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Table of content

Paper 1 – Services of general interest and the promotion of spatial justice

1. Introduction.....	5
2. The theory of social and spatial justice.....	5
3. The concept and key principles of services of general interest.....	7
4. Social/spatial justice and the provision of services of general interest.....	9
5. Findings from case studies.....	11
6. Conclusions	15

Services of general interest and the promotion of spatial justice

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1. Introduction

One of the main goals of regional policies (e.g. cohesion policies of the European Union) is related to the reduction of inequalities between different areas in terms of social and economic opportunities. Inequalities might be interpreted as signs of injustice among members of the society. The concept of social justice is largely built on the interrelated notions of fairness, solidarity and cohesion, and it expresses the need of equity within society in terms of wealth, opportunities and privileges. Social processes and characteristics are always spatial ones too, thus spatial features might also contribute to evolution or development of just and unjust conditions. In this way, spatial justice, by representing the spatial dimension of social justice, is related to the just distribution of resources, opportunities and power relations between social groups and spaces.

An essential question related to social/spatial justice is how members of a given society can access services (of general interest). Different territories might face different levels of injustice regarding the availability, affordability of and access to services of general interest (SGI). At the same time, the provision of basic services could significantly contribute to goals of spatial justice by mitigating the effects of these differences. How different types of services could serve as effective instruments in delivering justice is widely dependent on the way they are provided and adapted to local facilities.

This paper aims at assessing the role of services of general interest in delivering spatial justice by reviewing key EU policy documents, and academic and grey literature. This goal is also driven by the intention of exploring operational features of services which might aim at promoting spatial justice and actor groups that are central to their provision. This task is supported by the revision of findings from (Hungarian) case studies of RELOCAL Horizon 2020 research which focus on local (development) actions from the viewpoint of cohesion, territorial development, and spatial justice.

2. The theory of social and spatial justice

Roots of the concept of justice in social sciences are strongly related to philosophical debates on the morality of social relations. Works of influential thinkers from Plato to Locke, Rousseau and Kant emphasize the role of justice among members of the society by theorising moral foundations and standards operating within societies or by advocating the theory of social contract (Madanipour et al. 2017). The idea of social justice stems from the domain of political and moral philosophy and social theory and is essentially based on the Rawlsian theory of justice as fairness. According to the concept of Rawls, when conflicting, there is a 'lexical priority' in the order of principles of liberty, equal opportunities and difference (Rawls 1971).

- The Liberty Principle emphasizes the equal right of individuals to basic liberties.
- Within the Equality Principle,
 - the Fair Equality of Opportunity Principle says that individuals should have the right to opportunities regardless of their background.
 - The Difference Principle is about regulating inequalities in a way that ensures that the least advantaged should be benefited.

Through the Equality Principle, the Rawlsian theory of justice establishes the distributive element of justice, which underlines the importance of equal distribution of goods, services and

opportunities (Madanipour et al. 2017). Rawls also raised the issue how the outcome is connected to the procedure of distribution. In social theory, this established the idea of procedural justice, according to which just institutions and their operational mechanism are needed to achieve a just society (Bell, Davoudi 2016; Madanipour et al. 2017). And vice versa: critics to the procedural side of social justice underline that unjust institutions and procedures within the society contribute to reproduction of inequalities. Distributive justice is also often questioned on the basis if simply a fair distribution could lead to more just societies. Amartya Sen emphasized the importance of what people are able to do with the distributed resources (Sen 2009). His capabilities approach highlighted the question of social choice in relation to the importance of freedom and capabilities to make choices and be responsible for them (Madanipour et al. 2017).

Spatial justice is not just simply related to the distribution or the spatial and geographical aspects of social justice. Explanation, theorising (and critics on the distributive view) of spatial justice by Harvey (1996, 2009), Lefebvre (1991) or Soja (2009) – which are related to social movements, activism and political and governance issues in cities (e.g. ‘right to the city’) – emphasize more the role of institutional processes causing unjust geographies. By reflecting on that, according to Madanipour et al. (2017), spatial justice covers a complex understanding of the distributive and the procedural view (whose differences lie within theorising space). The distributive side of spatial justice can be understood as the just distribution of resources and opportunities between social groups across space (presence of justice in space). The procedural element of it is related more to power mechanisms causing injustice between various social groups and spaces.

Levels of spatial justice are related to a multi-scalar understanding, according to which spatial justice simultaneously operate at different spatial levels from the smallest neighbourhoods to the global scale (Soja 2009). This is valid both to the distributional and procedural element of spatial justice. Positive overall pictures at national or regional levels on distribution of resources might hide injustice between smaller areas (Madanipour et al. 2017). As a procedural phenomenon, spatial justice at local levels is highly dependent on processes, institutions, regulations, policies etc. at national, supra national or global levels. This underlines again perspectives in dealing with spatial justice at lower territorial scales (e.g. limitations and capabilities of localities or local actors).

Principles of social and spatial justice significantly reflect on the goals and the operation of EU cohesion policy, especially territorial cohesion. In that way, spatial justice as fairness might be a critique of ambitions associated with cohesion. As an aim of cohesion policy, promoting harmonious development and reducing regional inequalities should basically serve spatial justice as well. This goal is emphasized several times in declarations about cohesion policy in general and about territorial cohesion as well. The 3rd Cohesion Report expresses a basic principle of spatial justice by defining the rationale for territorial cohesion as “...people should not be disadvantaged by wherever they happen to live or work in the Union“ (EC 2004, 27).

Furthermore, in relation to territorial cohesion policy modes of development might need to be reconsidered from the viewpoint of spatial justice. The resource redistributive development of disadvantaged areas is not equal with promoting spatial justice (Connelly & Bradley 2004). The distribution of resources might not dissolve the causes of injustice and territorial inequalities between and within regions. It is also important to understand the role of local participation in actions constructing spatial (in)justice – access to or exclusion from actions. As an agenda for a reformed cohesion policy the Barca Report refers to Sen (1999) who promotes the role of individuals “...as active agents of change, rather than passive recipients of dispensed benefits” (Barca 2009, 22). According to the Barca Report a place-based approach could be regarded as a

key for promoting efficiency in local development and delivering spatial justice by giving the opportunity to places to make use of their potentials.

3. The concept and key principles of services of general interest

Services of general interest (SGI) are widely acknowledged within the European Union, and their role is underlined by several policy documents from the Treaty of Rome in 1957 to the Lisbon Treaty in 2007, as well as several report and communications by the European Commission. According to the communication of the European Commission in 1996, services of general interest represent a key element in the European model of society by expressing the commitment to mutual assistance (solidarity), social cohesion and market mechanisms (EC 1996).

The definition of services of general interest by the Commission is more tautological rather than clear in stating that the term SGI “covers both market and non-market services which the public authorities class as being of general interest and subject to specific public service obligations” (EC 2003, 7). Other explanations complete this understanding of services of general interest with additional aspects. In the ESPON SeGI project (on indicators and perspectives for services of general interest in territorial cohesion and development) the way of providing SGI is emphasized (ESPON 2013a). Thus, services of general interest are identified by being delivered to inhabitants and businesses not via “normal” market channels due to their status of “necessary services”. Others underline that SGI are related to the special interest of the “public” in certain services – used to belong to the public domain or still belonging there (Múscar 2008 cited by Noguera, Ferrandis 2014).

As a key element in the European model society, principles related to the provision of services of general interest are similar to values represented by the European Social Model. The Green (1993) and White (1994) Paper on European Social Policy introduced a social model based on shared values: democracy and individual rights, free collective bargaining, the market economy, equality of opportunity for all, social welfare and solidarity. This indirectly reflects on the role of SGI, since these services play an “...important role as a social cement over and above simple practical considerations”, and they have “...symbolic value, reflecting a sense of community that people can identify with” (EC 1996, 4). This is an important linkage in understanding the relationship between services of general interest and social/spatial justice, since the European Social Model somehow expresses the interests of the European Union on social justice – however, not in a well-addressed way (Madanipour et al. 2017).

Regarding the European Social Model, Madanipour and others also note that this provides soft measures in areas where the EU has no formal competences (for moderating the EU’s economic growth agenda). This kind of functionality as a secondary, soft law can also be recognised in operating principles of services of general interest (Neergard et al 2013). It also results in that SGI have no fixed meaning at the EU level, and different national models for and variations among welfare regimes have also been noted (Esping-Andersen 1989). This also leads to significant differences in the minimum level of service provision among European countries (ESPON 2013a). According to Noguera and Ferrandis (2014), this express a cautious attitude of the European Commission, since regulations on services primarily belong to the responsibility of national, regional and local legislations, and the Commission does not intend to trespass its competencies through providing policy statements on them.

Questions on the definition of services of general interest also lie within diverse cultural traditions of the EU member states. Social models, political cultures, and values reflected by SGI have special connotations in each European country, which are related to the historical evolution of their identity construction (Calleja 2015; Noguera, Ferrandis 2014). This process determines the principles of operation of a state, and within the European Union it provides distinctive feature for defining Europe (Calleja 2015). While the foundations of providing services of general interest are based on that identity construction, this also makes it difficult to have a consensus at the community level on what services should be included among SGI (Noguera & Ferrandis 2014).

In this way, individual EU member states define what is included in and excluded from the definition of SGI according to the national context. This might refer to what is public and what is private in the production and provision of services, but also relates to questions of financing (public, market), as well as to rules of competition.

Services of general interest cover a wide array of different types of services. The main factor of distinction within SGI is the differentiation between services of general economic interest (SGEI) and social services of general interest (SSGI). The importance of services of general economic interest was already mentioned in the Treaty of Rome in 1957. SGEI refer to “market services which the Member States subject to specific public service obligations by virtue of a general interest criterion.” (EC 1996, 3.). Services related to general economic interest usually cover networks of transport (road, rail or air), energy (gas water, electricity) and communication (electronic communication, ICT and postal services), but for example waste-management could also be included in this group. Besides these “classic” types of services, in their broadest meaning SGEI could cover any activity regulated by the state (EAPN Services Group 2007).

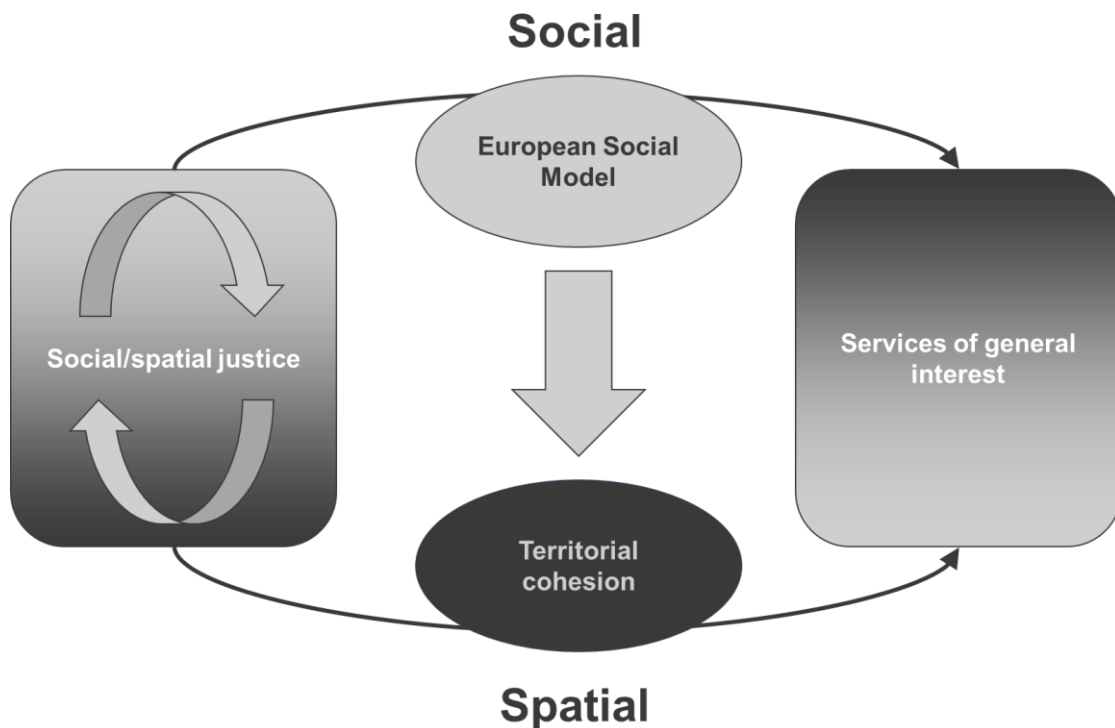
Social services of general interest are also provided in the public interest. These types of SGI are essentially “social” in character, and they are often linked to national social welfare and social protection rights and arrangements (EAPN Services Group 2007). The European Commission differentiates between the so called statutory and complementary and other essential services. The first group of social security schemes is linked to the main risks of life; related to health, ageing, occupational accidents, unemployment, retirement and disability (EC 2006). The group of other essential services plays a preventive and social cohesion role, being provided directly to the individual, and they are often targeted at vulnerable social groups (EAPN Services Group 2007). Regarding both types, SSGI could cover different activities related to health care, social security, employment and training services, social housing, childcare, long-term care, social assistance services.

The differentiation between services of general economic interest and social services of general interest is not crystal clear. On the one hand, the European diversity in the understanding of SGI makes it possible for similar services to belong to different domains (SSGI or SGEI) in different member states of the EU. Moreover, this assignment could change from time to time even in individual countries. On the other hand, the broad definitions of services of general economic interest might allow to classify generally social services as having economic interest if they are paid for (not necessarily by the beneficiary), since they serve economic activities (EAPN Services Group 2007).

4. Social/spatial justice and the provision of services of general interest

For understanding the role of services of general interest in delivering social and spatial justice, the introduced conceptual framework used the notions both the European Social Model and territorial cohesion (Figure 1). The European Social Model reflects on values shared by the concept of social justice, and also presents a European model of society which is also in the heart of the idea of services of general interest. While (territorial) cohesion is based on principles of spatial justice, it is also aimed by the provision of SGI.

Figure 1. The relationship between social and spatial justice and services of general interest



The linkage between social/spatial justice and services of general interest might also be understood without these mediating phenomena. The definition of the role of SGI is based on the concept of serving the public. This might cover the consideration of public needs which should be met, such as environmental protection, economic and social cohesion, responsible land-use planning, and promotion of consumer interests (EC 1996). And what is the most important from the viewpoint of social and spatial justice: obtaining high-quality services at affordable prices (which is also a particular concern for consumers). Declared operating principles regarding services of general interest include continuity, equal access, universality and openness (EC 1996), which are in line with basic values promoted by social and spatial justice.

Both services of general economic interest and social services of general interest fit into this conception. Principles establishing SGEI, while related more to the operation of market economies, they also express aspirations in being just by the (state, regional or local) regulation of adequate delivery for the public (EAPN Services Group 2007). In the case of social services of general interest, the goal of being “socially just” is more apparent. In a Communication from the European Commission on social services of general interest in the EU from 2006, organisational characteristics of SSGI are described among others by an operation on the basis of the solidarity

principle. They are also said to be “comprehensive and personalised integrating the response to differing needs in order to guarantee fundamental human rights and protect the most vulnerable” (EC 2006, 4). Other important elements of these operational modes are the non-profit characteristics, the expression citizenship capacity and the asymmetric (not normal supplier–consumer) relationship between providers and beneficiaries.

Regarding SGI, the provision of these services not via regular market channels might be rooted in that reliance on the market only cannot ensure the delivery of socially desirable objectives in a sufficient way (Calleja 2015). According to Calleja this is due to the inherent nature of market forces, which are not directed to deal with matters of the emergence of health problems, the strike of poverty, unemployment or other social problems. Through these social aspects, the provision of services of general interest has an impact on members of the society at the individual level. In the Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the above cited Communication of the EC on SSGI, this impact is expressed in the way of effective exercise of citizenship, since social services of general interest “underpin human dignity and guarantee the universal right to social justice and to full respect of fundamental rights” (Calleja 2015; EESC 2007, 81.).

Besides acknowledging these principles, it is necessary to add that services of general interest have their role not only in promoting individual development; they are also key factors in the stabilisation of communities. This role can be interpreted (for instance) by the observation of interrelationship between the decline/improvement of services and tendencies of in-/outmigration from an area or the evolution and formation of labour market conditions etc.

These individual and communal aspects of social sustainability are strongly related to different attributes of SGI, such as availability, accessibility, affordability, quality and variety (Breuer & Milbert 2015; ESPON 2013a; Humer 2014; Opp 2017). As principles, these are already proclaimed by communications of the European Commission on services of general interest (EC 1996, 2003). Nevertheless, the damage or the unfulfilment of these principles (SGI attributes) might have an essential role in generating social problems (social exclusion, poverty) and spatial injustices between (and within) different territories or contributing to their reproduction.

Comprehensive researches related to the European spatial characteristics of services of general interest explored different aspects of the above-mentioned attributes (e.g. ESPON 2010, 2013a, 2017). Patterns of inequalities related to SGI (illustrated by these researches) represent various spatial levels of injustices across Europe. Differences between older and newer (post-socialist) member states of the EU, and inequalities between urban centres and rural areas are probably the main features of the diversity of availability, accessibility, affordability, quality, and even in the variety of services (ESPON 2013b; Milbert et al. 2013; Noguera & Ferrandis 2014; Noguera et al. 2009).

At the same time, other territorial features (e.g. mountainous, remote or sparsely populated character) might also be influential on this variety, as well as historical factors or the operation of national political systems. Disparities of services of general interest within separate member states of the EU might dominantly be affected by national policies favouring and providing systems of social transfers, education health care etc. (ESPON 2013b). Shortcomings of these institutions might bear the procedural roots of evolved spatial injustices. Nonetheless, the provision of public goods and services to structurally disadvantaged territories might also be considered a form of redistribution (Madanipour et al. 2017), and as such, a tool in the delivery of spatial justice.

Regarding the relationship between spatial justice and the significance of services of general interest, it is important to underline that when considering service provision, spatial justice is

often subordinated to economic growth (Gruber & Rauhut 2016). This might best be illustrated by considering the impact of economic crisis on SGI. In times of crisis budget cuts and other austerity measures seriously affect both services of general economic interest (e.g. transport) and social services of general interest (health care, education etc.). These public expenditure cuts will also have an impact on the future provision and maintenance of SGI (ESPON 2013b).

The level of public service provision might have a critical contribution to the socio-economic sustainability, especially in the case of rural areas, for the maintenance of their role as part of an integrated urban-rural system (ESPON 2013b). This, for example, can strengthen the creation of economic opportunities, if the embeddedness of services of general interest is sufficient. The provision of SGI might also be linked to the solidarity side of spatial justice, by being an effective instrument for keeping such differences within and across European states and localities within manageable limits. This also contributes to the cohesion goals of the EU, which are not only about inclusion and solidarity, but also about breaking inefficiencies in social institutions (Barca 2009).

In service provision, the focus on local levels is especially important. This principle was already expressed by the Barca Report: “The goods and services concerned need to be tailored to places by eliciting and aggregating local preferences and knowledge and by taking account of linkages with other places.” (Barca 2009, XI). From this point of view, place-based policies aimed at enhancing social justice and inclusion might have a significant impact, since they aspire to guarantee socially agreed essential standards and to improve the well-being of the least advantaged via service provision (Barca 2009, Madanipour et al. 2017). Place-based policies and locally tailored services need to have a broad understanding on the role of local actors in the development and provision of services of general interest in order to adequately position them in the promotion of spatial justice.

5. Findings from case studies

Case studies in the RELOCAL Horizon 2020 research project introduce local development actions aiming at the promotion of spatial justice. While they represent different policy environments, institutional contexts and welfare regimes, their common central question is how spatial justice and fairness is defined and pursued at the level of local communities? Many of these actions are strongly related to the provision of services of general interest at local levels. Examples presented in this paper might provide a good insight on both local characteristics and challenges related to SGI and questions of local provision of these services. Additionally, the role of local, institutional and governmental actors is also explored, and feedback is given on actions related to the improvement of the presented services of general interest from the viewpoint of the promotion of spatial justice.

The two cases cited in this working paper cover two social services of general interest from Hungary: social housing and social assistance in the context of urban regeneration from a segregated neighbourhood (György-telep) in Pécs (Jelinek & Virág 2019) and childcare and child welfare services in a peripheral area (Encs district) of Northern Hungary (Keller & Virág 2019).

Characteristics and challenges of SGI

Actions presented by the example (Hungarian) case studies from RELOCAL research related to the development of services of general interest intended to be carried out with a focus on the local definition of social needs and equality demands. In the case of Pécs, the focus was on the renovation of low-comfort housing units and the provision of various social services (Jelinek &

Virág 2019), while the Give Kids a Chance programme aimed at resolving bottlenecks and inequality in service provision by introducing new services that improve living conditions for children and trigger institutional changes (Keller & Virág 2019).

These development initiatives covered a broad spectrum of social services of general interest. While the analysed cases had one or two key focal service areas (i.e. social housing and childcare), they were supplemented by other various types of social services: primarily with social assistance (e.g. individual work, community coaching, community working groups) and training (e.g. early childhood education, after school tutorials) services, but SSGI related to the improvement of employment capacities and even the improvement of ICT services were also considered.

Local characteristics and challenges related to services of general interest often show an interlocking situation of shortages of physical elements of infrastructure, institutional deficits, and social disadvantages, which lead to the growth of spatial inequalities and the reproduction of social injustices. In Pécs (György-telep), the urgent need for adequate housing is due to the availability of low comfort flats, which only provide scarce housing conditions. These physical aspects contributed to the evolution/subsistence of a disadvantaged socio-economic environment with multiple social drawbacks; for instance the level of education of the local population (in a significant proportion, Roma) is low. Low institutional capacities related to SGI are also linked to socio-economic disadvantages. For example, in Encs district the underdeveloped public infrastructure led to shortages in health, social care, and education (Keller & Virág 2019). Here, these problems also contribute to the formation of a disadvantaged socio-economic environment (low educational attainment, poor living conditions).

The mentioned problems related to the provision of services of general interest might cover difficulties regarding both the availability, accessibility and affordability of basic services, and not just in a physical sense – e.g. György-telep is far from the central areas of Pécs concerning physical distance, but the neighbourhood has many spatial and institutional connections to the city (Jelinek & Virág 2019). Beyond these direct factors of SGI-related challenges, these shortages also generate the accelerated stigmatization of the affected areas and neighbourhoods with multiple socio-economic disadvantages (ghettoised areas), and lead to the exclusion of their population from partaking advantages of high-quality services.

Challenges in the provision of services of general interest also have a special aspect related to the issue of territorial scale. Examples of service provision in Encs district show that the delivery of services might decline with the settlement slope. It makes micro-regional centres into service hubs, while the provision of childcare, social assistance and training services is sporadic and poor in smaller disadvantaged villages (Keller & Virág 2019). It also leads to differences in capacities and competencies between municipalities, which make the most disadvantaged municipalities become the most vulnerable to socio-economic challenges.

The role of local, institutional and governmental actors

In order to have a complex understanding, the role of actors in the provision of services of general interest might be approached through several aspects. Their activity is determined by their position related to territorial scales (local, national and supra-national actors), their position in social sectors (public or private institutions, NGOs), or even by their institutional role from the viewpoint of the provision of a given type of service.

Among actors from higher territorial scales (national and supra national), the role of the European Union and governmental institutions should be highlighted. The development actions aiming at the improvement of different types of services of general interest represented by the cited RELOCAL case studies have used different forms of financing opportunities provided by EU Structural Funds (European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund) or the Norway Grant. This also means that the European Union has a key role in the definition of priorities and regulations related to SGI development. From another viewpoint, local development ideas could be realised which are in line with EU directives.

EU priorities are usually translated to local initiatives by institutions of national governments. In this sense, governmental actors might have a central role in defining procedures of delivering spatial justice through the provision of services of general interest. But these actors not only have a role by forming institutional and policy background for SGI, they could also directly participate in actions focusing on local development of services. For instance, in the Give Kids a Chance programme the government had a coordination role through background institutions, which contributed to the strengthening of the position of the central state in public service provision (Keller & Virág 2019).

Local authorities play various roles in SGI provision and development. Municipalities often represent the local voice even in planning and implementation of development programmes aiming at services of general interest. It could mean that they bear political will with a wide mandate during different phases of SGI development (financing, brokerage, technical role etc.), like in the case of social housing projects in György-telep, Pécs (Jelinek & Virág 2019). Examples from Encs district childcare service development attempts show that the influence of local governments could also decrease over time in the maintenance and development (Keller & Virág 2019) of local institutions due to the increased centralisation efforts of the national government. The voice of local authorities could also represent an asymmetric appearance of local aspirations in place-based SGI development, since their narratives might overshadow interests of other local actors with less power (e.g. residents, NGOs, marginalized social groups).

Regarding the cited case studies, the biggest part of local provision of services of general interest and the implementation of development programmes belong to local public institutions (e.g. the Give Kids a Chance Office within Multi-Purpose Micro-regional Association of Encs) and NGOs (e.g. the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta – in Hungary often just referred to as ‘Málta’), which could be considered as key actors in service delivery (Jelinek & Virág 2019; Keller & Virág 2019). Their central role manifests in planning, managing, coordinating, brokerage, and promotion activities during the implementation of SGI development due to the high level of their local embeddedness and lobby activity (Jelinek & Virág 2019). Besides, they also participate in actual service activities, be they the provision of social care services, including family-based social work with careful assistance to families.

The example of ‘Málta’ shows that the role of non-governmental actors could go beyond activity related to service provision. In the case of social housing projects in György-telep (Pécs), ‘Málta’ gained an expanded authority, a kind of a shadow governmental role, by informally taking over supposedly municipal tasks (Jelinek & Virág 2019). While in Give Kids a Chance childcare development programmes ‘Málta’ had the mandate to approve programme design, with the proposal of uniform solutions and influence on decisions based on them, which worked against the operation of place-based solutions (Keller & Virág 2019).

These asymmetric power relations could also lead to a situation in which other NGOs, like the bottom-up organised Roma NGO Khetanipe in Pécs, could only have a minor role in SGI provision.

However, it played an important role in local development by running educational and cultural programmes and representing the ‘voice’ of Roma. Yet due to their small institutional capacities, it was later side-lined in decision making related to social (housing, assistance) development projects (Jelinek & Virág 2019).

Development and provision of SGI in relation to the promotion of spatial justice

The provision and development of services of general interest could make a difference for an effective promotion of spatial justice. Nevertheless, the unfair distribution of services (availability, accessibility, affordability, quality etc.) and procedural deficits of institutions related to the delivery of SGI could also lead to the increase of unjust spatial and social situations. RELOCAL case study findings could provide examples of both scenarios.

Service and infrastructure development effected the reduction of some SGI-related disadvantages in both two reviewed areas. Social housing projects in György-telep (Pécs) contributed to the significant improvement of living conditions within the area (Jelinek & Virág 2019). Nonetheless, the local development focus on large-scale city projects, the postponed development and the impact of economic crisis this has resulted in growing spatial and social inequalities compared to the city of Pécs itself and, in this way, the systematic reproduction of injustice. The Give Kids a Chance programme however could only lead to the temporary and sketchy improvement in the distribution and quality of child welfare services, with a low success in mitigating spatial inequalities in the micro-region, and the absence of institutional change (Keller & Virág 2019). The temporarily supplemented services have struggled after the end of the programme, since projects were dependent on external resources (EU funds, Norway Grant), and no resources were available for the sustainability of provision.

Besides financial reasons, both local practices in service provision and the way of implementation led to failures regarding a better promotion of spatial justice. In György-telep (Pécs), on the one hand, it was related to the unaccountable and non-transparent social housing provision and management. On the other hand, the mode of relocation of dwellers from segregated areas to integrated environment in social housing projects was a key element of reproducing injustices (Jelinek & Virág 2019). While the practice of relocations followed preferences of families (e.g. the reserve of kinship networks), the will of the municipality was more dominant (in guiding relocations not to prestigious parts of the city). As a result, in addition to growing living costs, relocations have not solved individual social problems.

The most important sources of SGI-related injustices during the childcare development projects in Encs district were the hierarchical dependencies between of a variety of local actors and the dominant role of given actors. Regarding the provision of services of general interest, smaller villages are disadvantaged compared to micro-regional centres, while these centres are highly dependent on the central state (Keller & Virág 2019). Moreover, the dominant role of local governments in local development led to the absence of competing visions, which resulted in a missing representation of marginalized groups in planning and the definition of goals. The social housing development programme in György-telep (Pécs) was more successful from this sense, since the housing projects could build on local capacities, with the participation of local dwellers (trained and employed by the program), the collective definition of goals, and the use of local resources or voluntary work (Jelinek & Virág 2019).

Frameworks of the SGI development programmes could also lead to the increase of unfair solutions in the reviewed example cases. Different programmes followed different logics, which

became a source of selective and unjust practices through, for example, narrow targeting (Jelinek & Virág 2019). Furthermore, mandatory components and regulations, representing e.g. the central state control in the definition of goals and means of local elements of the development of services of general interest resulted in significant procedural and distributive unfairness during implementation, by also weakening the effective application of place-based logics (Keller & Virág 2019).

6. Conclusions

This working paper intended to explore the relationship between spatial justice and services of general interest. The concept of social and spatial justice tries to answer the question how to manage inequalities within society in a fair way and provide equal opportunities to its members. A crucial element of answering this question is related to ways of provision of services: how different types of services are delivered to ensure fairness in their availability, accessibility, affordability, or even quality. Principles of services of general interest are rooted in a European model of society which seeks to provide equal opportunities, social welfare, solidarity and cohesion. These reflect on central aspects of promoting social and spatial justice.

Nevertheless, the practical realization of service provision and development aspirations could offer a more complex image on the actual functionality of these principles. Findings from RELOCAL Horizon 2020 case studies show that local challenges related to the provision of services of general interest might be managed to some extent (e.g. the improvement of living conditions), development programmes aiming at local SGI could also lead to the reproduction of social and spatial injustices and hierarchical dependencies due to procedural and distributive deficiencies. In these processes the role and responsibility of actors from different spatial levels and their power relations are essential, since they make linkages between agreed and desired principles and the actual implementation.

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