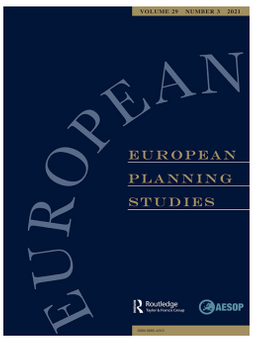

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A drop in the sea or catalyst for change: diverse effects of the place-based approach in Europe

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ABSTRACT

The place-based approach has been the guiding principle of EU policies for a decade. Building on the idea that place matters, the place-based narrative aims to promote local development and spatial justice through the utilization of local potentials and deliberative policy decisions. Institutional capacity for place-based action requires good quality governance and place leadership with transformative capacities. The domestic institutional environment can provide frames for the governance of local development by fostering local agency to (re)frame local issues and build coalitions across the horizontal spectrum and vertical scales. By focusing on the institutional processes of three place-based interventions, this comparative research paper maps out the ways domestic conditions can change parameters of place-specific institutional arrangements by influencing local agents' capacities for coalition-building and deliberation. Based on the selected case studies of the RELOCAL project, we specifically study the evolution of local coalitions, the effects of different actors' ambitions and commitment to development, and the process of planning and implementation through horizontal and vertical linkages.

KEYWORDS

Place-based intervention; domestic governance; spatial justice; local development; comparative research

Introduction

In recent decades, increased attention has been devoted to place-based policies in response to growing territorial disparities between 'winner' and 'loser' localities (Rodríguez-Pose 2018). The most prominent initiative of place-based development policies was provided by the European Union (EU) in the Barca report (2009), which claimed that a place-based development approach can help the EU to overcome the perceived ineffectiveness of Cohesion Policy (CP) and deliver the 'fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and opportunities' (Soja 2009, 2). Place-based interventions are believed to address inefficiency problems and serve as a means to tackle persistent patterns of social exclusion through place-tailored policies that foster local engagement of diverse stakeholders (Barca 2009). This approach is driven by the recognition that

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national governments and top-down strategies have limited capacities to design good local policies that address challenges perceived at the local level, and that ownership of development is best advanced locally through the deliberation of local stakeholders. Instead of governing localities 'from without', the role of the state and other external agents is to distribute authority to the local level and to provide incentives through funding, thus helping local actors 'from above' to mobilize local resources 'from below' through coalition-building (Trigilia 2001, 439; European Union 2015).

What matters in place-based development, institutions or agency has been part of a wider theoretical debate on development. While scholars have underlined the importance of the right balance of formal and informal institutions (Rodriguez-Pose 2013; Horlings, Roep, and Wellbrock 2018) in place-based development, attention has either turned to analysis of 'an enabling institutional context' (European Union 2015, 21) or the transformative agency of place leadership (Bentley and Pugalis 2014; Horlings, Roep, and Wellbrock 2018), which plays a key role in governing place specific practices, i.e. institutional arrangements (Horlings, Roep, and Wellbrock 2018). Agency implies local actors' capacity and capability to renegotiate, reassemble and transform the prevailing web of relations they are part of by setting deliberative institutions such as joint planning, problem-solving and strategizing to adequately define developmental goals and exercise the capability to choose (Fung and Wright 2003). This way, the transformative agency of capable actors can ultimately shape places by its own meaningful conduct (Pierre 2014; Horlings, Roep, and Wellbrock 2018) as it makes initiatives and moulds coalitions.

Some studies have noted the relationship between the institutional environment, local agency and institutional arrangements, and argued that for place-based leadership to flourish there is a need for a stable, enabling institutional environment based on the distribution of authority and 'true subsidiarity' (Rodriguez-Pose 2013, 1044). An institutional framework designed in a multi-scalar way (Gertler 2010) can empower local communities with the capacities they need to engage in policy design and implementation, and to facilitate collective agency to build coalitions across scales and at the local level (Horlings, Roep, and Wellbrock 2018). The delivery of place-based policy is particularly difficult where there is a high degree of central government control (Beer et al. 2020) and where tensions and incoherence exist in policy objectives between multi-level governance tiers (Pike, Rodríguez-Pose, and Tomaney 2007).

Although scholarship acknowledges that the particularities of institutional settings play a critical role in enabling or hindering a place-based approach to development (Rodriguez-Pose 2013; Horlings, Roep, and Wellbrock 2018), domestic factors, such as the regulatory role of the national state, domestic relational politics, wider historical processes and social conditions, are downplayed by the place-based approach (Hadjimichalis and Hudson 2014). Its emphasis on a 'sound institutional environment' builds on the premise of a 'benevolent state' that is keen to set up a multi-scalar institutional environment and true subsidiarity to empower local communities, and place-leadership to build coalitions for place-based development. Thereupon, it overlooks features of the state structure, degrees of bureaucratization, centralization and clientelism, which 'can account for the way in which local problems are regulated and state/society relations are shaped' (Paraskevopoulos 2001, 20). The dominance of political and administrative centers, tensions between multi-level governance tiers and centralization make the

delivery of place-based policies particularly difficult in countries where the loss of local autonomy has created tensions between the local and central state levels and general apathy towards place-based initiatives (Beer et al. 2020). Although the 'shadow of hierarchy' over place-based development has thus been endorsed, the way domestic political and administrative factors can influence place-based initiatives has not been dealt with.

This article aims to contribute to this research gap by studying the interplay between local agency, place-specific institutional arrangements and the domestic institutional environment in three place-based interventions in the Netherlands, Hungary and Romania. The institutional environment for subnational development differs significantly across the three countries, reflecting varied historical dynamics in terms of their acquaintance with the institutional setting of multi-level governance and fiscal, political and administrative responses to the global economic crisis. The three interventions were best-practice, place-based urban development projects in their domestic context targeting poor neighborhoods with the objective of delivering spatial justice and empowering marginalized communities (Bădiță and Vincze 2019; Dol, Hoekstra, and Kleinhans 2019; Jelinek and Virág 2019). Although all three interventions were successful from the perspective of project indicators, their effectiveness at achieving permanent patterns of spatial justice varied immensely. Therefore, rather than focusing on results measured by project indicators, our analysis scrutinizes institutional processes within the three interventions. We specifically study the evolution of local development coalitions, the process of planning and implementation as they concern horizontal relationships between the local state, stakeholders, and the local community, as well as vertical interactions with the central state and linkages to domestic public policies. We conceive of places as intrinsically multi-scalar and as assemblages of relations, where the global, domestic and local intersect and are mutually constructed (Horlings, Roep, and Wellbrock 2018). As a result, we expect that our local analyses will yield us insights about wider processes in the domestic institutional environment in which the place-based actions are embedded.

The main research question addressed in this article concerns how and to what extent factors of the domestic institutional environment can influence local agency and institutional arrangements summoned for the delivery of spatial justice through place-based interventions. Drawing on the literature of development as institutional change, our analysis is guided by the concept of (urban) governance to facilitate the conceptualization of the complex web of vertical and horizontal relations in which the three localities are embedded. Our analysis provides a view of these intertwined relations 'from below', i.e. through the actions of place leadership and coalition-building, and studies institutional arrangements in interaction with the domestic institutional environment and policies. More specifically, we scrutinize what kind of capacities (if any) the institutional environment offers local communities toward engaging in policy design, strategy and dialogue with the central government, and toward building local alliances at their own discretion and the kinds of institutional arrangements that evolve as a result.

We argue that if the general principles of the domestic governance structure are at odds with the institutional logics of place-based development, place-based interventions can be hijacked to deliver the policy objectives of national governments. The institutional architecture of the place-based approach makes place-based interventions highly vulnerable to politics, especially to political wavering. The lack or exhaustion of political will to

provide an enabling institutional backbone in support of place-based actions can cause deformations in objectives and the reshuffling of power in place leadership, which leads to qualitatively different dynamics in collective agency. In the absence of an accommodating institutional environment, place-based interventions remain just a 'drop in the sea', separated from the wider policy environment. Furthermore, reaching out and mobilizing the most vulnerable beneficiary groups for place-based actions seems difficult even in countries where the domestic institutional environment consistently accommodates place-based logics and enables local agents with 'true subsidiarity' (Rodriguez-Pose 2013, 1044).

The article draws on empirical evidence gathered for case studies through the RELOCAL project.[1] The thirty-three RELOCAL case studies were compiled through a common methodology for comparative purposes. The inductive, process-centred approach of the case study research aimed to understand the complexities and contradictions in manifestations of spatial justice. The localities of the case studies are understood as places, where power relations, processes and the experiences of spatial injustice can be understood and investigated at different geographical scales (Weck and Kamuf 2020). Our three selected cases are all marginalized urban communities whose vulnerable developmental position was tackled through hybrid action, mixing community-driven, bottom-up initiatives with externally- (state) driven, top-down actions. CP instruments played an important role in financing two of our place-based interventions, while the third was supported by another transnational agent with overall cohesion policy and social sustainability goals. The selection of our case studies was conducted with a view to variation in the governance of central-local relations characterized by different levels of local autonomy (Ladner, Keuffer, and Baldersheim 2016). Our three chosen cases draw on systematic text analysis of RELOCAL case studies based on extensive sociological research in the neighborhood and national reports (Bădiță and Vincze 2019; Dol, Hoekstra, and Kleinhans 2019; Jelinek, Keller, and Kovács 2019; Jelinek and Virág 2019; Kleinhans 2019; Vincze 2019) and secondary literature, document and data analysis.

In what follows, we will first discuss the approaches and theories of governance of place based-development. This will be followed by the analysis of the three cases focusing on the institutional frame of the development projects, power relations within local agency and subsequent coalition formations, and the different ambitions and commitment of actors from different scales and their effect on the implementation process. In the subsequent section we discuss findings of our case analyses and in the final section we draw some lessons and conclude.

The governance of place-based development

The approach we take in this article draws on theories that treat development as institutional change (cf. Sen 1999; Rodrik 1999; Evans 2004). In this view, development is about 'the enhancement of freedom' (Sen 1999, 37) that inherently requires the elicitation of local knowledge through participation, public discussion and exchange of ideas. Deliberative institutions such as joint planning, problem-solving and strategizing offer the way to adequately define developmental goals and exercise the capability to choose (Fung and Wright 2003).

Who can have a say and what counts in joint planning defines the governance of development. Governance refers to social and political arrangements by which, at an organizational field level, power is exercised through formal and informal, public and private, regulatory and normative mechanisms for collective objectives (Stoker 1998; Pierre 2014). Governance does not stipulate any loci of power, but is rather concerned with the relationship and different forms of interaction between diverse societal and institutional actors driven by the distribution of authority (Pierre 2014). Discussions of governance thus take into account the distribution of power and resources and the way they influence collective action (Pierre 2014).

Studies on subnational and urban development have turned to the concept of governance precisely because of its encompassing framework, which draws on a broader definition of potential participants: various types of public and private actors from across several scales of the local, domestic, and transnational (Stoker 1998; Torfing et al. 2012). This awareness of multiple actors stems from the recognition of state rescaling (Brenner 1999) and the resulting complex contingencies in which cities are entangled vis-á-vis the central state, regional governments, transnational actors, and local societal actors (Piattoni 2010; Pierre 2014). The complex array of vertical institutional scales and horizontal relationships in which cities are embedded makes the governance framework sensitive to formal authority that is vested in institutions and less institutionalized interactions that play just as important a role in governing localities (Rodriguez-Pose 2013; Pierre 2014). With this, governance conceptualizes 'effective practice' (Sen 1999, 159) and 'institutional arrangements' (Rodriguez-Pose 2013, 1037) that not only give room to studying reciprocal interactions between vertical scales but also the agency of local leadership capable of designing strategies, making initiatives, constructing coalitions and ultimately shaping places by their own meaningful conduct (Pierre 2014; Horlings, Roep, and Wellbrock 2018).

The particular role that agency plays vis-á-vis institutions in development is part of a wider theoretical debate in which the place-based approach was conceived. Studies have pointed out that formal institutional conditions offer both constraints and opportunities that are always subject to interpretation and contestation by actors (Streeck and Thelen 2005). While the formal institutional environment defines the rules of the game, local leadership always retains some capacity to interpret rules. For developmental interventions to have lasting beneficial results, the institutional framework needs to endow local actors 'from above' with capacities to mobilize institutional resources 'from below' (Trigilia 2001, 439). This requires a 'virtuous relationship' between various scales of government (Trigilia 2001, 439), one that empowers communities, provides institutional arrangements for dialogue and encourages collective action, but restrains attitudes toward rent-seeking and collusion.

This virtuous relationship is at the heart of the place-based narrative, which puts forward an institutional framework that sets responsibilities across different scales and delegates power to the scale closest to the problem to be tackled (Barca 2009). This framework of 'true subsidiarity' (Rodriguez-Pose 2013, 1044) lays emphasis on local capacity-building for controlling decisions about local development and mobilizing local knowledge through building collective agency that helps tailor strategies to places (cf. Horlings, Roep, and Wellbrock 2018). The missing link to delivering place-based development is place leadership that initiates interfaces vertically and horizontally, builds coalitions,

creates local institutional arrangements and delivers place-tailored services (Horlings, Roep, and Wellbrock 2018). The role of upper scales in this process is to create an institutional environment that facilitates dialogue and collaboration and maintains transparency and accountability between scales and horizontal partners through guidelines and incentives, but otherwise remains flexible enough to allow for the adaptation of interventions tailored to local needs (Rodriguez-Pose 2013).

In the EU's multi-level governance system, it is the European Commission (EC), Member States (MS) and regional authorities that can set strategic policy directions and provide local actors with capabilities through funding and a regulatory system for integrated policies. Due to the diversity of institutional arrangements in MS, there is no uniform way to implement the place-based approach within the EU (European Union 2015). Its effects greatly depend on the coherence of multiple levels of governance (Pike, Rodríguez-Pose, and Tomaney 2007). MS whose central state have a robust regulatory and financial commitment to guaranteeing objective standards in public policies and experience with cross-scale partnerships fare better in embracing place-based governance than those that have not had similar experiences (Avdikos and Chardas 2016). In the latter case, place-based interventions may struggle with the absence of institutional space for local deliberation (Andreotti and Mingione 2016; Keller and Virág 2019).

In post-socialist MS, though institutional arrangements for the technical implementation of CP funded programs are formally in place, principles of multi-level governance are still applied 'superficially' and inconsistently. This results in permanently weak administrative and financial capacities at the local level, and centralized planning processes (Dabrowski 2014; Telle, Špaček, and Crăciun 2019). Since the accession of post-socialist MS, the EU's capacity to coordinate policy activities and sanction misbehavior has ironically weakened while the role of domestic factors has increased, leaving considerable discretion to MS in rule adoption (Wozniakowski, Frank, and Matlak 2018).

Variegated institutional processes within place-based actions

Structural trends

Our three urban sites are located in three MS of the EU. It has been widely acknowledged that the EU has been an active supplier of new modes of governance in its quest to tackle spatial disparities in Europe (Hooghe and Marks 2001; Bruszt 2007). Challenged by vertically overlapping authorities and a multitude of horizontal stakeholder interests across policy fields and territorial scales, the EU has developed a multi-level governance system that encourages less hierarchical and less formal steering of policy-making, and the distribution of authority among diverse actors (Hooghe and Marks 2001). Indeed, the EU's multi-level governance system has had an immense impact on general trends in the governance of sub-national development in MS. Its subsidiarity and partnership principles have promoted the sharing of competences, the capacity-building of the sub-national level and the involvement of non-state actors in integrated policy design and delivery. At the same time, the rescaling of the national state has contributed to the increasing marketization of the public domain.

Public authorities of the central state have increasingly taken an 'enabling' role (Cf. Gilbert 1989), promoting the 'outsourcing' of services to non-state actors and the 'downloading' of delivery to local authorities.

Narratives of selective decentralization have become particularly accentuated as a result of the global economic crisis. Although the effects of the crisis were mitigated by central governments in different ways, 'centralization reflexes', particularly fiscal centralization and cuts in public expenditure, were prevalent across MS (Andreotti and Mingione 2016). Post-crisis institutional restructuring included a general withdrawal of the central state from social policy, reduced funding for education and healthcare, and 'radical reforms in a number of areas, such as social dialogue, social protection, pensions, labour market and social cohesion in general' (Vaughan-Williams 2015, 47–48). In some countries, fiscal centralization was only temporary (Pálné Kovács 2020), while in others the governance of central-local relations has become characterized by overregulated state capacities and reaffirmed central state power.

As the crisis hit Hungary, the Netherlands and Romania, transfer dependency of municipalities in these countries increased substantially as their own resources yielded only 10-25% of the local budgets (Ladner, Keuffer, and Baldersheim 2016). Between 2000 and 2014, the involvement of local governments in delivery of services and in political discretion over aspects of delivery increased in the Netherlands and especially in Romania (Ladner, Keuffer, and Baldersheim 2016). Over the same period of time, the policy scope and discretion capacity of local governments in Hungary decreased substantially due to extensive recentralization in several policy domains after 2010. (Ladner, Keuffer, and Baldersheim 2016). Although local governmental finances were affected by post-crisis austerity measures in all three countries, the vulnerability of the local level varied according to the percentage of unconditional financial transfers they received from higher governmental levels (Ladner, Keuffer, and Baldersheim 2016). In the Netherlands, the proportion of unconditional financial transfers from the central to the local governments increased to more than 60% between 2000 and 2014, which gave Dutch municipalities room to manoeuvre for development (Ladner, Keuffer, and Baldersheim 2016). In contrast, the proportion of unconditional transfers in Romania was cut in half, while in Hungary activity-based financing (2013) provided municipalities with a decreasing amount of an earmarked sum based on costs calculated by the central government (Ladner, Keuffer, and Baldersheim 2016). This dried out local governments' budgets and reduced potential for place-based local development.

In Hungary and Romania, the scarcity of state transfers was coupled with the withering away of national financing for small-scale development projects (Jelinek, Keller, and Kovács 2019). This increased the dependency of Romanian and Hungarian municipalities on transnational and, particularly, on CP funds. In post-socialist MS, CP funds are instrumental 'to prop up local budgets', whereas they are considered 'expensive money which demands efficient and accountable spending' in older MS (Telle, Špaček, and Crăciun 2019, 166). Between 2015-2017, an average of 40-80% of all public investments in post-socialist MS were financed through CP (European Union 2017, p. XXII). This ratio is even higher in some policy areas, and in the case of integrated urban developments in Hungary, there is practically no public investment realized without EU funds (Jelinek and Virág 2019).

Rotterdam South, the Netherlands

The Netherlands has a long-standing tradition of national urban regeneration, and *Rotterdam South* has been a particular laboratory of such policies (Dol and Kleinhans 2012). The area is a former dock-worker neighbourhood poorly connected to Rotterdam-city, which became a disadvantaged and hyper-diverse district due to municipal housing policies in the 1970s and 1980s that triggered selective migration. Today, there is a high concentration of socio-economically vulnerable families in *Rotterdam South,* where the social position of different social and ethnic groups determines their access to different institutions and services, especially to social housing, which produces further social differences (Tersteeg, Bolt, and van Kempen 2015).

Austerity measures in the aftermath of the global economic crisis restricted and reduced investments in cities and decentralized some policies to the local level. Since 2014, the central government has stopped investing directly in urban renewal, and while neighbourhood policy has not been abolished, the initiative is now left more to local governments and to the citizens (Kleinhans 2019). The national government's gradual retrenchment from neighbourhood programs was an important source of motivation for an informal coalition of local stakeholders in *Rotterdam South* 'to scramble for help' at the central government level with the leadership of the municipality (Dol, Hoekstra, and Kleinhans 2019, 15). Convinced by local leadership about complex socio-economic problems in *Rotterdam South*, the central government assembled a commission of external experts to gather information from relevant stakeholders about the scale and nature of the problems, prepare a diagnosis, and develop recommendations. The central government acknowledged the problems elaborated by the commission, and it was willing to contribute financially to interventions in the area. However, it had no intention of coordinating the development action and demanded commitments and contributions from the local government and stakeholders. By providing funding and strategic guidelines on commitment, the central state provided incentives for local actors to form the *Nationaal Programma Rotterdam Zuid* (NPRZ), an independent local network organization.

The NPRZ is not a formal organization, but a coordinator of a variety of actions focusing on improving well-being in *Rotterdam South*. It does not receive a budget for redistribution, but it has a strong mandate to mobilize diverse actors and projects and to keep partners committed to the common vision of raising *Rotterdam South* to a level comparable to other neighbourhoods by 2030. Stakeholder partners in the NPRZ include the central government, the municipality and several local stakeholders, such as umbrella organizations of schools, employers' organizations and NGOs that represent the three action pillars of NPRZ activities: education, housing and work-employment. All stakeholder partners make contributions to achieve NPRZ objectives in these action areas, such as formulating and implementing their own projects while the central government allocates funding directly to urban renewal projects and schools. The commitment of the central state is crucial not only to ensure funding for the education and housing objectives of the *Rotterdam South* action,[2] but to maintain alignment with domestic legislative procedures and policy objectives. The establishment of additional resources for extra teaching hours in schools within Dutch public education policy stems from an NPRZ initiative to improve education services for disadvantaged children in *Rotterdam*

South. NPRZ's ability to keep all partners committed to policy objectives can be seen in the way it managed to divert a high proportion of the municipal budget of the Rotterdam municipality for 'work and income' projects, and its successful mobilization of local stakeholders to implement several EU-funded projects (Dol, Hoekstra, and Kleinhans 2019, 30).

NPRZ's coordination activities are undertaken by a staff of seven people in its central office, the Bureau, led by a former municipal alderman in Rotterdam. His 'sharp and persistent attitude' helps the Bureau to keep all stakeholder partners committed to long-term objectives, even across local election cycles (Dol, Hoekstra, and Kleinhans 2019, 20). Inter-scalar dialogue among partners is ensured both formally and informally. The Bureau Director, as well as the mayor of Rotterdam - who is also the chair of the NPRZ Board where he engages in regular discussions with the Bureau Director and the delegates of all stakeholder partners, including government partners from multi-level scales - have direct relations with the central state agencies. Delegates of stakeholder partners remain in close contact with their constituents through regularly held 'consultation tables', where members of each organization can articulate their viewpoints and provide feedback on objectives and actions (Dol, Hoekstra, and Kleinhans 2019, 19). The Board thus provides collaborative leadership in NPRZ developmental actions by bridging conflicts of interest among various stakeholders, forging joint links between grassroots initiatives. The delegates' consultation tables offer local embeddedness, generate place-based knowledge and mobilize resources for shared developmental objectives. Table 1.

Although the NPRZ's network structure aims to facilitate a 'participation society', it does not guarantee representation for the most marginalized groups despite the consultation tables. Hence, the NPRZ comes short of mobilizing those social groups that do not have the capacity to formulate initiatives or whose projects are small-scale. While the NPRZ provides residents with access to information through its website and aims to gather their place-based views at periodically organized, large-scale consultation events such as the Citizens Summit, residents' organizations as formal stakeholders in the NRPZ are weakly represented. The NPRZ's reluctance to become a network for a

Table 1. The interplay between local agency, place-specific institutional arrangements and the domestic institutional environment in the three cases.

	Rotterdam South	György-telep	Pata Cluj
Institutional environment	reciprocal relations between central and local levels local level has transformative capacity to shape objectives	top-down and dependent relations between central and local level national level has authority to define developmental objectives	no relations between the central and local level externally induced development initiated by transnational actor did not liaise with national policy
Institutional arrangements	collaborative agency with capacity to build coalition between cross -sectoral actors from different scales deliberative, stable coalition with commitment to objectives	transformation from collaborative to informal local agency that has informal capacity for a hegemonic coalition changing relations from 'synergic alliance' of diverse actors to hegemony of powerful actors depend on national policy objectives	diverging objectives and unequal power relations between the local actors – disintegrated local agency temporal, ad hoc coalition for the given project
Agency model	*Transformative agency*	*Informal agency*	*Fragmented agency*

multitude of small-scale, bottom-up initiatives also stems from concerns over the ability of these initiatives to gather different forms of capital to sustain projects in the long term.

György-telep, Hungary

The transformation of territorial governance structures and the institutional reshuffling of public policymaking in Hungary were consequences of the landslide victory of the ruling Fidesz party at two national election cycles in 2010 and 2014. Two seemingly contradictory processes evolved amidst the post-2010 transformations: intensive centralization, which meant pulling away administrative and executive functions from local governments in nearly all policy areas, and selective welfare retrenchment, taking shape in the erosion of provisions for low-income families and the outsourcing of social services for the poor to church-related or religious organizations (Jelinek, Keller, and Kovács 2019). The increased involvement of the state in policy administration resulted in local governments losing their mandates to maintain local institutions, which in turn reduced their capacities to influence local spheres of life. They were placed in a domestic scalar hierarchy as a means to control the local level according to the designs and coordination of the central state. This system of hierarchical, clientelist governance forced welfare interventions to align with the local political objectives of the national government (Jelinek, Keller, and Kovács 2019).

György telep is a former miner colony situated on the periphery of the county seat city of *Pécs* where Roma families were settled in the 1970s after the miners were relocated into better quality flats. The area is characterized by an extremely high ratio of substandard flats, a lack of institutions and services and insufficient public transport, making access to institutions difficult for residents. The neighbourhood is highly stigmatized locally, and has become a 'penal colony' within the city where problematic families can be 'hidden'. Prior to 2008, the neighbourhood was listed in the city's development strategies as an area to be demolished. Due to the political risk of potential resistance from residents opposing the relocation of 'problematic' dwellers into 'non-problematic' neighbourhoods, the municipality has repeatedly postponed the elimination of the colony.

In 2008, the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta (Málta) proposed to start a small-scale project based on the organization's hallmark method of engaging long-term presence of social workers in marginalized neighbourhoods. Through this project, Málta played an important role in convincing the mayor of Pécs to find solutions other than demolition to respond to the ills of *György telep*. The political will of the municipality to 'do something' with the most disadvantaged neighbourhood in the city met the capacities and ambitions of the municipality's Department of Natural and Human Resources (DNHR). They could rely on the local embeddedness and knowledge of Málta and the previous experiences of the most powerful Roma NGO, called Khetanipe, in different Roma development projects. In 2012, a call for tenders was issued for EU-funded developments that targeted segregated neighbourhoods, the frameworks of which were highly influenced by Málta's Presence methodology of providing social and community work that offered social services based on the mobilization and utilization of place-based knowledge. DNHR became the key broker in assembling the development coalition between Málta and Khetanipe. Relations between the partners were more or less equal despite their differing institutional logics: the DNHR was imagined as a project manager and

coordinator that would not only fulfil bureaucratic and technical criteria but also open up communication channels, bridge conflicts and build a joint spirit and linkages among the actors through its collaborative leadership. Khetanipe ran the education programmes and, as a Roma association *per se*, gave voice to the specific issues concerning the local Roma population. Málta continued the family-based social work in *György-telep* and was seen as the NGO bridging local realities with that of the project world.

This largely equitable triadic relationship between the local partners changed after two large, EFRD-financed infrastructural projects were called and ran parallel beginning in 2013. Both programmes provided funding for the renovation of social housing units and supported the relocation of dwellers from segregated areas to an integrated environment enhanced by one-on-one social work. As these programs began to take shape, the synergic alliance between the three partners came to a halt. DNHR was abolished following local elections in 2014, its duties transferred to a municipal unit that was previously responsible for large-scale infrastructural projects. DNHR's place in the coalition was taken over by the Urban Development Company (UDC) which was in close daily contact with the staff of Málta. Khetanipe was marginalized, and while it formally remained a member of the coalition, it was sidelined in decision-making. Málta strengthened its brokering position as it remained responsible for assisting the families and logistically organizing relocations, which required some organizational expansion. It began hiring employees of the former DNHR and Khetanipe, resulting in most participants remaining in key positions now mainly as Málta staff. The collective agency of the former coalition thus transformed into the duo of Málta and the UDC of the municipality.

The transformation of local collective agency can be linked to political changes and a subsequent reshuffling of policy objectives at the level of the central state. The marginalization of Khetanipe in the coalition and the concentration of decision-making in the Málta-UDC duo was akin to centralization at the domestic level, which increasingly sidelined non-governmental actors in the policy process. The strengthening position of Málta within the coalition is related to the fact that it is a national organization with clear ambitions to expand its authority (Jelinek and Virág 2019). Its efforts to shape welfare policies for the poor met with the central government's strategy of outsourcing social service provision – and in general the 'management' of marginalized communities – to non-governmental, church-related or religious organizations. The evolution of Málta's powerful position within the coalition was thus rooted in its collaborative leadership and its capacity to connect different interests and aspirations and turn them into a coherent intervention. It was also able to translate between the various stakeholders: the municipality and neighbourhood residents, the municipality's aspirations and the language of EU-funded projects, and the political objectives of the central state and local affairs. The position that Málta held in local affairs after the organizational shift is regarded as 'shadow municipal', because its growing power within the consortium was accompanied by the informal outsourcing of some of the municipality's functions related to poverty management (Jelinek and Virág 2019, 16).

Pata-Cluj, Romania

In the process of the 'Europeanization' of institutional and territorial structures in Romania (Surubaru 2016; Vincze 2019), a polycentric developmental model was

recommended for the country with highly decentralized developmental functions for Romanian cities. Within this framework, instances of spatial injustice, like the one in the settlement of *Pata Rat*, are envisioned to be tackled locally through the mobilization of local resources and the absorption of EU funds. While the National Agency for Roma (NAR) has existed since 2004, and development strategies have always defined housing as one of the key policy areas, the first pilots targeting Roma neighbourhoods only began in the new development cycle of 2014 (Vincze 2019).

Pata Rat is an informal settlement inhabited mainly by Roma families in a 'no-man's land' landfill area of the developed metropolitan city of Cluj-Napoca. Dozens of families were evicted from several inner city neighbourhoods and placed here in the 1990s with the assistance of the City Hall, part of the city's post-socialist development. The local government contributed explicitly and tacitly to the production of this marginalized neighbourhood by failing to publicly acknowledge the existence of *Pata Rat*, nor providing resources for its infrastructural development or access to urban services.

The Pata-Cluj project was based on the institutional blueprints of a former UNDP intervention, and funded by an external agency, the Norwegian Funds. Since there was no available national call for tender to improve housing conditions of Roma at that time, the project did not initiate consultation with the Ministry of European Funds and the National Contact Point for Roma. Place-based knowledge and local expertise was provided by team members of the former UNDP project and local activists, and supplemented by a UNDP household survey. The project aimed to eliminate the Roma neighbourhood and relocate families from their informal housing conditions in the polluted landfill to social houses in integrated neighbourhoods. It was implemented by a consortium consisting of the Inter-community Development Association Cluj Metropolitan Area (IDA-CMA), the AltArt Foundation, Habitat for Humanity Romania – Cluj Office and the Community Association of Roma from Coastei. In this consortium, IDA-CMA held a coordinating role, while the Community Association of Roma from Coastei was imagined to bring local knowledge, channel local needs into the project and work on the ground as a 'translator' between Pata Rat residents and the project team. Habitat for Humanity assisted families in relocation and renovation, and the AltArt Foundation coordinated the project's cultural component. The local government of Cluj-Napoca, despite formally being in charge of housing policy and having an active role in the former evictions, participated in the project through its membership in the IDA-CMA, a public utility organization established for accessing EU environmental funds and conducting development projects by local governments in the greater Metropolitan Area of Cluj-Napoca. As a voluntary association of local governments which is not a recognized territorial-administrative unit, it is not accountable to the citizens of its member settlements. The local government and mayor of Cluj-Napoca play a dominant role within the association since vote weighting and power distribution is based on urban demographics: in Cluj County, Cluj-Napoca is the main urban administrative unit, a 'magnet city' and the strongest economic actor within the association (Bădiță and Vincze 2019, 6).

The development goals of the Pata-Cluj project were hampered by the diverging objectives and perceptions of different stakeholders on spatial injustice. These perceptions remained throughout the project and were shaped by stakeholders' positions, which in turn were determined by the role stakeholders played in the administrative-

political structures of urban governance and their personal embeddedness in the geography of the city. Hence, non-governmental coalition members, experts, local activists and social workers shared views about the combined effects of spatial injustice in Pata Rat, while the local administration saw nothing unjust about living in a landfill and saw no need to develop local measures to resolve the situation. The official position of the Pata-Cluj project on the problems it addressed was cumulated by stakeholders working on the ground in Pata Rat, and reflected the antagonistically differing viewpoints of the local administration and activists on the nature and scale of the problem. The former generally considered Pata Rat the 'natural result of urban development', while the latter found the local government's social and housing policy to be responsible for the situation. Since non-governmental stakeholders remained outside the administrative-political structure of urban governance due to the lack of participative urban policies, and local administration refused to acknowledge the problem, none of the stakeholders in the consortium assumed the role of collaborative place leadership. As a result, conflicts of interest and viewpoints could not be resolved, and a joint spirit among stakeholders could not be built.

Rather than forging collective agency and joint action as the most resourceful partner within the coalition, the local government of Cluj-Napoca used its dominant position in IDA-CMA to externalise managing the problem of Pata Rat in various ways. Firstly, its participation in the project through IDA-CMA meant a half-hearted involvement in joint problem-solving of urban marginality, and reflected resistance and a lack of political will to remedy spatial injustice. Secondly, the majority of the families relocated from Pata Rat were eventually placed outside Cluj-Napoca in neighbouring villages since the integration of school-aged children into city schools seemed politically risky for the administration.

Similar imbalances of power and hierarchical relations were present in the structure of project management. Due to time constraints and institutional blueprints, coordination had a top-down structure. The project's central team in City Hall controlled resources and information and kept decision-making internal. The project based its actions on a top-down mobilization of the local residents, and tried to gain locals' trust by organizing a series of consultative meetings and installing an information office in Pata Rat. Despite stakeholders' efforts, these events only served to facilitate residents' understanding of the project rather than their effective participation in decision-making. The community of Pata Rat had limited means to control actions, and the central team considered stakeholders working on the ground to be employees rather than project partners.

Despite a formal partnership agreement among consortium members, the division of responsibilities and budget shares and the distribution of authority and information was uneven within the coalition. Adding to the instabilities, the project lacked a long term perspective: 'it was on the move', continuously changing without a shared understanding of the objectives. The lack of collective agency is demonstrated in the way the project team was dismissed soon after the project ended without an assessment of their project experiences and knowledge. The project's lack of coordination with the City Hall of Cluj-Napoca is mirrored by the lack of local and national policies that could support the institutional logic of the Pata-Cluj project. In the absence of a facilitating institutional environment at the national level that could encourage collective leadership

and local institutions to counter spatial injustice in a lasting way, the project's solutions remained temporary.

Discussion

This article discussed institutional processes behind three place-based interventions that aimed to tackle urban marginality in Rotterdam, Pécs and Cluj-Napoca. It has been suggested that a place-based approach requires capacity-building, collaboration, collective agency and institutional arrangements to initiate and support joint action. Institutional capacity for place-based action is thought to require good quality governance and place leadership with transformative capacities to (re)frame local issues and connect different logics to bring diverse actors together around joint agendas, thus building collective agency. Our findings go beyond the argument that place-leadership is key to building collective agency: we found that institutional arrangements must be attuned to local specificities, and that place-leadership with transformative capacities can only flourish if the domestic institutional environment provides institutional frames for the governance of local development in a way that fosters collaborative agency at the local level and across scales, all while encouraging dialogue with the domestic scale to shape strategies.

In the Netherlands, recent decentralization of Dutch domestic policies signified the waning will of the central state to coordinate urban actions. Dutch decentralization, however, retained principles of subsidiarity by way of empowering localities with capacities to make autonomous decisions about developmental coalitions and goals for implementation. This enabled local actors to engage in a dialogue-based relationship with upper tiers of government on launching initiatives and shaping policies. The institutional arrangements thus created in *Rotterdam South* were coordinated by the collaborative leadership of the NPRZ, which acted as the spider in a web of inter-scalar and inter-sectoral relations by building joint platforms, bridging different interests and creating commitment to a shared vision of long-term objectives by all stakeholder partners. Collective agency with transformative capacities was also fostered by a deliberative process of regular consultations with stakeholder constituents, and the deliberation of delegates at the Board. Yet institutional arrangements fell short of inclusive solutions for grassroots organization of the most vulnerable residents.

In Pécs, the synergic alliance of diverse local actors that emerged alongside the collaborative leadership of DNHR and within the institutional frame of an EU-funded calls for tenders on urban regeneration came to an end as a result of shifting power relations within local collective agency after national and local elections in 2014. The resulting transformation of institutional arrangements followed national trends of the increasing centralization of power since 2010. In the post-2014 institutional setting, NGOs were increasingly sidelined and local state capacities curtailed. The central state retained its authority to define developmental objectives and press for blueprints of top-down policy decisions, while selectively withdrawing from policy areas that manage poverty. At the local level, the transformation of collective agency reflected hegemonic trends in domestic policy-making, whereby a particular type of actor (Málta, as a church-related organization), favoured by the institutional environment, is provided with capacities to manage urban marginality while the NGO is marginalized and the local

government is left without resources. Since the local level had no mandate to shape policy strategies in the centralized system, local institutional arrangements became dominated by informal solutions. The informal agency of Málta's shadow municipal position can be seen in the way some of the municipality's functions were informally outsourced to the organization.

While in the Hungarian case the policy objectives were defined at the national level, in the Romanian Pata Rat project, objectives were defined by an external agent and with half-hearted support from the local state, and without linkages to the central state. The transnational organization funding the project had no mandate to raise local capacities for collective agency in an overall institutional environment where local autonomy only denotes administrative decentralization, i.e. the shifting of responsibilities from the central state to local authorities without support for funding. None of the partners assumed place-leadership to forge linkages along shared objectives, which was exacerbated by the local government's externalization and rescaling of the Pata Rat problem. Local institutional arrangements reflected this externalization by way of leaving local civil organizations without capacities and resources in their attempt to resolve the situation in Pata Rat. The absence of an institutional environment that gave room to place-leadership and facilitated collaboration generated fragmented local agency without capacities for collaboration. As a result, the fragile, *ad hoc* coalition that was brought about was dissolved upon the end of the project without leaving sustained solutions for spatial justice in Pata Rat.

Conclusions

This paper intended to map out mechanisms through which the domestic institutional environment influences local agency and place-specific institutional arrangements summoned for the delivery of spatial justice through place-based actions. Our analysis had a view of institutional processes 'from below' through the study of the governance of local actions in three European cities.

Outsourcing, externalising or downloading problems related to urban marginality by the state at various scales was a common thread in our three cases, irrespective of degrees of centralization or decentralization of policy-making. Decentralization did not necessarily mean the central state's abandonment of the local state or non-state actors with local problems, as suggested by the Dutch case. Although the central state downloaded the coordination of neighbourhood policy to local actors, it stayed committed to providing legislative and financial support for place-leadership. On the other hand, the Hungarian case indicated that centralization may as well indicate the central state's selective abandonment of particular policy segments and actors. Variation in these processes was mostly related to the commitment of the state to deliver spatial justice to disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

The commitment of the state to provide an institutional environment that provides local agents with capacities to build vertical and horizontal alliances and to have a say in the definition of developmental goals is a key factor in the efficiency of place-based interventions. This commitment denotes a Burkean virtuous representation of public good (Bruszt 2007), in which decisions about public policies are based on the accommodation of diverse conceptions of public good without favouring any representative actors

of these conceptions. Commitment of the state can bring stability to governance structures to make them operate across an enduring time span, allowing them to function effectively and provide agency with capacities so that it becomes productive in its role.

Our cases showed that such domestic commitment is a fragile concept which depends on political will and is highly vulnerable to political wavering. Even in 'policy-dense' and affluent countries such as the Netherlands, changes in political objectives can make achieving greater spatial justice difficult. Although there is continuing central state commitment to funding and resolving local problems in association with local agency, place-based actions often fall short of reaching out and mobilizing the most vulnerable groups in local communities. In Hungary, political shifts contributed to the state's weakening commitment to a Burkean virtuous representation of the public good, and resulted in hegemonic representations of particular actors' views on public good. In Romania, the lack of commitment to collaboration resulted in dominant actors hijacking the placed-based intervention in Pata Rat.

It would be unfair to blame individual development projects for failing to transform entire systems of spatial injustice. However, it is possible to speculate about some general lessons concerning the broader function of place-based development projects through our case studies. The first lesson is that given their institutional architecture, place-based interventions are highly vulnerable to politics. The lack or expiry of political will of state actors to provide an enabling institutional backbone and financial support to place-based projects can cause deformations in project objectives and uneven reshuffling in the distribution of power and responsibilities. The second lesson is that multi-year planning for proper place-based development policies is difficult to achieve in institutional environments that, either for reasons of centralization or half-hearted decentralization, do not provide institutional and financial resources for the sustainability of place-based interventions. The focus of the place-based approach on enabling institutional arrangements is a snapshot view of the development process, and the way these interventions' objectives are sustained remains beyond the scope of the place-based approach. The third lesson demonstrated by our cases shows the limits of Cohesion Policy-funded place-based initiatives in the multi-level regulatory framework of the European Union. Within the EU's multi-level governance system, the effects of domestic institutional constellations can often be stronger than the catalysing role of place-based development. Place-based interventions have weak capacities for affecting domestic policy systems through spill-overs and social learning, since features of state structures can hijack place-based initiatives in order to deliver the policy objectives of national governments. If the latter are based on the systematic reproduction of injustice, narrowly targeted place-based projects will remain just a drop in the sea by providing temporary oxygen tubes for marginalized communities.

Notes

1. RELOCAL project: Resituating the Local in Cohesion and Territorial Development H2020 Framework project No. of Grant Agreement 727097. You can find the case studies here: www.relocal.eu
2. E.g.: to reduce school drop-out rates and improve general educational scores in Rotterdam South.

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