Can local development actions be transformative and contribute to more just spaces?

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Abstract

The key question in this article is whether place-based or local(ised) development actions can have a lasting impact on local institutions and whether, in influencing decision-making processes and planning routines, they can support more inclusive or just processes and outcomes in a locality. I draw on scholarly literature on spatial justice, as well as recent work on transformative social innovation, to develop an analytical framework for assessing the transformative potential of local development actions in disadvantaged regions. I subsequently use this framework to analyse empirical evidence from 15 case studies. The findings show that place-based actions can help to reform institutional settings but need to be planned and implemented more consequently in terms of a process facilitating institutional change. Among the factors limiting the lasting impact of localised development actions on local institutions is a narrow (one-dimensional or too modest) set-up of actions, or a lack of time and persistence to achieve structures that consolidate new practices.

Introduction

Disparities and inequalities across regions and countries, and how to tackle unequal living conditions, are issues of key interest to spatial planners. In this context, spatial justice stresses "the inherent spatiality of the processes that (re)produce social inequalities within and across regions" (Madanipour et al., 2022, p. 810). The debate on spatial justice focuses on the problems of unequal access to resources and opportunities across space, on concentrated patterns of disadvantage, and on the processes (re)producing these inequalities. "Thinking spatially about justice", argues Soja (2009, p. 1) "not only enriches our theoretical

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understanding, it can uncover significant new insights that extend our practical knowledge into more effective actions to achieve greater justice and democracy".

Adopted in November 2020, the New Leipzig Charter formulates three dimensions for the European city: the just city, the green city and the productive city. "A just city", the Charter states (EU ministers on urban matters, 2020, p. 4), "provides opportunities for everyone to integrate in society". The call for a just city comes at a time when urban segregation, the commodification of housing and displacement of low-income households, as well as rising populist movements in regions with populations feeling "left behind", constitute urgent challenges to a spatially more just development.

In recent years, EU territorial cohesion policy has undergone a clear strategic shift towards greater regional and local ownership (Cox 2019, p. 2; Madanipour et al., 2022; Medeiros, 2022). The place-based approach, as a new policy instrument (Barca, 2009), takes the specific features of sub-regions into account and integrates local resources more closely into regional development policies. Policy initiatives thus feature the concerted efforts of all relevant stakeholders, a bundling of existing resources, and a tapping of the potential of civil society. When properly designed, such a policy approach can challenge local or regional planning routines and processes, eventually leading to shifting (power) relations and more inclusive decision-making. However, the potential of a place-based approach for spatially just development requires closer attention. Some authors see greater regional and local ownership as evidence of a move away from solidarity between regions (Madanipour et al., 2022). Also, as argued by Cox (2019, p. 2), the new key role of regions and localities in regional policy might accompany a shift in regional policy goals which are now "more a matter of stimulating national growth than (…) ameliorating regionalized hardship".

This article examines whether place-based or local(ised) development actions can contribute to spatially more just development in disadvantaged regions and localities. Specific attention is given to an action's lasting impact on local institutions and whether, in influencing decision-making processes and planning routines, it can support more inclusive or just processes and outcomes in a locality in the long run. The article thus connects to debates on spatial justice, place-based development and territorial cohesion (Madanipour et al., 2022; Weck et al., 2022) as well as recent studies on the geographies of discontent (Rodriguez-Pose, 2018). This latter line of research has drawn attention to areas facing socio-economic challenges, where there is widespread disillusion or frustration within local communities regarding future development perspectives. Research findings emphasise the need to go beyond the (re)distribution of resources and focus more on institutional problems, in the form of "poor local institutions and government quality in many of these areas", including clientelist networks or reliance on transfer payments (Rodriguez-Pose, 2018, p. 202, see also p. 204). The definition of institutions used here goes beyond the established local governance structure and includes political arrangements, norms and routines believed to be locally rooted and

continuously reproduced. Against this background of an advocated need to challenge existing institutions, the place-based approach might appear to be an appropriate remedy or tool for changing local institutions and government quality in a locality in the long run, through localised actions which foster the inclusion of the interests of underrepresented or disadvantaged community groups, and which allow them to feel they have a stake in the future development of their place. In the context of a lasting impact and a sustainable change towards spatially more just development, I draw on the notions of transformative justice, as well as recent research on transformative social innovation, asking whether local development actions can be transformative, and not only affirmative, remedies leading to greater spatial justice. I use an analytical framework to assess transformative elements of local development actions implemented in 15 localities and regions.

In this article, I first review scholarly literature on spatial justice, as well as recent work on transformative social innovation, with both bodies of research subsequently brought together to develop an analytical framework. In answer to the research question, I rely upon empirical findings from an EU-funded project on local development actions in diverse territorial contexts across Europe. Some of these local development actions were designed as place-based policy instruments (for instance, within the framework of EU LEADER programmes), while others have grown incrementally, as detailed in the section on methodology and case studies. I refer to both as "local development actions". The findings in response to the research question are presented in the concluding section.

Literature review

Spatial justice and transformative changes

Since the early works of Soja on socio-spatial dialectics (1980) or those of Pirie (1983), spatial justice has become more than an issue of distribution across territories. The redistribution of resources and burdens is inevitably linked with the processes organising this redistribution. Hence, existing scholarship highlights two interconnected aspects of spatial justice: procedural justice and distributive justice (Madanipour et al., 2022; Israel & Frenkel, 2017; Reynolds & Shelley 1985; Pirie, 1983). While distributive justice is about the socially and spatially equitable distribution of resources and opportunities, procedural justice is about fair and transparent decision-making over resources and the extent to which (marginalised) communities have a fair say in decisions affecting them. In our context, it thus relates to the procedures which lead to decisions on the distribution of spatial resources and opportunities.

The focus on processes and the procedural dimension of spatial justice is specifically relevant in disadvantaged areas. In line with the diagnosis of internal institutional problems in these areas (Rodriguez-Pose, 2018; Horlings et al., 2018; Kamuf & Weck, 2022), specific attention needs to be paid to how policies or local development actions are set up and implemented to bring about change in a disadvantaged area. Of particular importance are

mechanisms able to change or challenge place-based internalised belief systems, clientelist networks, rules and routines, among others. In this respect, Rodriguez-Pose (2018, p. 204) speaks of a "modus operandi [becoming] deeply rooted in a territory". Likewise, in the spatial justice literature, Israel and Frenkel (2017, p. 652-653) argue for a change in the local 'habitus', alongside the promotion of individual capabilities to achieve arrangements remedying injustice, contending that an analytical perspective on the interaction of local habitus with the living environment (political milieus, physical attributes) and individual forms of capital helps us understand inequalities and individual livelihood opportunities in a spatial context (ibid., p. 653). The question is thus about how justice is practised in terms of procedures, ongoing processes and ways of doing and saying things in a specific context in response to local injustices. "Justice is not static, instead it is always in process, being negotiated, maintained and brought into being through practice" (Williams, 2017, p. 2222). In this vein, spatial justice practices need to be understood and assessed in a local context, integrating local knowledge and local perceptions.

In this context of lasting impact and sustainable change, Fraser (1997) distinguishes between 'affirmative' and 'transformative' remedies for injustice, with the latter challenging the dominant institutions and the underlying framework that generate inequitable outcomes. This all depends, of course, on individual standpoints on what is meant by transformative remedies and by alternatives to the present order. Fraser (1997, p. 23) makes her argument clear:

> Let me begin by briefly distinguishing affirmation and transformation. By affirmative remedies for injustice I mean remedies aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them. By transformative remedies, in contrast, I mean remedies aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes precisely by restructuring the underlying generative framework. The crux of the contrast is end-state outcomes versus the processes that produce them. It is not gradual versus apocalyptic change. (Fraser, 1997, p. 23)

Transformative, in her definition, relates to a socialist understanding of economics for overcoming economic inequality (class) and a deconstruction of group differentiations (based on race or gender). As Fraser herself argues, transformative does not necessarily mean apocalyptic or system changes, such as restructuring by shock or revolution. She does not, however, go into greater detail about how gradual or incremental transformative change could look. Transposing her thoughts on gradual or systemic change to the spatial justice debate, we find corresponding lines of argument. From a critical geographer perspective, greater spatial justice cannot be achieved without overcoming the way in which space is produced in a neo-liberal, capitalist society (Marcuse 2009, p. 1; Perry & Atherton, 2017, p. 38). Fair planning processes (such as participatory planning) within an existing (neo-liberal, capitalist) society might end up co-opting and weakening more structural demands (fairer outcomes) (Fainstein,

2009 p. 3). Looked at from this perspective, greater justice is generated by pressure on the existing system, class-based revolution, protest movements or political struggle. On the other hand, there are scholars who argue for multi-gradual, incremental changes and the value of "quieter, steady transformations" (Perry & Atherton, 2017, p. 47) in the quest for greater spatial justice. Their research links to studies on performative approaches and potential openings for (radical) interventions (Williams, 2017, p. 2219-2220). Such an approach calls for attention to be paid to emergent niche innovations from a multi-level perspective.

I will make use of conceptual and theoretical works from sustainability research to further investigate potential avenues for "gradual transformative change" (see also Table 1).

Theories on Transformative Change

The works on socio-technical transition pathways to sustainability, and specifically the multi-level perspective (MLP) as a process theory, are relevant in this context. Geels and Schot (2007) develop a typology of different transition pathways, focusing on different constellations and the interaction between landscapes (as exogenous context), socio-technical regimes (as stable configurations of macro-political development, cultural or macro-economic patterns) and radical novelties emerging at micro-level (Geels & Schot, 2007, p. 400) (see Table 1). Despite criticism of modelling these 'dynamically stable' levels and a missing stakeholder perspective (Smith et al., 2010; Geels, 2019; Savini & Bertolini, 2019), MLP is nevertheless helpful in conceptualising transformative change. Depending on the nature and timing of the multi-level interactions, regimes may gradually adapt to pressure, incorporate niche innovations without changing their underlying architecture, or may be replaced over time (transformation, reconfiguration, substitution, de- and re-alignment). In changing from one socio-technical regime to another, Geels (2019) emphasises "the importance of radical innovations" (p. 1) integrating multiple dimensions (cross-sectoral, global-local) and stakeholder perspectives. During transitions, as Geels and Schot (2007, p. 402) argue, at some point there is an "alignment of visions and activities of different groups" and a cross-sectoral common understanding about the way forward.

> This framework theorises transition dynamics through the interactions between three levels [.] 1) the landscape (exogenous macro-trends), 2) regimes (dominant institutions and practices), and 3) niches (places of innovative practices). A transition occurs when changes at all three levels reinforce each other into an overall systemic transformation […]. (Avelino et al., 2019, p. 196)[1]

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[1] Square brackets [ ] indicate an omission within a quotation, a comment or clarification added by the author.

From this work, we learn that transition dynamics are not linked to a specific stakeholder group (Geels & Schot, 2007, p. 402), that they range from collaborative learning processes to conflicts (Geels 2019, p. 1), and that transition arises from the interaction between an innovative practice and institutional frameworks (role relationships, values, belief systems, problem definitions, see Geels & Schot, 2007, p. 403), and their interaction with wider macro-trends. Institutions, according to Geels and Schot (2007, p. 403), are here meant in a broader sense as rules and routinised practices which are continually reproduced by the actions of those embedded in them. They take on different forms: regulative (regulations, standards, laws, etc.), normative (role relationships, values, behavioural norms, etc.) and cognitive (belief systems, innovation agendas, problem definitions, guiding principles, search heuristics, etc.). Institutional changes thus implicitly alter formal rules, role relationships and belief systems.

Geels & Schot (2007, p. 415) argue that, while MLP is a global model which addresses transitions over long periods, it can also accommodate and "leave space for different 'local' subplots". Taking this need for adaptation into account, the theoretical perspective provided by MLP is a useful resource for investigating the transformative potential of actions (defined as niche innovations). Savini and Bertolini (2019) rightfully remind us that the process of creating, selecting and retaining some experimental niches (but not others) is not a technical but a political process. "Niches can in fact disappear, become marginalized, be assimilated in the dominant order without significantly changing it, or ignite a transformation of existent institutions" (ibid., p. 832). The underlying politics of creating, selecting and retaining experimental niches thus need to be critically reviewed from a political power perspective.

Recent work on transformative social innovation in the context of the EU project TRANSIT contributes further insights into actions and processes which may have a transformative impact and which challenge dominant social arrangements and norms (Avelino et al., 2019; Pel et al., 2020; Haxeltine et al., 2017). The authors theorise the way in which social innovation (SI) initiatives interact with institutions based on an empirical study of 20 SI networks and 100 associated SI initiatives. According to this work, systemic, transformative change that is able to alter or replace dominant institutions is "the resulting interactive, co-evolutionary process between distinct but intertwined dimensions of innovation and change" (Avelino et al., 2019, p. 196). For change to become transformative, Avelino et al. (2019, p. 196-197) define four overlapping dimensions: social innovation, i.e. changes in social relations and new ways of doing or framing things; system innovation involving changes in institutions, physical infrastructure or other societal sub-systems; game changers, defined as macro-developments impacting habitual rules and players; and narratives of change, including new discourses on change and innovation (see Table 1). This work points to the several dimensions involved in transformative change, ranging from social relations to material and symbolic changes. To a certain extent, this work draws on adaptations of MLP (see above), but also practice theory (Schatzki, 1996). It is evident from

this literature that transformative change relies on interactive changes in various spheres and dimensions, encompassing local and trans-local change.

Table 1: *Theories that address transformative change in sustainability research: Key dimensions, components and assumptions. Source: The author, based upon Geels & Schot, 2007; Geels, 2019; Avelino et al., 2019.*

Theories	Key dimensions	Elements / Components	Assumptions
Multi-level perspective (Geels & Schot, 2007; Geels, 2019)	Landscape (exogenous macro-trends)	Varied set of factors that cannot be influenced in the short term	Transition occurs when changes at all three levels reinforce each other (multi-level interactions) and there is an alignment of the visions and activities of different groups
	Regimes (dominant institutions and practices)	Shared cognitive routines; Communities of interacting groups; 'dynamically stable'	
	Niches (places of innovative practices)	Small networks of dedicated players; 'emergent'	
Transformative Social Innovation (Avelino et al., 2019)	Social innovation Changes in social relations and new ways of doing or framing	Changing social relations	Interactive, co-evolutionary process between these dimensions of innovation and change
	System innovation Changes in institutions, physical infrastructure or other societal sub-systems	Interactions between different processes (social, technical) of innovation and change (~regimes)	
	Game changers Macro-developments impacting habitual rules and players	Trends, events and developments that change dominant societal understandings	
	Narratives of change Storylines and new discourses on change and innovation	Give meaning to a specific phenomenon; Create counter-narratives	

An analytical framework for assessing the transformative potential of local development actions

From the literature review, we conclude that any analysis of transformative change encompasses different dimensions. Figure 1 shows the three building blocks used in analysing the transformative impact of local development actions: an assessment of (1) overlapping

shifts in multiple dimensions (social, material, symbolic); (2) procedural and distributive spatial justice; (3) limitations and risks.

Against the background of diagnosed institutional problems in disadvantaged regions and the argued need for changes in established decision-making and planning routines in these regions, place-based local development actions can act as catalysts and help to change and challenge established institutions. Transformative change in established institutions, as the social innovation literature suggests, relies on "interactive, co-evolutionary processes" (Avelino et al., 2019, p. 196) involving different innovation and change dimensions. Changes solely in, for instance, the physical environment, without triggering changes in other dimensions, might not be sufficiently far-reaching to challenge or alter dominant institutions.
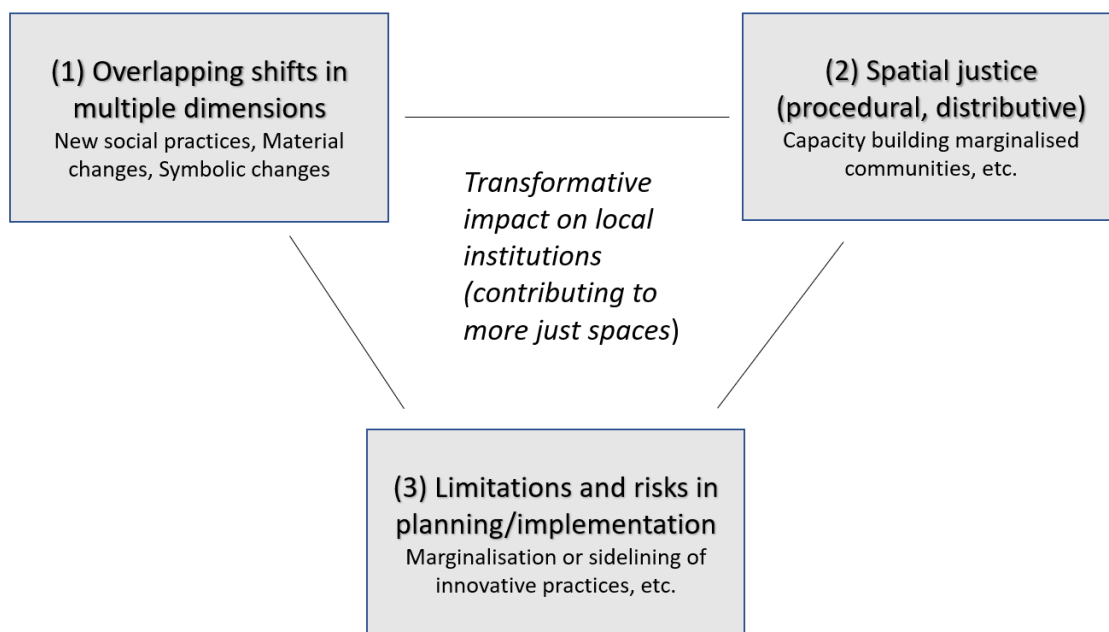

Figure 1: *The analytical framework. Source: The author.*

In the empirical analysis of local development actions, it is therefore relevant to trace (1) overlapping shifts and changes in three dimensions: social, material and symbolic (see Figure 1). In the context of existing spatial disadvantages, and considering the need to promote spatially more just processes and outcomes, these changes at the social, material and symbolic levels need to be targeted, benefiting marginalised communities in procedural and distributive terms. The overlapping shifts in multiple dimensions thus should bring about positive local change by promoting spatial justice in its procedural and distributive dimensions (2). The framework stresses the interconnection between the two building blocks (1) and (2). In a distributive perspective, the aim is to achieve a socially and spatially fair distribution of resources and opportunities in a locality (city or region), and a targeted approach to enhance access to resources and opportunities for disadvantaged population groups/in disadvantaged

areas. Attention to the needs of underrepresented or marginalised population groups/parts of a locality or region must be built into the action from the outset, in a procedural dimension, giving these groups/local residents a fair say in decisions affecting them. Otherwise, actions will typically fail to promote the perception of "being treated fairly" among marginalised population groups or stakeholders in disadvantaged parts of a city or region, or may even exacerbate feelings of resignation or frustration among local stakeholders and community groups. Examples of the interconnection between these two building blocks (1) and (2) and the attention to spatial justice in multiple dimensions of change include, for example:

- At the social level: new ways of doing things such as
  - Empowerment and capacity-building of vulnerable/marginalised populations
  - Cross-sectoral co-learning processes between different groups of local stakeholders
- At the material level: changes in, for instance, the
  - Appropriation of space
  - Access of marginalised population groups to new resources
- At the symbolic level: changes such as
  - New narratives opposing existing (marginalising) framings or perceptions
  - Counter-narratives on marginalised groups or stigmatised places.

From the above literature discussion, we learn that institutional rules and routines are locally deep-rooted and are being reproduced and maintained in an ongoing process. Introducing new practices, such as decision-making procedures allowing the local knowledge of marginalised communities to be considered in decision-making, will not automatically lead to a fair(er) representation of their interests in future decision-making processes. New practices may be ignored or marginalised by the dominant established order (Savini & Bertolini, 2019). Given that (re)distributive justice deals with the allocation of resources (and burdens) and that dominant power relations underlie spending mechanisms, any analysis should take resistance to change into account. More inclusive decision-making processes and planning routines, and the aim of promoting spatially more just processes and outcomes, challenge the status quo and established institutions. Whether or not these new practices and routines can be sustained in the long run needs critical attention in the planning and implementation of an action, which is illustrated by the third building block of the analytical framework (3). Otherwise, the transformative impact on local institutions (towards more just procedures and outcomes) will be limited.

We conclude that transformative remedies are those which challenge dominant institutions and the underlying framework that generates inequitable outcomes. Radical or more gradual innovations at different levels (social, material and symbolic) are needed in order to change institutions (defined in a wider sense as rules and routines) in disadvantaged areas. For greater spatial justice, this change needs to target fairer processes and more just

spaces – some kind of 'majoritarian stance' – benefiting the interests of marginalised communities. Can place-based actions deliver or support such radical or gradual innovations, developing longer-lasting transformative impacts benefiting marginalised communities in disadvantaged localities? In the results section, I use the analytical framework (Figure 1) to dissect the empirical evidence for the different analytical categories and investigate how local development actions potentially contribute to sustained change in a locality's routines and practices. The aim here is to explore development patterns and processes, rather than search for causalities. Before turning to the results, the methodology of this study is presented.

Methodology and case study sample

The empirical findings of the analysis stem from a five-year European research project, RELOCAL, which investigated 33 cases of local development actions in diverse contexts across Europe (http://www.relocal.eu). Each case stands for a place-based action selected by the researchers as representative of a localised policy, or as a local project aimed at achieving greater spatial justice in a locality. In view of the research question, I focus on a sub-sample of cases.

RELOCAL used an embedded case study approach, with case study analysis and reporting, following detailed methodological guidelines (Weck & Kamuf, 2020). To analyse the change capacities of local development actions within the RELOCAL project, analytical dimensions and key categories served to guide researchers in gathering empirical data and analysing local development actions. These key analytical categories included the perceived geography and space, as well as stakeholders' perceptions of implemented actions. The analysis of the actions' internal functioning focused on modes of leadership, structures of coordination, participation and engagement, learning processes, and scope for flexibility and adaptability. A further aspect was the formal and informal empowerment of hitherto silent local communities. Conducted in 2018 and 2019, the research was based on extensive qualitative fieldwork, including document analysis, stakeholder interviews, and focus group discussions.

To answer the research question in this study, a sub-sample of the 33 RELOCAL case studies (see Table 2) was used to investigate cases initiated, shaped or influenced by local communities to serve local needs. These actions could be initiated either by local communities themselves or by higher policymaking levels while involving or enabling bottom-up elements. Municipalities were also included in this category as there were cases where local administrations acted bottom-up against or independently of higher-level administrations. Sixteen cases were ruled out as they involved higher policymaking levels – national, regional or even local levels – with very little or no evidence of bottom-up involvement (Weck et al., 2020, p. 25). As concluded from the literature review, transformative change is unlikely to emerge from one sector alone (in this case, planned and coordinated by the government

Table 2: *List of case studies analysed, case study authors and some background information on the actions. The actions are sorted by their timeframes. Source: The author, based upon Weck et al., 2020.*

Action name / Author(s)	Case / Local development action
Smart Country Side (Matzke et al., 2019)	Smart Country Side Ostwestfalen-Lippe. A Digitalisation Project in Villages, Germany - Digitalisation as a tool to promote civic engagement in a rural area - Regional strategy involving bottom-up elements of community involvement - 2016-2020, ongoing at the time of research
Activation of Youth (Fritsch et al., 2019b)	Civil-Action-Based Local Initiative for the Activation of Youth in Kotka, a town in Finland - Community-led local development action in a town - Action seeking to enable local bottom-up processes, specifically in the third sector - Started 2016, ongoing at the time of research
Lieksa Development Strategy 2030 (Fritsch et al., 2019a)	Lieksa Development Strategy 2030, Finland - Municipal development strategy of a town in a predominantly rural region - Strategy involving bottom-up elements, specifically the local business community - Started 2015, ongoing at the time of research
Northumberland LEADER (Brooks et al., 2019)	The Northumberland Uplands Local Action Group (NULAG) LEADER in England, UK - LEADER action in a rural area, largely volunteer-led and run - Bottom-up initiative controlled by higher policymaking levels - Started 2014, Revision in 2017, ongoing at the time of research
Mara-Natur LEADER (Zamfir 2019)	Micro-Regional Association Mara-Natur in Maramures County, Romania - LEADER action in a rural area - Action seeking to enable local bottom-up processes - Started 2011, Extension 2014, ongoing at the time of research
Induced Earthquakes (Trip & Romein, 2019)	Northeast Groningen. Confronting the Impact of Induced Earthquakes, Netherlands - Policy measures implemented to alleviate earthquake damage - Province is acting bottom-up against the higher policymaking level of the central government - Started 2011, ongoing at the time of research
Social Cooperative (Jeziorska-Biel et al., 2019)	Communal Service. A Social Cooperative as Part of Local Revitalisation, Poland - Social enterprise creating work for the socially excluded - Bottom-up initiative taken over by higher policymaking levels - Started 2010, Revised in 2012, ongoing at the time of research
Llei de Barris (Ulied et al., 2019)	Action Plan for the Promotion of Quality of Life in a Segregated Neighbourhood, Spain - (Integrated) neighbourhood transformation plan in a peri-urban municipality - Regional strategy (Catalan Government) involving bottom-up elements - 2009-2018
Euralens (Blondel, 2019)	Euralens. An Innovative Tool to Redevelop Pas-de-Calais Former Mining Basin, France - Regional development strategy in a peripheralised, former mining region - Action seeking to mobilise local expertise and inner-regional cooperation - Started 2009, ongoing at the time of research
Balaton LEADER (Kovács & Nemes, 2019)	The Balaton Uplands. LEADER Local Action Group, Hungary - LEADER action in a rural region - Action seeking to enable local bottom-up processes and local development - 2007 – 2015, funded again since 2017, ongoing at the time of research
Thematic Village (Tobiasz-Lis et al., 2019)	A Thematic Village as an Anchor for Local Identity and Rural Development, Poland - Thematically-led redevelopment of a village in a rural area - Led by a local community or civil society initiative (Goth Village Association) - Started 2006, Extension 2010, ongoing at the time of research
Youth Centre (Kamuf et al., 2019)	Local Youth as Urban Development Actors in Görlitz, Germany - Rabryka as a platform for urban development and socio-culture in a town - Bottom-up initiated youth centre (Rabryka), initiated by a group of local youths - Initiated 2003, Extension 2016, ongoing at the time of research
Producer Organisation (Kovács et al., 2019)	May a Producer Organisation prevent Mass Pauperisation? An Example from Hungary - Producer Organisation as a broker for supporting cooperation in a rural area - (Bottom-up) cooperation for branding and technological innovation - Started 2003, ongoing at the time of research
Strengthening Communities (Currie et al., 2019)	Strengthening Communities on the Isle of Lewis in the Western Isles, United Kingdom - Community land trusts as a novel approach for local empowerment - Action seeking to enable local bottom-up processes - Initiated 1991, ongoing at the time of research
Ecosystem of Collaboration (Petrakos et al., 2019)	Karditsa's Ecosystem of Collaboration, Greece - Local development agency as a broker for supporting cooperation in a rural area - (Bottom-up) cooperation between (social) businesses, cooperatives, intermediaries - Initiated 1989, Revision in 2009, ongoing at the time of research

sector). Two further actions (from Poland) were excluded to avoid an over-representation of cases from one country in the sample (a maximum of two cases per country allowed). The remaining 15 cases were further analysed in this study. Sample size and selection procedures do not allow conclusions to be drawn from single cases for the wider national context.

Table 2 lists the 15 case studies, including some background information on the actions. All case study reports are published as open-access documents and can be consulted for more detailed reading (see reference list). The 15 cases were analysed case by case, using the case study reports on the local development actions as the text corpus. As the case study research and case study reports followed detailed common guidelines, all 15 reports offered assessments and explicit statements on five analytical categories (perception of spatial (in)justice; tools and policies for development and cohesion; coordination and implementation of the action; autonomy, participation and engagement; local knowledge and adaptability) and on three synthesising categories (assessment of promoters and inhibitors; competences and capacities of stakeholders; assessment of the action in relation to spatial (in)justice) (for a full list of all analytical categories and sub-categories, see Weck & Kamuf, 2020, p. 8). Following an inductive approach, statements on the outcomes of the actions were encoded using qualitative text analysis software (MaxQDA). Positively and negatively assessed aspects of an action's outcomes and explanatory factors (promoters and inhibitors), as assessed by the case study authors, were coded (150 text segments per report on average). Following a more deductive approach when going through the material a second time, text segments were summarised and sorted into different categories according to the analytical framework, as displayed in Figure 1. The final list of 603 text segments constituted the core material for the analysis in this paper.

In two cases, the author was directly involved in the collection of empirical data for the study. In all other cases, the findings were based on data collected and processed by others. While this constituted a limitation, there were two offsetting factors. First, as explained above, there was a common framework for data collection and analysis. Second, the author was involved in the quality control, review processes and cross-case analysis of the entire case study sample, and thus had context knowledge and insights into the analysed cases beyond the case study report. This helped in the interpretation of the outcomes and thus increased the validity of the findings.

Results

Using the analytical framework, I identified four patterns explaining the factors promoting or hindering greater spatial justice through transformative impacts on local institutions. Presented in Table 3 below, the patterns are explained in detail in the following subsections.

Table 3: *The identified four patterns and their characteristics. Source: The Author.*

Patterns	Overlapping shifts in multiple dimensions	Spatial justice	Limitations and risks
Novel and innovative, but fragile achievements	Shifts in social, material and symbolic dimensions	Action contributes to greater procedural or distributive spatial justice in the locality	No long-term strategy for sustaining the impetus, endangering local stakeholders' future engagement Changing priorities of higher layers of governance endanger previous achievements, loss of locally accumulated human and social capital
	Cases for illustration: Smart Country Side (DE), Llei de Barris (ES), Balaton LEADER (HU), Northumberland LEADER (UK)		
Small gains, but not sufficiently broad to generate a transformative impact	Shifts in one or two dimensions only	Action contributes to greater procedural or distributive spatial justice in the locality	A one-dimensional focus constrains the actions' full potential Actions have insufficient breadth or depth
	Cases for illustration: Lieksa Development Strategy 2030 (FI), Ecosystem of Collaboration (EL), Social Cooperative (PL), Activation of Youth (FI), Euralens (FR)		
Counter-productive and problematic outcomes of local development actions	Shifts in one or two dimensions only	Action creates negative counter-effects	Little consideration of unequal opportunity structures / of distributive effects of measures One-sided regional economic growth focus
	Cases for illustration: Mara-Natur LEADER (RO), Induced Earthquakes (NL), Producer Organisation (HU)		
Incidences or traces of a transformative impact on local institutions	Shifts in social, material and symbolic dimensions	Action contributes to greater procedural or distributive spatial justice in the locality	The action has some transformative impact on local institutions
	Cases for illustration: Youth Centre (DE), Thematic Village (PL), Strengthening Communities (UK)		

Novel and innovative, but fragile achievements

Certain actions introduced novel and innovative place-based approaches for dealing with local or regional challenges and were able to attract substantial community resources to further social justice. There were overlapping shifts in social, material and symbolic dimensions. Stakeholders in the localities and case study researchers assessed the outcomes of the actions as positive with regard to outcomes for marginalised populations and for spatially more just development. Nevertheless, there is a danger of these positive niche innovations being marginalised over time (see Savini & Bertolini, 2019), with a question mark hanging over their long-term sustainability and mainstreaming in established governance structures, thereby endangering or hindering the transformative impact of the otherwise positively assessed action.

In the case of the Smart Country Side project, a digitalisation project for villages in a rural area in Germany, promising new local practices were developed, such as the recognition and involvement of citizens as experts on their environment. However, "in terms of the sustainability of effects, [...] it is not completely clear how the action is sustained in the selected pilot villages and how the impetus of the project is integrated into regional and district development politics in the long term." (Matzke et al., 2019, p. 26). The same applies to a Neighbourhood Action Plan in a residential municipality in the Barcelona metropolitan area, where the case study researchers conclude that the main threat to the outcomes is that the action has no sustained funding.

> The design of the action focused on the diagnosis, implementation and assessment but [not on] its sustainability. In terms [of] operational and maintenance costs, there are not stakeholder engagements yet (governments from different scales; Generalitat de Catalunya, Diputació de Barcelona), but probably it is expected to be assumed by the municipality. (Ulied et al., 2019, p. 26)

One problem here is that policymaking innovation often remains framed in terms of solving acute or emerging problems, without a long-term local or regional strategy for sustaining an action's momentum or mainstreaming its successful elements within a long-term process facilitating institutional change. Limited funding timeframes or changing funding sources pose limitations to sustaining positive outcomes and momentum. Local stakeholder engagement is a valuable resource essential for local and regional development in response to societal, social and ecological challenges in disadvantaged areas. Projects calling for community participation and generating hope, but which do not deliver in the perception of local communities, endanger this engagement in the future.

> In those villages which had participated in municipal or regional projects with a similar extensive outreach to the local community but which in the end did not deliver clear visible results to the local community, frustration was clearly noticeable [...]. (Matzke et al., 2019, p. 26)

In two other actions, the sustainability of previous achievements was endangered for reasons related to the dependency of local action groups on (shifting) higher-level governance agendas, hindering continuity in line with local communities' own priorities and needs. Two LEADER actions from England and Hungary serve as illustrations here. In both cases, the local action groups managed to secure funding in successive programming periods. However, shifting priorities at higher levels of governance between the programming periods led to the loss of accumulated social and human capital in both cases. In the case of the Northumberland LEADER programme, the shift from its first to second phase ultimately constrained the

"capacity of the action to decide its own focus, and in particular to further social justice in the rural area" (Brooks et al. 2019, p. 1).

> A Ministerial intervention shaping the second phase of NULAG (equivalent to the fifth iteration of LEADER in England) has reduced the autonomy of the action and its capacity to address social exclusion and sustainable development goals by narrowing the focus of the action mainly to economic growth. (Brooks et al., 2019, p. 39)

In this case, the priorities, regulations and control of higher layers of governance conflicted with planning reflecting local needs and priorities. In addition, mutual learning and skill sets were lost, with "a great deal of learning from the first phase of the action being lost to the current phase" (Brooks et al. 2019: 31). The Balaton LEADER project is a similar case. The case study researchers commented on the achievements of the analysed actions, emphasising that "the Balaton Upland LEADER can undoubtedly be seen as a best practice for local development, civic engagement, empowerment and participation." Yet they also observed the action's vulnerability to shifting higher-level priorities and political interests, with consequences for local capacities.

> The implementation of the LEADER program in the current programming period suffered from severe cut-backs, delays and other problems, which had negative effects on the Balaton Uplands LEADER LAG [...], resulting in a dramatic shrinkage of management resources, and in the loss of locally accumulated human capital. This endangers seriously the achievements of the previous period. (Kovacs & Nemes, 2019, p. 1)

Changes in the priorities of funding programmes at higher policymaking levels may thus conflict with actions tailored to local needs or may limit localised learning processes over time. Especially in countries where municipalities have limited autonomy in political and material terms (Keller & Virág, 2022), a lack of support from higher policymaking levels or shifting priorities may limit local capacities to deal with persistent local challenges and to facilitate institutional change. Transformative change occurs through multi-level interactions and the alignment of the visions and activities of different groups. Time and persistence are needed to achieve structures that consolidate new practices. For these reasons, the transformative potential of the cases is ambiguous. It remains an open question whether and to what extent the positive impulses of these actions and their outcomes in terms of social and spatial justice become mainstreamed or integrated into established public policies or just disappear.

Small gains, but not sufficiently broad to generate a transformative impact

Detected as a relevant pattern in several cases, some of the investigated actions showed promising new governance approaches. But any co-occurrence of shifts in the social, material and symbolic dimensions was limited, with actions planned and implemented in a one-dimensional way, for instance with a focus on job creation or only involving local businesses but not civil society organisations. Other actions did not have sufficient breadth or depth to challenge local routines and practices or to generate a transformative impact on established institutions.

For instance, in the case of the Lieksa Development Strategy 2030, local political will existed to improve the city or regional governance in procedural aspects (greater transparency, more participation opportunities for the business community). Featuring positive initial results, this strategy received credit from the local business community for the "flexible and responsive way in which the City of Lieksa is interacting with businesses these days" (Fritsch et al., 2019a, p. 26). However, the focus on businesses and an "overall entrepreneurial approach" was not complemented by an equally ambitious people- or community-centred approach, as Lieksa had "not yet [committed] to a structured and long-term dialogue with a broad set of third-sector organisations." (Fritsch et al., 2019a, p. 27). This reorientation in city management raised concerns of marginalisation.

> From the viewpoint of residents, particularly ones that do not have access to or interaction with decision-making elites, the new municipal strategy and approach raised concerns of marginalisation from the decision-making processes. From the perspective of third-sector, there was also a concern that their arguably important contribution in terms of knowledge and know-how, particularly with regard to social, well-being and community aspects, could be underutilised as a result of a focus on businesses. (Fritsch et al., 2019a, p. 25)

A more cohesive approach, integrating social justice concerns in the municipality's new strategy, would increase the action's strength and scope in overcoming spatial injustice challenges. A similar argument applies to the Ecosystem of Collaboration in Karditsa, where a local development agency is promoting collaboration between local (social) businesses, cooperatives and business-related intermediaries in a predominantly rural locality in Greece.

> In relation to the participatory processes, the feeling of some respondents is that there are no structured mechanisms for the civil society to express its views. (Petrakos et al., 2019, p. 12)

Inspired by the rules and values of the social economy, this action generated noteworthy and positive outcomes for the locality. One limiting factor seemed to be a lack of trust (rooted

in the past experience of a cooperative going bankrupt), indicating that more attention needed to be paid in regional development strategies to measures promoting an area's social fabric, and creating trust and engendering a spirit of cooperation in the region. This would involve investing in civil society, i.e. going beyond the more business-oriented approach of the Karditsa ecosystem. A shortcoming of a different kind was visible in the case of the social cooperative established in a Polish town, which generates employment opportunities for vulnerable social groups while at the same time providing services to the local community. However, a policy for identifying disadvantaged persons going beyond the 'deserving poor' discourse was missing, as the motivation underlying the social cooperative was basically an instrumental and economic one, including

> assistance and support extended to the socially excluded, and the 'mending of individual biographies' (and consequently of their families) by attempting to [.] bring [them] back into society, taking the burden off the Urban Centre for Social Assistance, as well as decreasing joblessness in the town. (Jeziorska-Biel et al., 2019, p. 1)

A second sub-pattern involved outcomes assessed as having insufficient political visibility or being insufficiently radical, thereby increasing the danger of (the innovation) becoming marginalised (Savini & Bertolini, 2017). This argument applied to the Activation of Youth action in the Finnish city of Kotka. While the action certainly responded to local needs and enhanced "social/spatial justice in both its distributive and procedural aspects" (Fritsch et al. 2019b, p. 27), its outcomes did not generate much attention and public awareness, thus "[limiting] the Action's effect as a source of innovation in local governance" (Fritsch et al., 2019b, p. 23). A similar situation arose with Euralens, a French action targeting the redevelopment of a traditional mining region. Mobilising the expertise of local stakeholders and external experts and promoting cooperation between local authorities, the action generated a common vision of the way forward – contrasting greatly with the former fragmentation of local interests – and a much-improved climate of cooperation. Nevertheless, it was seen as modest in comparison to the extent of the needs and did not manage to increase trust among local stakeholders in the region's future development. In the words of the case study author,

> the effort seems still insufficient over time. The enormous environmental impact of mining activity as well as the deep social impact of the collapse of this activity have let the territory dry. Albeit positive, the action of Euralens is relatively modest in comparison to the extent of the needs. At the social level in particular, the rebuilding of individuals trust is a long-term policy that deserves more attention. Too often, Euralens disregard the social and the procedural dimensions of injustice. It does not pay sufficient attention to the

integration of the civil society to the decision-making in a time of democratic crisis. Yet, symbols, power balance, transparency should be cornerstones of Euralens action in the territory in order to better exemplify change in the locality. (Blondel, 2019, p. 1)

Specifically in regions "with a lack of trust in the way political decisions are taken" (Blondel, 2019, p. 21), local and regional development actions need to pay attention to the social and the procedural dimensions of (in)justice, as a pre-condition for outcomes being perceived as inclusive and fair.

While the actions provided benefits in terms of overcoming fragmentation and sectoralism and opening up new participation opportunities or better employment prospects, a question mark remained over the transformative potential of these innovations, as they were not sufficiently radical or disruptive, or not sufficiently broad to have any great impact on local routines and practices. Similar to the cases studied under the first sub-pattern, the question remains of whether these first signs of incremental change can be expanded and upgraded, leading to transformative changes in the long run.

Counter-productive and problematic outcomes of local development actions

Some cases were assessed by interviewees and case study researchers as problematic in their outcomes as they had the potential to boost or create new challenges in disadvantaged areas. In these cases, we found social/spatial justice shortcomings, little consideration of unequal opportunity structures and few reflections on the distributive effects of measures. This created unintended side effects or even new injustices.

One visible pattern here was that local needs seemed under-represented in rural or regional development schemes, creating frustration and anger among local stakeholders, as witnessed in the Romanian Mara-Natur LEADER action. The lack of attention across the territory and social groups to unequal opportunity structures for accessing external funding led to frustration among the poorer local communities, as

> some are more capable of writing competitive projects, others have money for externalizing this work towards private companies. For richer LAUs [Local Administrative Units], Mara-Natur is the cherry on top, just another opportunity for attracting external funding, while for poorer ones it turns into a source of frustration: funds are symbolic relative to their needs, and the administrative effort too costly. (Zamfir, 2019, p. 13)

The competitive distribution of external funds thus exacerbated inequality in the region, rather than ironing it out.

In the case of the "Induced Earthquakes", the Dutch national government's measures to compensate local inhabitants for subsidence damage to their buildings (caused by the

extraction of natural gas, a measure of national interest) resulted in an "extensive and highly complicated institutional framework that is experienced as being imposed on the region by the national government, and absorbs most of the time and funding available but is nevertheless widely considered ineffective, inefficient and unfair." (Trip & Romein, 2019, p. 2). The compensation scheme had actually exacerbated the local population's distrust in the national government. While households had received financial compensation, the framework for doing so was widely perceived as unjust. Local interest groups had little power or influence, and the lack of involvement of those most affected in designing the compensation framework had caused frustration and anger among local stakeholders. As a result, Trip & Romein (2019, p. 2) noted: "the distrust in the national government that is more interested in gas revenues than in protecting people is widespread in the region.". The researchers concluded that in this case the "measures that (at least nominally) aim to solve distributional injustice actually increase procedural injustice, i.e. that part of the Action as discussed here can in fact be considered to be counterproductive." (Trip & Romein, 2019, p. 15)

Actions might also perpetuate existing discrimination or inequality through a focus on maximising economic growth. This was the case with a Hungarian initiative where a regional producer organisation of vegetable and fruit growers aimed to introduce new technologies in smaller, family-owned companies to help them remain competitive. However, as a result of the change pressure on the producers, the number of small producers in the producer organisation decreased, leading to a concentration of power among larger producers over time. Though the producer organisation had been successful in some aspects, such as the regional branding of products, sustainability aspects or fair working conditions for the workforce seemed to play only a minor role compared to economic aspects. Therefore, the action did not sufficiently address locally rooted patterns of discrimination and inequality, instead perpetuating existing patterns of "the exploitation of labourers, especially the most vulnerable layers such as women and the Roma" (Kovacs et al., 2019, p. 28).

The action shows how a focus on economic growth, without understanding regional innovation policy in a wider sense, i.e. in response to societal, social and ecological needs, raises new problems.

Incidences or traces of a transformative impact on local institutions

Last but not least, a group of actions showed incidences or traces of a transformative impact on local routines and practices, revealing shifts in various dimensions (social, material, symbolic). In terms of benefiting marginalised communities, all actions were positively assessed from a social justice perspective by the case study researchers. As a relevant pattern, there were interrelated shifts in several dimensions: There were signs of empowerment and growing capacity-building within local population groups or young, marginalised populations On a material level, new socio-cultural infrastructures emerged, or local players became

empowered to take possession of local assets. These in turn led to newly emerging, positive narratives countering existing framings or perceptions of the localities.

The example of the Rabryka youth and socio-cultural centre in the midsized East German town of Görlitz serves as an illustrative case here. It is an example of an initiative by and for young people active in the local development of a town affected by major socio-economic transformation. Managing to create a centre for youth and socio-culture in Görlitz in cooperation with the municipality (the public authority), the youngsters behind the Rabryka youth initiative have since become urban development players in the town. Looking at the material dimension, the youth initiative enables and encourages young people to appropriate space. Alongside running the socio-cultural youth centre, the Rabryka team is involved in neighbourhood regeneration. Turning to the social dimension, the team is also engaged in local public affairs, lobbying for the interests of the town's youth and cultural players and striving to empower young and vulnerable cohorts to voice their interests. As for the symbolic dimension, the Rabryka youth centre has become a hub for socio-cultural activities, giving rise to positive narratives about the town and allowing young people to identify with the locality, as the following quotation shows.

> In a regional context of structural economic change, outmigration, and increasing populism, the researched action is a bottom-up organisation by and for young people. In terms of distributive justice, it aims [to] provide open spaces and activities as alternatives to mainstream culture in Görlitz. In terms of procedural justice, it seeks to be an anchor institution for the interests of vulnerable (young) people, seeking to involve them in democratic forms of engagement. The action could be seen as a catalyst for the interests of young people and a promotor of sociocultural development, both of which help to make young people stay in and feel that they belong to the town. (Kamuf et al., 2019, p. 27)

New role relationships between local or regional authorities and these civil society stakeholders have emerged, with respective capabilities recognised on an equal footing. There are signs of a new culture of communication and cooperation emerging between state and non-state players, as voiced by a local administration official

> [Rabryka] changed communal politics. [...] It changed the relationship between citizenry, particularly young citizens, and the municipal administration, [towards] local politics (Kamuf et al., 2019, p. 17)

The concrete negotiations and planning behind the realisation of the Rabryka youth and socio-cultural centre induced learning processes on both sides, the youth initiative and the local authority. In a similar vein, new role relationships were established in the case of the

redevelopment of a village in a rural area (Hrubieszów community) in Poland, where the action succeeded in "breaking down barriers between the local community, professionals, local stakeholders, entrepreneurs" (Tobiasz-Lis et al., 2019, p. 18). In this case, the local stakeholders, with professional help from university researchers and employees of a regional museum, established the Goth Village Association, including an open-air-museum, communal facilities and events, which has since become the heart of the village "not only the natural meeting place of the community but also their common place to identify with, work on and realise new ideas." (Tobiasz-Lis et al., 2019, p. 16)

Realising new ideas in a more cooperative style of politics enables mutual learning processes, shared problem definitions and innovation agendas across sectors, while at the same time enhancing mutual understanding between different stakeholder groups (acknowledging the respective sector-specific logic of stakeholder actions, but also the limits). As a result, the local authorities of the Hrubieszów community see the Goth Village Association as

> partners in local and regional development. Over the years the community has given the Goth Village Association freedom to develop the idea and contents of the Goth Village (Tobiasz-Lis et al., 2019, p. 24)

The freedom given to the Goth Village Association allowed it to grow and become more strategic over time. Over the years, it has become highly professional and now employs staff and volunteers and engages in spatial development plans. The same applies to the Rabryka team which has shown its capacity to attract funding from national or EU programmes, thereby generating additional resources and developing in line with its own agenda-setting.

The appropriation or 'making' of space gives rise to further activities and supports local communities' self-perception of being able to induce change, an important aspect of localities characterised by depopulation. This is specifically visible in the Scottish case, where community land buyouts represent a radical innovation bringing about shifts and changes in multiple dimensions. The Land Reform (Scotland) Acts of 2003 and 2016 have facilitated community land buyouts and the establishment of community trusts. In the case of Lewis, new community trusts have given local communities better access to and ownership of land, thereby increasing their autonomy in responding to local needs with locally devised responses (Currie et al., 2019, p. 7). The action is thus designed around empowering those involved to take possession of assets, as witnessed by the positive impact on service decline and depopulation.

> The Action directly responds to the wider needs of Lewis - as it facilitates a process of empowerment that increases autonomy and access to assets, most specifically land. Better access and community rights to and ownership of the land have been seen to reverse population and service decline, which is a

> major source of injustice and inequality in comparison to other Scottish areas.
> (Currie et al., 2019, p. 29)

While the community land buyout process enables greater autonomy and a place-based approach to tackling spatial injustices, it is important to note that the authors of the case study also observed emerging differences between the trusts, as they have varied assets and capacities to create income for their communities (Currie et al., 2019, p. 29). This attention to newly emerging risks is quite important, reminding us that spatial justice is not an ultimate goal but "a continuous, democratic process of demanding fairer, more equal conditions." (Madanipour et al., 2022, p. 812). Striving for more just spaces, stakeholders and policymakers need to be aware of potentially emerging new forms of spatial injustice through place-based approaches.

The cases illustrate how new routinised practices have emerged, from problem definition to a joint local agenda on how to deal with perceived spatial injustices, in a process indicating institutional changes in role relationships, local social arrangements and belief systems.

These changes have been dependent not only on capable stakeholders or initiators of change but also on a policy environment allowing new, innovative ideas to take root and grow in the longer term (see Savini & Bertolini, 2019). What we thus have is an interactive process and "intertwined dimensions of innovation and change" (Avelino et al., 2019, p. 196), in which the emergence of bottom-up 'policy entrepreneurs' or initiators of change is nested in (supra-)local constellations allowing and fostering innovation and (bottom-up) disruptions of local routines.

Discussion and conclusion

Based on the empirical findings from 15 cases, the article discussed the transformative potential of local development actions. The analysis aimed at investigating to what extent a place-based approach can go beyond affirmative remedies in disadvantaged areas and trigger transformative change. Rather than radical restructuring, transformative change is defined here in the sense of niche innovations and gradual steps towards greater (spatial) justice and towards systemically changing routines, practices and power structures (Castro-Arce & Vanclay, 2020; Perry & Atherton, 2017). An analytical framework guided the empirical analysis, based on theoretical insights from spatial justice literature and transformative social innovation.

The empirical findings revealed that few of the investigated place-based actions had transformative impact on local institutions. The findings point to the context-dependent, critical interaction between place-based approaches and the wider institutional or policy environment which enables innovative ideas or hinders them from taking root and growing. Different dimensions or arenas influence each other, with no single or isolated element or stakeholder group having sufficient power or influence to trigger transformative change in a

locality. Such change depends instead on sets of practices, rules and routines being negotiated in different arenas and emerging through the interaction of different groups over time. Institutional relations and practices may remain unchallenged by place-based actions which are too sectoral in planning, too modest in ambition, or have no disruptive impact on the underlying framework that continues to reproduce the existing (unfair) social arrangements. These in turn give rise to a risk of only minor add-on effects or even capture. Similarly, disruptions in planning processes taking account of local needs and local priorities (through shifting supra-local priority setting or political interests, project funding drying up, etc.) endanger positive achievements and limit localised learning processes. Vested interests then tend to reassume dominance over innovative elements. This is a specifically counter-productive development in vulnerable or peripheralised regions, as such disruptions endanger local stakeholders' future engagement, a critical resource in regional policies for overcoming territorial disadvantage.

On the other hand, the empirical analysis also revealed the potential of place-based local development actions and how these can trigger change. Looking across the investigated sample, we see transformative elements and processes changing social relations and practices, such as cross-sectoral working. We also see more inclusive governance, albeit to varying degrees, emerging as a result of local development actions. The actions thus help open up space for alternative approaches in a local context and support innovation beyond established practices (Horlings et al., 2018). Place-based actions have specific potential in recognising and capturing place-specific needs and can drive change towards more just arrangements (i.e. recognising the specific needs of marginalised groups) in the local context. They can thus trigger new developments, setting the scene for innovation in areas with "poor local institutions and government quality" (Rodriguez-Pose, 2018, p. 202). The empirical analysis thus supports the argument of Horlings et al. (2018, p. 262-263) about place-based approaches being able to initiate a "gradually expanding 'spiral' process" where "joint learning and innovation" can eventually "result in institutional reform."

The article offers various 'lessons learned' with respect to a better understanding of the potential of local development actions to initiate the transformation of local institutions and promote spatial justice. First, the findings point to a need to understand place-based actions in the context of territorial cohesion policy less in terms of solving acute socio-economic problems, and more in terms of a long-term process facilitating transformative, institutional change. If we agree with the diagnosis of widespread frustration with existing institutions, mistrust and a feeling of despair in poor communities and peripheralised areas, local development actions should be conceived (and consequently planned and implemented) more in terms of driving change towards more just institutional arrangements. Recent policy developments at the EU level, but also at the national level, point to a broader understanding of place-based approaches. For instance, sustainability is included in a new generation of

smart specialisation policies in the context of the European Green Deal (McCann & Soete, 2020). Evidence from the sample of analysed actions underlines the necessity for such policy orientation. Among the factors limiting the impact of localised development actions is a narrow (one-dimensional) set-up of actions, for instance when innovation is predominantly understood in its capacity to drive economic growth, and is too little framed in terms of sustainable development, social innovation and institutional change. An economic growth focus without a wider understanding of place-based innovation policy in response to societal, social and ecological needs might raise new problems.

Second, the article calls for integrating spatial justice concerns more explicitly in place-based actions. This includes consideration of unequal opportunity structures across the territory and across local communities, and reflections on possible unequal distributive effects of local development actions. Such actions need to pay more attention to fair, inclusive and transparent decision-making processes over resources, and to ensure that the interests of marginalised communities are represented. Specifically in regions with widespread feelings of frustration, or little hope in a region's prospects, attention to the transparency and inclusiveness of processes, and thus to the social and procedural dimension of justice, is important. Actions with a focus on small acts of everyday democracy learning, the building of trust among individuals and stakeholders, capacity-building in marginalised communities, and the empowerment of local agents, are important in this sense. This is not to say that 'good' processes, in the sense of democratic and inclusive ones, will automatically lead to outcomes perceived as just and fair (Pirie, 1983, p. 470). It is essential to reflect on newly emerging risks or unintended counter-effects, and to strive towards more social/spatial justice in a continuous learning process (Madanipour et al. 2022, p. 182).

Finally, time and persistence are needed to achieve structures establishing such new practices for the benefit of marginalised communities. It is thus important to define the outcomes of place-based actions less in terms of 'fixing' problems in a region, and more in terms of a long-term strategic agency towards more sustainable and just regional development. Policy environments need to allow innovative ideas to take root and grow over time, backed by support from higher-level policies. In the context of embedded governance, and with support from transversal networks, place-based actions might then lead over time to gradual, transformative change in established institutions and more just spaces, insofar as some of the above-mentioned risks (too sectoral, or too limited in time, not allowed to follow local needs, etc.) can be avoided.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that they have no conflict of interest.

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