



## RELOCAL is coming to an end. Get to know our conclusions!

RELOCAL has, in the course of more than 4 years, studied several cases in order to assess place-based actions, territorial cohesion and spatial justice, amongst multiple other issues. As we reach the final stretch of the project, one can observe that the conclusions emerging from these investigations are diverse. Some case studies document the achievement of important levels of local development impact and spatial justice, while other cases are rather more indicative of the uphill struggles place-based actions face. Therefore, RELOCAL has provided valuable lessons regarding what works and why in terms of linking place-based development to spatial justice. RELOCAL has also highlighted the main factors that condition outcomes in terms of spaces for experimentation, learning processes, degrees of citizen and community involvement and a focus on local needs. Some RELOCAL cases indeed serve as warnings about re-centralisation and the return in some member states to top-down paternalism and blunt instruments of redistribution. In sum, we see a highly promising mainstreaming of place-based approaches but also an inherent vulnerability of local development initiatives that needs to be addressed as part of improving the efficacy of EU Cohesion Policy as well as other national-level policies.

The significance of RELOCAL is confirmed by comprehensive assessments and scenarios of place-based development as a concrete practice as well as by the identification of key factors promoting achievement of local cohesion, autonomy and democracy. All this has been done using a wide range of instruments and methodologies, as well as with the coordination of multiple organizations and researchers. Some of the main messages that emerge from RELOCAL include:

1. Both local and place-based knowledge must be mobilised; networks of deep learning necessitate that leading actors identify ways of mobilisation, cross-fertilisation and the incorporation of local knowledge and place-based knowledge into learning loops
2. Implementation is more important than design: Place-based development needs to integrate horizons of expectation based on realistic assessments of what is possible
3. Linking procedural and distributive justice requires a holistic policy vision
4. A source of EU Cohesion Policy innovation would be the provision and mandating of enabling frameworks as a conditionality that targets, among others, inclusive implementation and the support of experimental governance modes

Of course, more research still needs to be done and more actions need to be executed in order to accomplish more effective, democratic and legitimate local development.

Finally, as this is our last newsletter we would like to thank you for your interest in RELOCAL. While the project is now closing, the results of our work will be made openly accessible through publications and upcoming events either online or, Covid conditions permitting, in person. Hope to see you soon.



Brief summaries of some of the deliverables developed by the project partners are displayed below. For more information on the RELOCAL project, [click here](#).

## Modes of procedural (in)justice

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Several aspects related to procedural (in)justice were identified and used in the analysis: positioning of leading actor(s) in relation to the action under consideration, forms of leadership of identified leading actor(s), forms of coordination and collaboration, participation of non-institutional actors and their exertion of influence, and transparency and intelligibility. These categories were assigned to each case study, and their influence on achieving procedural (in)justice was assessed. This showed the performance of each case in each area.

The conclusions obtained indicate that there is potential for improvements, but also show which aspects seem to function correctly and lead to procedural justice. Generally, we can say that there's room for improvement concerning governance practices that are related to the participation of initial non- key actors and their exertion of influence, and to aspects related to the transparency and intelligibility of the actions, whereas practices related to the leadership of the identified leading actor(s) are assessed more positively.

## The role of place-based knowledge

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The role of place-based knowledge for achieving better spatial justice has been analysed attending to a) the forms, expressions and ways of mobilizing local and place-based knowledge, b) the learning loops involved, and c) discusses the flexibility and adaptability of the actions in relation to what role local and place-based knowledge has.

There were four main findings:

- A more thorough conceptualization of place-based knowledge should be developed.
- The actions analyzed differ substantially in how they relate to knowledge. Most cases score high in both local knowledge and place-based knowledge but some of the projects are not prepared for continuous learning from all relevant actors.
- The forms of mobilizing knowledge in the actions range from actions that have an explicit approach to including knowledge, to those that do it in forms that are implicit. The explicit approach is the most cost effective in the long term, but the implicit approach includes the important aspect of the professional independently finding the knowledge needed for project implementation.
- Organizational learning is directly connected to communicative reasoning in the form of learning loops that engage with the knowledge of various actors. This organization of learning loops is vital for the flexibility and adaptability of these projects.

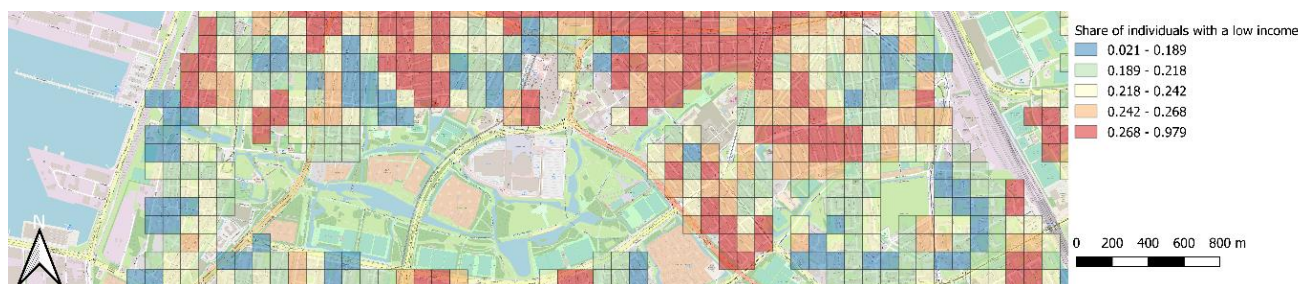


## Analysis of spatial inequalities at different geographical scales

The analysis of spatial inequalities at different geographical scales provides empirical evidence on the relationship between local area income deprivation and individual socio-economic outcomes. The analyses use geocoded longitudinal microdata for Sweden, the Netherlands and the UK, and longitudinal microdata from the EU-SILC for countries with geographical identifiers for NUTS2 regions: Spain, France and Finland. The results differ as the scale of the data isn't the same for both groups.

The results for the first group have shown that this relationship differs depending on the geographical scale used: the effect of contextual income deprivation appears to be most pronounced for lower spatial scales, though scaling up to larger geographical areas, the concentrations at micro scale are averaged out, resulting in less extremes of poverty concentration at these scales. The results for EU-SILC also indicate that regional differences matter: the analyses provide some indication of a negative correlation between NUTS2 population size and the degree of upward mobility, in line with the results by degree of urbanization suggesting less income mobility for large urban areas.

One of the main conclusions is the importance of testing the relationship between area income deprivation and individual socio-economic outcomes at different geographical scales. An important recommendation is the need to improve the availability and access to socio-economic geocoded data at very low scale for more countries.



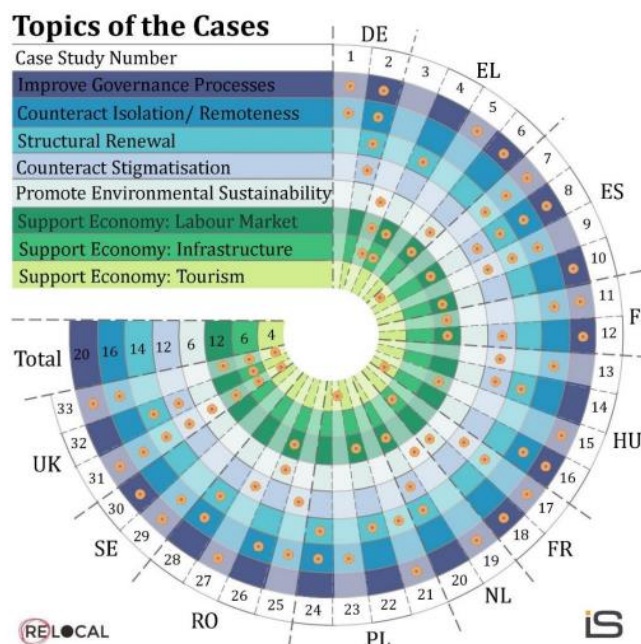
## The RELOCAL Cases

This report provides an overview of the characteristics of the total sample of 33 RELOCAL cases. These cases are place-based actions, ranging from bottom-up civil society initiatives to the implementation of national development programs, in localities presenting development challenges.

A grouping and clustering process provided both insights into similarities across the cases and singularities within the sample. Some of the patterns observed are:

- Local actors strive towards integrated, multidimensional approaches.
- EU and national programs increasingly call for integrative approaches, which has noticeable impact on the design of respective actions.
- 16 out of the 33 cases are implemented by higher policy levels with very little or no evidence of bottom-up elements.





Themes of the case study actions.

The main conclusion is that the perception of spatial (in)justices in the localities needs to be more systematically included in the design, the implementation and the evaluation of these projects. In terms of policy implications, there is a need to include and bring into the policy design and implementation the knowledge and the energies of local communities to address spatial injustice.

## Regional autonomy and spatial justice

The RELOCAL project has investigated the following paradox: even though local autonomy has increased all over Europe, local democracy has not followed it. Therefore, more locally driven forms of government of the action do not per se produce more inclusive forms of participation.

Despite waves of decentralization, rising responsibilities have rarely come with financial means and, in some situations, without a clear mandate to act. Also, decentralization can be reversed by state-led initiatives, or it is often incomplete.

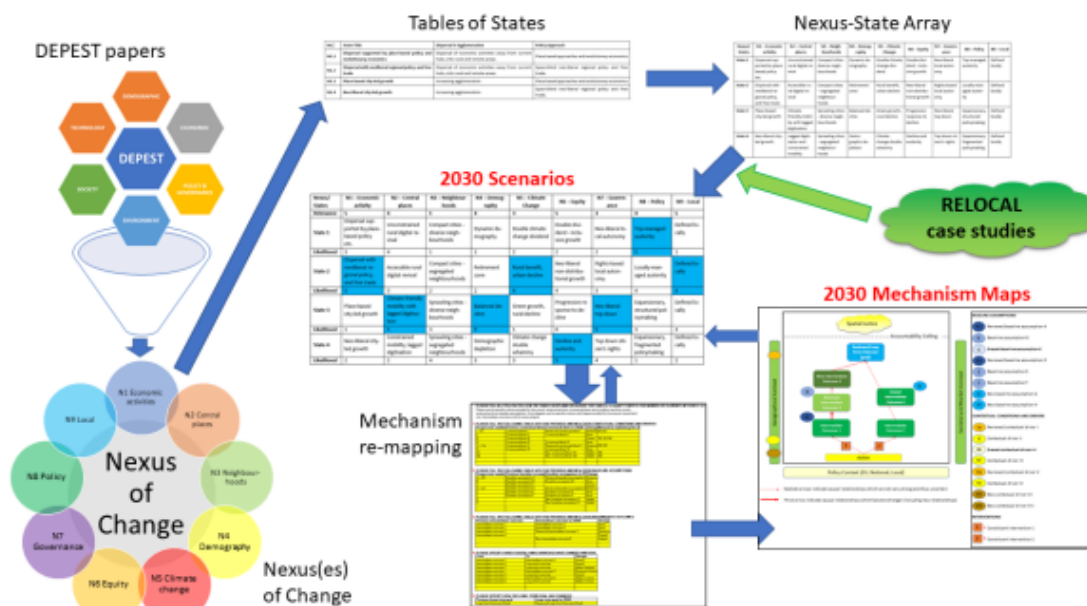
Participation should be understood as a way of fuelling actions of local development with giving value to place knowledge. Recognizing place knowledge in addition to other forms of knowledge and giving it the right to participate in decision-making processes through participation processes would allow a rethinking and reframing of the notion of legitimacy of local development strategy.

Five sets of changes needed were identified: 1) implementing a more inclusive and balanced government of the action, 2) adopting a decolonial approach to rethink the way local development itself is conceived, 3) adopting a more progressive way of imagining the objectives, 4) re-articulating the local action with ambitious long-term public policy, 5) re-injecting trust, flexibility and social control to measure the impact of the action.

## Spatial Justice and how to achieve it across Europe

The elaboration of scenarios has identified plausible changes in terms of spatial justice, the potential to achieve or improve it in a ten-year period, and to assess the mid-term effectiveness of the actions.

The methodology of analysis includes elements of Theory of Change (ToC) and morphological scenario elaboration, which were integrated in a novel approach. Amongst all the case studies, two nexus of change felt to be particularly important for the future of the localities in 2030: demographic changes and changes in governance and configuration of power. On the other hand, those of lowest importance were climate change mitigation and adaptation, neighbourhood diversity and segregation, and changes in the centrality of places due to new mobilities and digitization.



General overview of the methodology for the scenarios elaboration.

In relation to policy implications, the scenarios revealed a pessimism about the capacity for local, bottom-up initiatives to effectively deliver spatial justice under a neoliberal socio-economic system actively perpetuating inequality of all kinds. Also, a need for coordinated governance approaches both vertically, to connect local development strategies to those at the regional, national and EU level, and horizontally between institutions and other stakeholders was identified. Finally, the report showed paradoxical disadvantages created where measures in one place relatively disadvantaged neighboring villages or districts.

## The RELOCAL Policy Conference: the main conclusions

The RELOCAL Policy Conference took place on March 15, 2021, and consisted on several actors involved in local development exposing the main challenges on this matter, as well as their own experiences and opinions. Also, RELOCAL researchers presented their respective investigations and conclusions, as well as recommendations for EU policy. Each research group has worked on a specific case study, or on several of them, and did so applying different techniques. Therefore, the results obtained differ from one another, but the general conclusions and recommendations are quite similar. Also some local actors participated explaining their projects and experiences. This conference aimed to be a space for dialog, debate and reflection on the matter of local development allowing the direct participation of localities. The conference's purpose also involved the exploration and formulation of cohesion policy.

After all this research has been done, there is the general belief or impression that there is a need for long-term commitment to these projects, and more attention needs to be paid to their sustainability. Specifically, in some cases cohesion and empowerment was accomplished but this didn't happen equally throughout the community, or it implied disadvantages for other groups. Also, some local actions achieved certain aspects related to local development but failed to achieve other important ones.

In spite of this, a lot of work has been done in this matter thanks to all those projects and initiatives. It has been demonstrated that these interventions help to achieve local cohesion and spatial justice, and that fair and just processes are important and make a difference.

Lastly, in relation to policy, some of the recommendations had to do with the importance of having a holistic policy vision, the fact that spatial justice objectives need to be decoupled from economic growth and efficiency, and the promotion of state-level commitments to provide an institutional environment that enables local agency and capacity building.

## Next activities until the end of the project and beyond

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### - RELOCAL Publications

In addition to these events, the RELOCAL team is busy reporting the findings of the project in a number of academic publications. This includes:

- The RELOCAL Special Issue *Place-based Development and Spatial Justice* in the *European Planning Studies* journal. The Special Issue will be published in summer 2021 and focuses on the question whether spatial justice, as a fair and equitable distribution of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them across places and time, can be achieved through place-based strategies.
- A RELOCAL book on *Spatial Justice and Cohesion: The Role of Place-Based Action* will be published by Routledge in 2021.

### - RELOCAL webinars

In the last few months, we have held RELOCAL webinars with the participation of local, national and European experts and RELOCAL researchers. The first two webinars focussed on "Perceptions of Spatial Injustice" and "Two urban RELOCAL cases with governance innovation in the spotlight", discussing RELOCAL findings. The third webinar will be held on the 19 May, registration is open. Please visit our website for the video recordings and more information.

### - Post-RELOCAL Conference (tba)

The aim of this conference is to invite scholars to present and discuss insights on the future of place-based Cohesion Policy and related actions. We will debate social, territorial and institutional aspects of spatial justice and place-based development. One central question, for example, regards the potential contribution of local stabilisation strategies to wider European cohesion and the achievement of greater and more flexible policy focus on communities. We will also discuss political challenges facing a greater place-based policy focus.

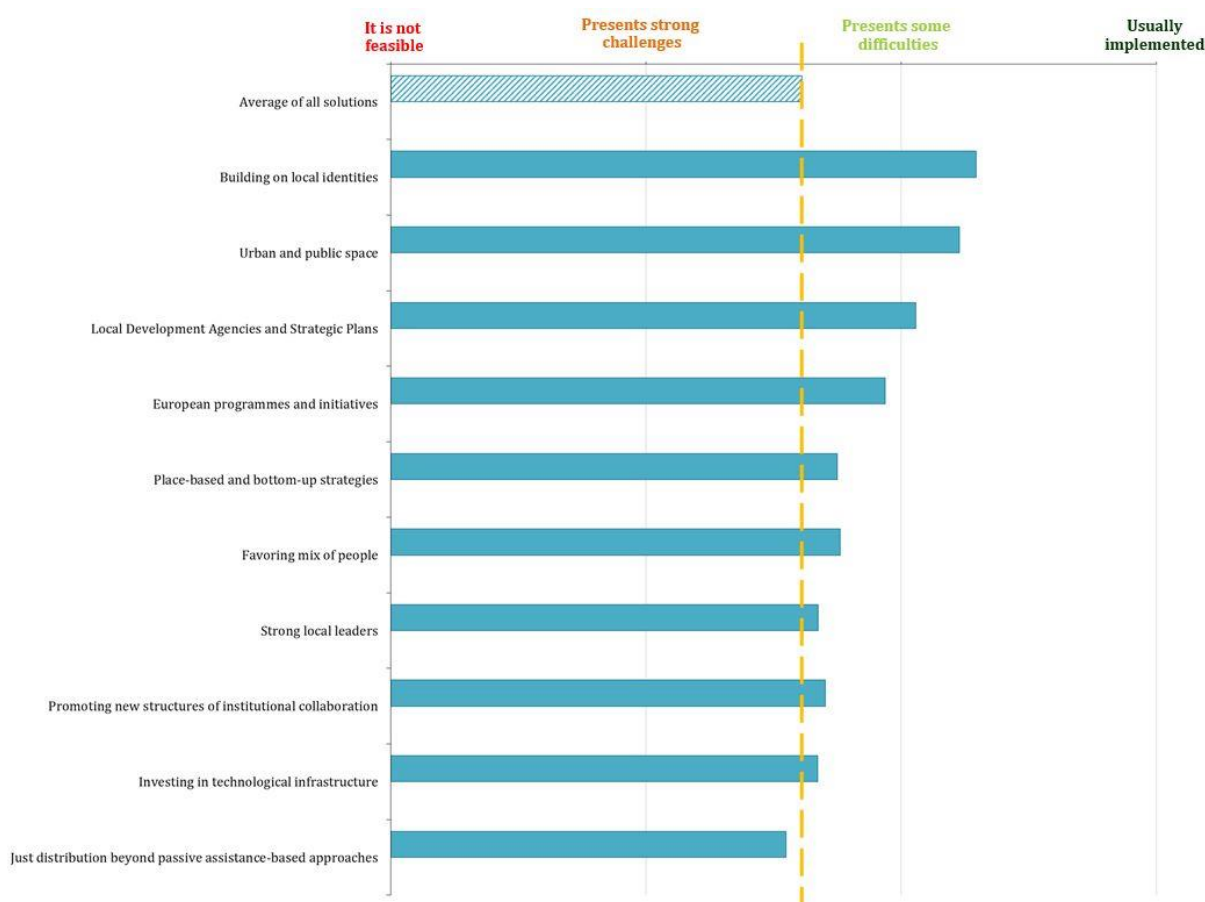


## Results of Expert Consultation on Tools for Contributing to Spatial Justice

The first expert consultation brought forward by the RELOCAL project had the goal of discuss the current validity of 10 normative statements reflected on European policies, as well as local implications of such statements across Europe. It has been built upon the findings from the 33 case studies available at [relocal.eu](http://relocal.eu).

The survey was composed by 10 questions presenting 10 normative statements reflected on European policies, as well as local implications of such statements across Europe for improving Spatial Justice at local level. Participants were requested to express their opinions in relation to their possible implementation at their region or locality.

Next, the main results of the consultation are presented in the next graph. They show up the EU statements that may be easier implemented.



In the following weeks, new consultation will be launched based on the project's results. We invite you to participate on it. Don't miss it!



## Who is in RELOCAL?

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ILS – Institut für Landes- und  
Stadtentwicklungsforschung**Project Full Title****Grant Agreement****Project Budget****Project Duration****Project Coordinator****Contact****Website**

RELOCAL - Resituating the Local in Cohesion and Territorial Development

GA. 727097

€ 4,885,750

October 2016 - May 2021

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