

### 3 Spatial justice and locality

#### The conceptual framework and application

*Ali Madanipour, Elizabeth Brooks,  
Mark Shucksmith and Hilary Talbot*

The aim of this chapter is to provide a brief outline of the RELOCAL project's concepts, methods, and their application. The chapter thus complements James W. Scott's previous discussion of the 'localities approach' in terms of elaborating the normative foundations of the project. The chapter is structured into two sections. The first section outlines the conceptual framework of the RELOCAL project by introducing the two key concepts of spatial justice and locality, the relationship between them, and the research methodology that was used in the RELOCAL project. The second section explains how this conceptual framework was applied during the course of the research, and how it was used in work packages. An extended discussion of the project's concepts and a full list of references are available in Madanipour et al. (2017, 2020, 2022). Some of the project's findings are available in two special issue journals of *Justice Spatiale/ Spatial Justice* (Blondel and Evrard, 2019) and *European Planning Studies* (Weck et al., 2022).

#### The concept of spatial justice

As Schmitt and Weck indicate in Chapter 4, the concept of spatial justice is one of the key concepts employed in the RELOCAL context. Spatial justice closely relates to, and overlaps with, the concepts of social justice, territorial cohesion, sustainable development, and the European Social Model. The European Social Model is one of the ways in which the EU pursues its efforts in social justice, but the Model does not engage with spatial justice. Territorial Cohesion Policy, with its focus on spatial connections and distribution, would be more closely related to the concept of spatial justice. Both, to an extent, address the more institutionalized forms of social and spatial justice through their emphases on improving some of the systems that could mitigate against oppression, vulnerability, and disadvantage. The concept of spatial justice indicates *equity in social space*, integrating five dimensions of justice: social, procedural, distributive, spatial, and temporal, which distinguish it from related concepts.

*Social: spatial justice as an integral part of social justice*

Social justice indicates *equity among the members of society*. A society is seen to be unjust if it is characterized by deep and persistent inequality among its members. Such levels of inequality undermine any claims to democratic legitimacy and social cohesion. A call to social justice, therefore, means a demand for reducing, and eradicating, these inequalities in wealth, opportunities, and privileges.

The social is inherently spatial, and so spatial processes are an integral part of social processes, contributing to the creation of just or unjust social conditions. The social and spatial processes are mutually interdependent: social processes find spatial expression and spatial processes influence the social processes. Spatial justice is the term that is used to capture this dialectical relationship. Elements of spatiality, such as the processes of agglomeration and dispersion, centralization and decentralization, centre-periphery relations, polarization, domination, boundary setting, rescaling, and spatial transformation are among the processes that play a significant role in social arrangements.

Spatial justice is the spatial dimension of social justice. In parallel to social justice, therefore, *spatial justice indicates the equitable formation of social space*. Social conditions and processes are inherently spatial, so spatial and social justice are integrated. Social inequality and exclusion can be present in all areas of social life, where access to resources, rights, decision-making, and cultural expression is not available to some groups. These forms of inequality and exclusion often find spatial expression, as exemplified in the privatization of public goods, services, and spaces, which consolidate the processes of inequality. The patterns of disadvantage tend to be concentrated in particular areas, and in turn spatial concentrations and transformations can cause further inequality and marginality. Spatial justice, therefore, means an equitable spatial distribution of resources and opportunities, and fairness in the relations of power that shape and transform the social space.

Spatial justice (incorporating social justice) focuses on both the just geographic distribution of resources and opportunities, and on the power relations that cause (in)justice between social groups and between spaces. Social and spatial justice are complex and overlapping theoretical concepts, with a strong normative character and a wide variety of different interpretations. Both see the distribution of resources and opportunities as a key factor in identifying (in)justice, with social justice focusing more on the distribution between social groups, and spatial justice more interested in the geography of distribution. Both forms of (in)justice are generated by power relations and procedures that enable the domination and oppression of certain groups of people, and by the way that space itself is constructed and used. Both of these types of spatial justice were empirically researched in the RELOCAL project.

*Distributive and procedural: spatial justice as a combination of distributive and procedural justice*

Spatial justice is a form of justice that combines procedural and distributive aspects. This enables us to go beyond the usual dichotomy of these two forms of justice, which should not be considered to be mutually exclusive. It would therefore enable the processes of multi-level governance to have the appropriate procedures for a better distribution of resources and opportunities, and better mechanisms to ensure democratic empowerment and legitimacy. Providing access to substantive needs and the provision of opportunities are as important as the ways of achieving them. This requires attention to both the procedures of ensuring justice and the outcomes of these procedures.

Social justice involves distributional and procedural aspects of justice as applied to households and social groups. It involves the material conditions, institutional arrangements, and social relations and processes that facilitate a fair and equitable distribution of resources and opportunities in society. Social justice under the conditions of social inequality, therefore, involves reducing social inequality and marginality, both through the provision of essential resources and opportunities, and through the institutional arrangements and processes that are necessary for reducing social inequality. In practice, social and spatial justice require putting extra emphasis on improving the conditions and life chances of the underprivileged and marginalized households and social groups. This would necessitate identifying and targeting the disadvantaged households and social groups, providing the essential resources and opportunities that would improve the living and working conditions of the disadvantaged groups, and creating the institutional and procedural arrangements that are needed to make it happen. Research into social and spatial justice means investigating the causes and conditions of social inequality, exclusion, and injustice, and identifying the material and institutional resources and arrangements that are needed for reducing social inequality and marginality.

*Spatial: spatial justice within and between territories*

Spatial justice is both inter-local and intra-local, as it is a concern at all spatial scales and territorial levels. It includes the questions of regional inequality as well as social inequality and exclusion within localities and regions. The focus on the locality should include both an investigation into spatial justice within the locality and across localities. Spatial justice would require a spatial rethinking of localities to ensure a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities and a more appropriate governance arrangement to deliver it. Spatial justice would also require an inter-local analysis, so that inter-regional inequalities can be understood and procedures for reducing them be identified.

*Temporal: spatial justice within and between generations*

The emphasis on the social relations in spatial justice would also mean that these relations are not static, but change in time, and therefore need to have a clear temporal dimension. The temporal dimension should be taken into account both for shorter periods of time and for the longer timescales of sustainability. In its broad meaning, sustainable development requires justice within and across generations. This requires paying particular attention to the natural environment and how our quest for social justice for the present generation needs to be balanced with the needs of future generations, as well as the needs and vulnerabilities of other species on earth. The RELOCAL project cannot focus on spatial justice without emphasizing the environmental aspects of social disadvantage and exclusion. Sustainable development overlaps with the notions of territorial cohesion and spatial justice. An important ingredient of the notion of sustainable development is a combination of inter-generational and intra-generational equity. It is important for the research to inquire the extent to which these forms of equity are detectable in localities, and how far it is possible to keep the balance between them in vulnerable places. The pressure for balancing local development and social justice should include the care of the environment and other species. All Work Packages, especially WP8, which deals with future scenarios, are mindful of this important challenge.

**The concept of locality**

The second key concept of RELOCAL is locality, as the spatial focus of research and the nexus of a range of forces that contribute to spatial (in)justice and democratic legitimacy. In the preceding chapter, James W. Scott has provided background on the rationales informing RELOCAL's localities approach. While notions of place and community-building are central to this perspective, localities are clearly not self-sufficient enclaves, but porous and interlinked parts of wider contexts. Therefore, RELOCAL adopts a critical and relational approach, analysing the locality from a critical and open perspective, through four interrelated dimensions: differential, vertical, horizontal, and transversal.

*Differential*

A locality is not a homogeneous place, but a place of multiplicity, variation, and diversity, which includes inequality and injustice within any given territory. Any understanding of the locality, therefore, needs to take this inner diversity into account, rather than assuming it to be a homogeneous entity. Patterns of social inequality and diversity, and the processes of social inclusion and exclusion are at work at all levels of a place, however defined.

### *Vertical*

The strengthening of local governance would potentially help bridge the democratic deficit, but it would need coordination and collaboration with other levels of power, as well as the cross-cutting procedures and forces, so as to ensure solidarity within and across regions. The concept of multilevel governance is part of a hierarchical conceptualization of power between local, national, and European levels, but it suffers from a mismatch between the ambiguous division of labour between different levels of power. Nevertheless, a locality is subject to governance forces from higher and lower levels of decision-making and power relations. The question becomes the relationship between these different levels of power and whether and how they can positively contribute to spatial justice.

### *Horizontal*

The inter-local relations are important for spatial justice within national and EU territories, as they aspire to social and territorial cohesion. A horizontal comparison and coordination of procedures across localities is needed to ensure the appropriate distribution of power, resources, and opportunities, in coordination with the vertical levels of governance. Horizontal relations may be investigated between adjacent localities, as well as through linkages and comparisons between localities in different parts of the EU.

### *Transversal*

The transversal forces of the market and technology do not necessarily work through the hierarchies of multi-level governance and the networks of inter-local comparison and coordination but operate at different scales and places and at different tempos, such as those of digital networks, international organizations, and multinational corporations. The locality is a combination of these four dimensions of differential, vertical, horizontal, and transversal relations. The forms of political action to ensure territorial cohesion are often performed at distinct spatial levels. But there are many social and economic forces that are not confined to these discrete boundaries of decision-making. The vertical relationships may create new hierarchies and generate the problem of democratic deficit and power imbalances. The horizontal forms of coordination are often presented as an alternative to the vertical arrangements. This is a tension between hierarchy and network. It is also a tension between subsidiarity and equity. Furthermore, the transversal relations cut through these policy networks and disrupt them.

A relational reading of the spatial, however, would enable us to go beyond the dichotomy of vertical and horizontal relationships, and also take into account the dynamics of heterogeneity and transversality. This would require locating the local in the context of its differential, vertical, horizontal, and

transversal relationships. It would enable the research to test the hypothesis that the localities approach can address the challenges of inequality, power imbalance, and democratic deficit. It would therefore address the Horizon 2020 Call's question on whether '*regional autonomy or decentralization are – or are not – justifiable on account of economic, political and social justice.*' The spatiality of the local becomes the framework that links solidarity, democracy, and sustainable development. The social life of the locality becomes the nexus of efforts for solidarity, democracy, and sustainability, but always in relation to the vertical, horizontal, and transversal axes, rather than an isolated and isolating parochialism. This would mean investigating the capacities of the local in both its procedural and distributive dimensions and for its capacities for spatial justice and social inclusion within and across territories and social groups.

### **The research framework**

The research hypothesis and key questions link the two concepts of spatial justice and localities. At the core of this relationship, and a primary defining relationship for the definition of spatial justice, is the relationship between procedural and distributive justice. Distributive justice is focused on identifying the patterns and perceptions of spatial injustice, exclusion, and inequality, while procedural justice concentrates on actions and institutions that can combat spatial injustice. These two key themes are then addressed through a series of subthemes in Work Packages (Figure 3.1).

The research framework therefore comprised a spatial ontology, a relational epistemology, and a mixed methodology.

#### *A spatial ontology: the localities approach*

By adopting spatial justice as its starting point, the RELOCAL project's key assumption, and the focus of its empirical data, are localities, the places in which the challenges of spatial justice and democratic deficit, and the responses to these challenges and inequalities, can be analysed and understood. Such a spatial focus facilitates the investigation of various challenges and responses within given territories and in their relations to other places, particularly under the conditions of crisis. This would respond to the Horizon 2020 call's invitation to 'explore the links between territorial cohesion, sustainable development and spatial justice in Europe in times of crisis.'

#### *A relational epistemology*

Justice is a comparative concept: it is a process of judgement on the quality of relations between two or more states of affairs. On their own, the number and composition of agents and material objects are not judged to be just or unjust. It is only when they mediate the relations between people and

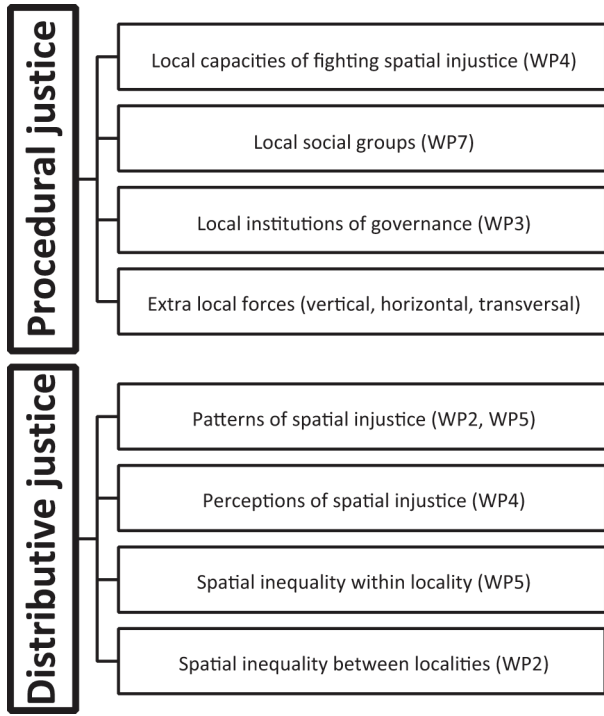
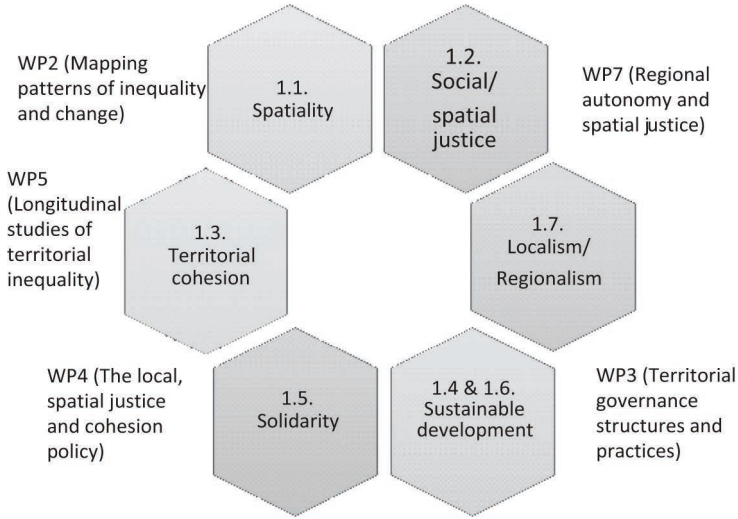


Figure 3.1 The distributive and procedural dimensions of spatial justice

territories, and only in comparison with others, that they find such meanings. Relations, therefore, are the focus of analysis. Through them, the power arrangements that make up spatial governance, behaviour of actors, access to material goods and services, spatial and social relations between them, composition of localities and their relations with other localities become just or unjust.

#### *A mixed methodology*

The locality and its relations form the unit of analysis, where spatial (in) justice will be studied. The local area under investigation, however, does not need to be defined in a strict sense. We did not try to draw rigid and final boundaries around particular areas but saw them as a flexible definition of an area with porous and potentially changing boundaries. To undertake this investigation, the project used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative methods were used for measuring the substantive dimensions of spatial exclusion/inclusion, and qualitative methods for analysing the experiences, relationships, and processes and the various ways of combating spatial injustice. Investigating the power relations, the processes,



*Figure 3.2* Relationship between the theoretical framework and Work Packages

the experiences of spatial exclusion and injustice, and the responses developed towards them, were analysed in qualitative case studies. In addition to Work Package 6, qualitative methods were also used in Work Packages 3, 4, 7, and 8. Quantitative methods were best placed to compare different localities, especially regarding distributive justice. Quantitative methods were especially used in Work Packages 2 and 5. These methodologies will be further introduced in the relevant sections and chapters (Figure 3.2).

The RELOCAL project, therefore, examines the capacity of place-based approaches to deliver spatial justice. Localities are defined as multifarious and porous, at the intersection of vertical, horizontal, and transversal forces. Spatial justice is conceptualized as integrating social, spatial, temporal, distributive, and procedural dimensions. By focusing on a spatial ontology, through a relational epistemology and a mixed methodology, we investigate whether spatial justice, as a fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them, can be achieved through place-based strategies, and whether these can be achieved within as well as across places and times.

### **Applying the conceptual framework**

#### *Work Package 2: mapping patterns of inequality and change*

Work here focused on the distributive aspect of spatial justice, notably, the disparities in economic and social advantage between European regions and their interlinkages. Due to this focus on comparison across regions, the key



level of locality for this WP was the ‘horizontal.’ Moreover, the originality of this quantitative comparison of EU regions was reflected in a broader-than-standard thematic ambit, and also, where data is available, carrying analysis to a more fine-grained (NUTS 3) level than previous such studies. The role of this work package within the RELOCAL study was, through its initial analyses, to inform the selection of case studies. Its main findings emphasized the significance of looking beyond purely economic indicators and the importance of looking across multiple scales when investigating spatial justice.

*WP3. Territorial governance structures and practice*

The core RELOCAL concept investigated here was that of procedural justice, viewed as one of the two key components of spatial justice mapped out in the project’s conceptual framework. Work Package 3 explored the procedural aspect of spatial justice through a comparison of how the RELOCAL case studies have implemented project governance: who are the key actors and institutions and how have these been mobilized to become stakeholders? The key level of locality that this analysis takes place at is the internal (or differential) level, in that the investigation, while it includes higher levels of governance, is concerned with how these impact at the local level and on the actions or projects that are the focus of the case studies. Work followed the example of many of the RELOCAL case studies, which provided its source material, in taking a broad and general perspective on procedural justice and its relationship to spatial justice. This is based on standard measures of participation and transparency, rather than providing details on accessibility to marginalized and excluded groups. Even at this very mainstream level of procedural justice, however, the analysis affords appreciation of the close relationship, or interdependency, between spatial justice and procedural justice.

*WP4. The local, spatial justice, and cohesion policy*

The core RELOCAL concept explored in this work package was the perception of spatial justice in case study localities. It deployed a relational concept of locality which was one of the two main RELOCAL concepts alongside spatial justice (see Chapter 3), and included the component dimensions of differential (or internal), horizontal, vertical, and transversal relationships. WP4 could be described as taking a bottom-up perspective, in that it explores people’s perceptions of spatial justice and injustice in their locality. Its perspective is also relational in that it places these perceptions in a context where place-based actions are subject to various and changing influences across all four locality relationship levels that we identified earlier: those internal to the locality; those from similar places; those from higher levels; and those from distant locations, be they EU region or global levels. While all levels were considered, the key levels of locality relationship in this WP can be identified as the internal (differential) level and the vertical and transverse level (in

particular EU Cohesion Policy) with its significant impacts on the horizontal and internal relationships.

#### *WP5. Longitudinal studies of spatial inequality*

The core RELOCAL concept used here was the distributional aspect of spatial justice, and in terms of the level of localities it focused on neighbourhood effects regarding individual socio-economic outcomes, both as a snapshot in time and longitudinally. Because it was also comparative, dealing with outcomes between localities, internal and horizontal levels were the main focus. The intention of the work package was to gain a better understanding of the suitability of different geographical units, in terms of both scale and boundary, for assessments of area effects on individual labour income (after controlling for individual's characteristics and, where possible, family background) (Janssen and van Hamm, 2018). This is because the effects appear different depending on the scale of analysis, which evidently has consequences for the design and implementation of public policies. The main finding of this WP was that to determine the impact of place of residence on outcomes such as income, the relationship should be measured and tested at a number of scales; it also recommended that countries provide better and more detailed fine-level data to enable the closer-grain level of analysis (Melo et al., 2019).

#### *WP6. Case studies*

Following RELOCAL's conceptual framework, the aim of the 33 case studies carried out in the project was to investigate whether spatial justice, as a fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them, can be achieved through place-based strategies, and whether these can be achieved within as well as across places and times. The possibilities for case study selection were set wide: they embraced a wide range of local strategies. The studies could thus be place-based or community-based, involve participatory cohesion strategies for improving the local quality of life as well as promote more balanced and sustainable development (see Weck et al., 2020). Three pillars guided the process of case study selection:

- Representation of different welfare regimes in the list of final cases
- Informed knowledge of national case study representatives on localities and actions which correspond best with the study's research interest and questions
- Representation of different types of actions, such as level of maturity in the policy process, territorial governance arrangements, EU funding, diversity of top-down and bottom-up actions, etc.

*WP7. Regional autonomy and spatial justice*

Aspects of the two core RELOCAL concepts, those of locality and spatial justice, were addressed in this work package. The question of relative autonomy of a given locality in relation to vertical levels of governance relationships was the main focus. This produced some overlaps with the question as to whether case study actions were able to be effective in their place of operation. However, WP7 had a specific focus on aspects of actions that result from bottom-up local organization to address spatial injustices, and to what extent this might produce spatial justice gains both locally and at higher levels, including the question of to what extent these local initiatives may translate and alter within and across scales. Thus, there were two key levels of locality for this WP – the internal (or differential) and the vertical and transversal. Ultimately it asks the question of whether greater autonomy for local-level actions might generate greater levels of spatial justice. This relates back to the main question of the Horizon 2020 call to which RELOCAL responded, which sought an answer to the question of whether ‘regional autonomy or decentralization are – or are not – justifiable on account of economic, political and social justice.’

*WP8. Coherence and scenarios*

This is the second RELOCAL work package that reviewed the 33 RELOCAL case studies in their entirety and thus it addressed both key concepts of spatial justice (procedural and distributional) and the relationality of localities (at internal/differential, horizontal, vertical, and transverse levels). This work package used a scenario approach, defined as ‘qualitative methods to identify the drivers of certain phenomena (in this case, spatial injustice) based on expert opinion’ (Piras et al., 2020: 2). Mechanism Maps and Theory of Change narratives for each of the 33 cases allowed the authors to develop a typology of three types of spatial (in)justice faced by the localities and addressed through the actions: namely (1) Territorial Disadvantage (19 case studies), (2) Neighbourhood Effects (stigma) (11 case studies), and (3) Disempowered Places (three case studies). The first group were places that provide fewer opportunities and poorer outcomes compared to adjacent areas, for geographical and/or geo-political reasons. Neighbourhood effects were found mainly in urban contexts and represent segregated urban areas which reinforce population disadvantage with locational effects. Finally, the smallest category, of Disempowered Places, were those where ineffective, or inappropriate, multi-level governance structures blighted localities in terms of wellbeing and the entrepreneurial environment, relative to neighbouring administrative areas.

The approach used was unusual, compared with the extant literature on scenario methods, in requiring partners to determine the single, most likely, scenario for their action, rather than the more standard approach of

presenting a number of possible scenarios, or contrasting examples of a positive and negative scenario. This simplification enabled comparison between all 33 cases but did not exclude the recording of uncertainty, because at the same time, factors influencing development over time were rated for relevance as well as probability, enabling a further level of analysis about future contextual impacts on spatial justice. Finally, the individual Mechanism Maps created for each action were adapted by each RELOCAL case study team and, as necessary, restructured to reflect the anticipated change in contextual conditions and drivers by 2030 that had been identified through the Nexus-State Array exercise.

## Conclusion

The analysis of work packages and academic output has shown that the Conceptual Framework (Madanipour et al., 2017) for RELOCAL, as developed at the start of the project, has served the project well. Two concepts formed its core: spatial justice (with its five dimensions: social, procedural, distributive, spatial, and temporal) and locality (with its four dimensions: differential, vertical, horizontal, and transversal). Based on these two key concepts and their relationships, a spatial ontology, a relational epistemology, and a mixed methodology were developed, which were applied in 10 work packages over a period of five years, 2016–2021. This theoretical-analytical framework provided a primary foundation upon which the teams of RELOCAL researchers have conducted their empirical investigations and analysis. The intersection of distributive and procedural justice with relational spatiality and different aspects of locality has provided a framework through which communication across research teams has been facilitated and the collection and analysis of empirical material have been supported. The outputs of each work package demonstrate how the concepts of spatial justice and locality, as discussed and unpacked in RELOCAL's Conceptual Framework, have been taken up and developed further by the different research teams. These researchers have further elaborated the initial conceptual framework with their additional literature reviews and theoretical tools that were specifically necessary for their work package but have broadly shared RELOCAL's definitions of spatial justice and locality.

## References

- Blondel, C. & Evrard, E. (2019). Autonomy + development = spatial (in) justice? *Justice Spatiale/Spatial Justice*, (13) October. Available at: [https://www.jssj.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/JSSJ\\_13\\_1\\_INTRO\\_EN2.pdf](https://www.jssj.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/JSSJ_13_1_INTRO_EN2.pdf).
- Janssen, H. & van Hamm, M. (2018). *RELOCAL, deliverable 5.2 report on multi-scalar patterns of inequalities*. Joensuu: University of East Finland. Available at: <https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/D5.2-Report-on-multi-scalar-patterns-of-spatial-inequalities-Version-1-20180531.pdf>.

- Madanipour, A., Shucksmith, M. & Brooks, E. (2022). The concept of spatial justice and European Union's territorial cohesion. *European Planning Studies*, 30(5), 807–824. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2021.1928040>.
- Madanipour, A., Shucksmith, M., Talbot, H. & Crawford, J. (2017). *RELOCAL deliverable 1.1 conceptual framework for the project*. Joensuu: University of Eastern Finland. Available at: <https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Deliverable-1.1.pdf>.
- Madanipour, A., Shucksmith, M., Talbot, H., Crawford, J. & Brooks, E. (2020). *RELOCAL, deliverable 1.2 revised conceptual framework for the project*. Joensuu: University of Eastern Finland (internal working document).
- Melo, P., Gaspar, J., Janssen, H. J., van Ham, M., Andersson, E. & Malmberg, B. (2019). *RELOCAL, deliverable 5.3 location and context – analysis of spatial inequalities at different geographical scales*. Joensuu: University of East Finland. Available at: [https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/D5.3-Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/D5.3-Report_FINAL.pdf).
- Piras, S., Currie, M., Duckett, D., Copus, A., Tobiasz-Lis, P. & Dmochowska-Dudek, K. (2020). *RELOCAL, deliverable 8.3 scenario report: Trajectories of spatial justice and actions to achieve it across Europe*. Joensuu: University of East Finland. Available at: [https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/RELOCAL\\_D8.3\\_020720.pdf](https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/RELOCAL_D8.3_020720.pdf).
- Weck, S., Kamuf, V., Krehl, A., Schmitt, P., Borén, T., Kovacs, K. Virág, T., Tagai, G., Blondel, C., Evrard, E. & Nienaber, B. (2020). *RELOCAL comparative case study research in RELOCAL: An overview on the methodology*. Joensuu: University of Eastern Finland. Available at: <https://relocal.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/D-6.4-Methodology-Comparative-Case-Study-Research-20200420.pdf>.
- Weck, S., Madanipour, A. & Schmitt, P. (2022). Place-based development and spatial justice, introduction to special issue. *European Planning Studies*, 30(5), 791–806. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2021.1928038>.