirect way to take autonomy out from municipalities.

Strategic planning is not a common practice of public institutions. In the case of Monistrol, the Local Strategic Plan has been an episodic effort, which has not had continuity over the years. Strategic planning processes are conditioned by political and economic context and by the degree of interest that civil society has about this issues. Moreover, there are not mechanisms that take into account the importance of the social impact that generate the plans and the projects on the localities.

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8. Annexes

8.1. List of Interviewed Experts

List of interviewed experts	Date of interview	Type of expert
S1	November 2017	Local government representatives
S2	November 2017	Technicians from Town Council
S3	February 2018	10 on street interviews with citizens
S4	February 2018	5 on street interviews with tourists (rail station)
S5	November 2017	Local business owner
S6	November 2017	Local business owner
S7	February 2018	Cultural Association
S8	June 2018	Provincial Administration

8.2. Stakeholder Interaction Table

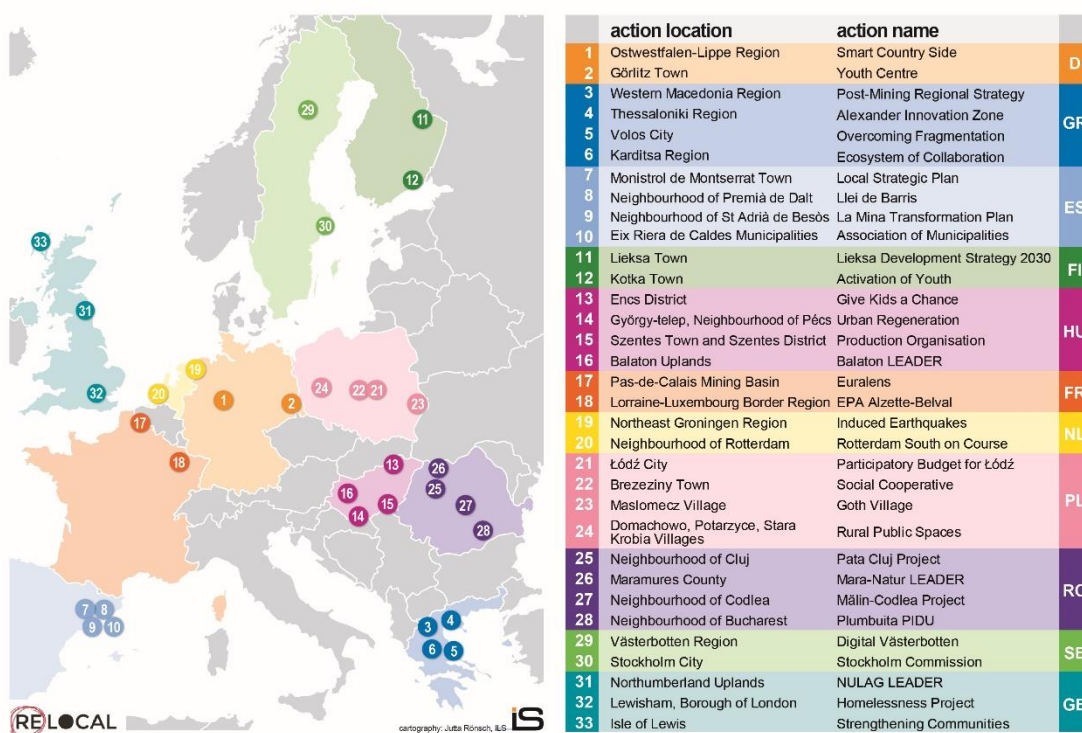
Type of Stakeholders	Most relevant 'territorial' level they operate at	Stakeholders' ways of involvement in the project (What do we gain, what do they gain)
Local politicians	Monistrol Town Council	Participation in individual interview
Local administration	Monistrol Town Council	Participation in individual interview
Associations representing private businesses	Monistrol and Montserrat surrounds	Participation in individual interview
Local development companies/agencies		
Municipal associations		
Non-profit/civil society organisations representing vulnerable groups		
Other local community stakeholders	Citizens	Street Interviews and perception surveys
Other local community stakeholders	Tourists	Street Interviews and perception surveys
Local state offices/representations		
Regional state offices/representations	Barcelona Province	Participation in individual interview
Regional state offices/representations	Barcelona Province	Workshop with strategic planning experts
Ministries involved in (national or EU) cohesion policy deployment		
Cohesion Policy think tanks (national/EU-level)		
Primary and secondary educational institutions		
Colleges and universities		
Social and health care institutions		
Cultural institutions and associations		
Media		

The RELOCAL Project

EU Horizon 2020 research project '**Resituating the local in cohesion and territorial development**' –**RELOCAL** aims to identify factors that condition local accessibility of European policies, local abilities to articulate needs and equality claims and local capacities for exploiting European opportunity structures.

In the past, especially since the economic and financial crisis, the European Social Model has proven to be challenged by the emergence of spatially unjust results. The RELOCAL hypothesis is that **processes of localisation and place-based public policy** can make a positive contribution to spatial justice and democratic empowerment.

The research is based on **33 case studies** in **13 different European** countries that exemplify development challenges in terms of spatial justice. The cases were chosen to allow for a balanced representation of different institutional contexts. Based on case study findings, project partners will draw out the factors that influence the impact of place-based approaches or actions from a comparative perspective. The results are intended to facilitate a greater local orientation of cohesion, territorial development and other EU policies.



The RELOCAL project runs from October 2016 until September 2020.

Read more at <https://relocal.eu>

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