

September 2018

The Role of the Local in Improving Cohesion and Spatial Justice: integrating place-based with top-down approaches to local development

There is growing concern about the increasing lack of positive identification with the European project by the citizens. Persistent regional disparities and increasing social injustices that have marked spatial effects in localities are part of this trajectory and need to be addressed by the European policy community. Social, economic and environmental disadvantage are socially produced and spatially expressed, and spatial processes in turn produce and reproduce these conditions of disadvantage and vulnerability.

One specific approach to tackle this challenge is to focus on the 'local'. The European Commission, the Member States, Regional Authorities and local stakeholders have all emphasised the need for greater sensitivity towards local specificities, more support for community-based development and the importance of greater civic participation. Indeed, in order to make EU Cohesion Policy more effective, it has to be relevant to local populations.

In order to be relevant, first, ways need to be found to enhance local abilities to define and articulate needs and, second, these articulations and specific approaches to local development must be properly integrated into the design and deployment of future Cohesion Policy. Such solutions are sought for across the whole spectrum of multi-level governance that is the EU.

RELOCAL's contribution to this is to shed light on how place-based approaches can support the enhancement of spatial justice and territorial cohesion, that is, a fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them.

For analytical and policy purposes, the research consortium decided to focus on the relationship between distributive ('equitable distribution of resources') and procedural ('ways and opportunities to use them') justice.

The RELOCAL researchers have carefully selected 33 locality-based/targeted 'Actions' (case studies) from all over Europe that represent different welfare regimes, rural and urban areas, disadvantaged and well-to-do localities and various cultural and historical contexts.

The case studies therefore come from 11 EU countries, which covers the European territory relatively well and in a balanced way. Each individual case is designed to provide a holistic picture of locally-based/targeted Actions and their interaction with spatial justice context of these localities. These interactions approached and analysed through a number of analytic dimensions such as perceptions and capacities, tools and policies, co-ordination and governance, and participation and autonomy.

Also, within this sample of 33 cases, we already see the formation of interesting clusters (Fig. 1) that provides scope for comparisons, analogies and different ways of synthesis towards policy-relevant messages. Please see Fig. 2 for a map and short description of the individual case studies.

At a later stage of the research process, the RELOCAL project will key messages on how to make EU Cohesion Policy more receptive, pro-active and supportive of place-based and locally sensitive approaches.

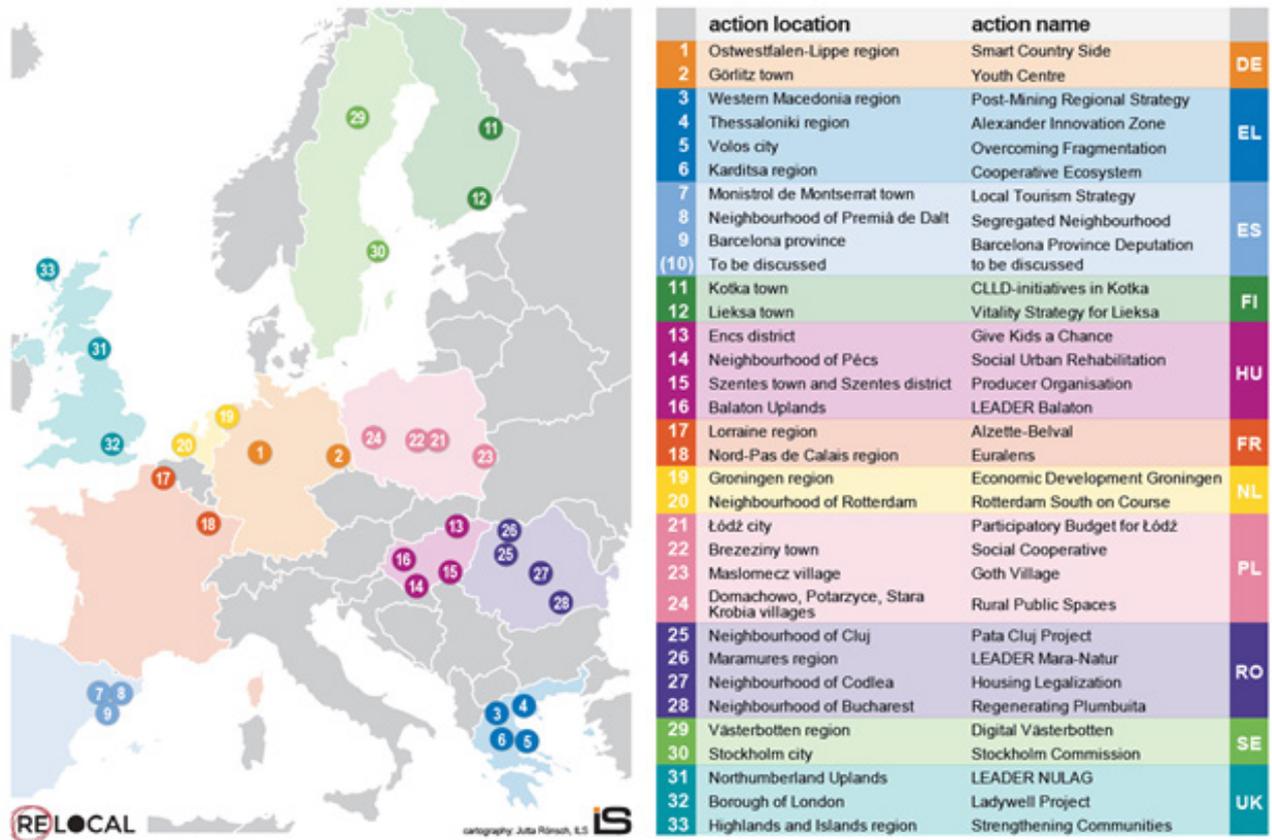


Figure 1. The locations of the 33 RELOCAL case studies (as of 30.9.2018)

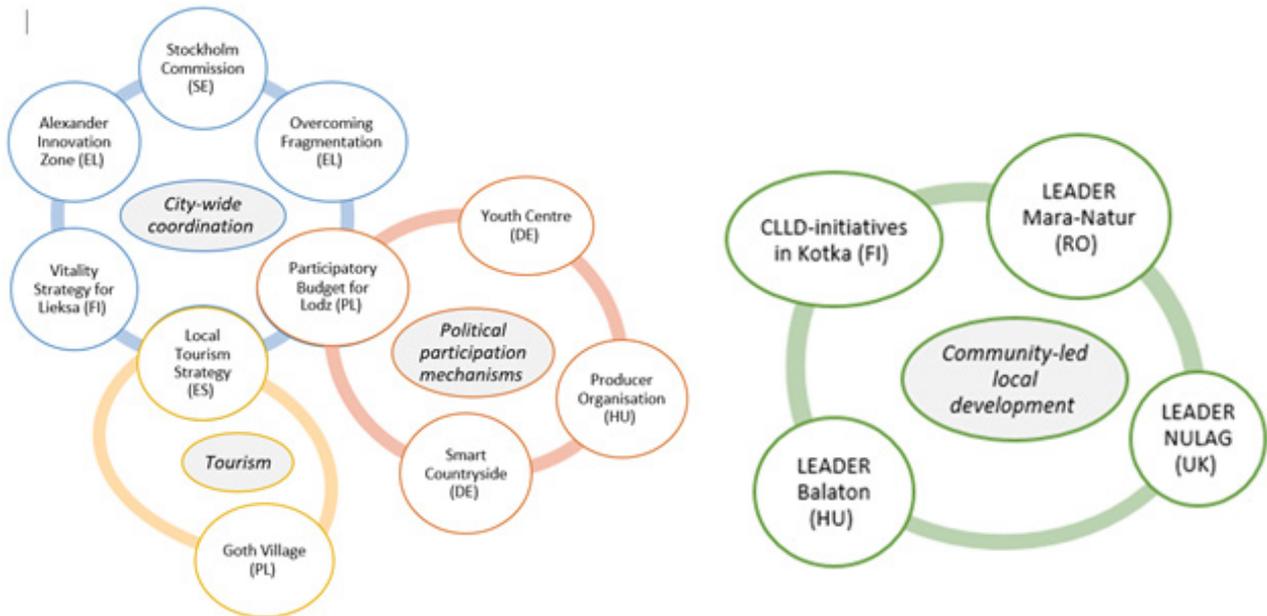


Figure 2. Examples of preliminary clusters within the 33 RELOCAL Cases



14 partners in 12 Member States
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 For more information visit www.relocal.eu