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## Possibilities and Constraints of Place-Based Development Projects to Temper Hierarchical Dependencies in a Deprived Neighbourhood

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### ABSTRACT

Recent studies have argued that place-based public policies can make a positive contribution to spatial justice. Arguably, the combination of procedural and distributive justice can enable local governance to develop appropriate procedures for more equitable distribution of public resources and for partnership and participation. Research in economic sociology, however, has found that place-based interventions, in order to generate positive resources for local development, must be based on a “virtuous relationship” between various scales of government. This relationship is shaped by a governance framework that applies principles of distributed authority, integration of various branches of policies, and partnership between the central state, lower levels of state and non-state actors. Our research analyses the case of a place-based developmental intervention against child poverty financed by the European Union Cohesion Policy in a small, disadvantaged town in the northeast periphery of Hungary. The findings of extended fieldwork funded by RELOCAL and NRDIO post-doctoral fellowship (112659) suggest that in the absence of a virtuous relationship between levels of government in domestic policy regimes, place-based interventions cannot make a positive contribution to spatial justice, but rather preserve existing inequalities in local power relations and in access to public services.

**Keywords:** place-based development, spatial justice, institutional embeddedness, institutional change, empowerment of marginalised group

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## Introduction

In recent years, the role of institutional arrangements in discussions about the success of external developmental interventions has attracted growing interest. Many studies have criticized external support programmes for depoliticizing the development process and leaving behind misaligned incentives and insufficient domestic capacities, thus contributing to the reproduction of developmental traps and the expansion of bureaucratic state power in people's lives (Stiglitz, 1999; Ferguson, 1994). At the core of these critiques was the argument that "one-size-fits-all" and place-blind quick-fixes of institutional arrangements result in unbalanced policies incapable of delivering sustainable development and social change (Barca *et al.*, 2012; Pike *et al.*, 2006). Even the European Union's regional development regime, the largest concerted effort in the world aimed at territorial cohesion which is implemented in a multi-level system through a series of innovative decision-making methods, has been criticized for its cumbersome policy procedures and for the weakness and inflexibility of the institutional system behind Cohesion policy.

These accounts discuss the reform of Cohesion policy using a place-based approach. The place-based agenda has been a long-term strategy aimed at "tackling persistent underutilisation of potential and reducing persistent social exclusion in specific places through external interventions and multilevel governance" (Barca, 2009, p. VII). It is designed to supply integrated goods and services tailored to local contexts by relying on local knowledge produced by local state and non-state actors in a partnership based on dialogue. The "success" of the developmental process thus depends on the embeddedness of interventions in the local context. The role of the state is to set the general conditions that local actors can follow in designing policies that fit local specificities.

More than a decade before the emergence of a place-based agenda for renewed Cohesion policy, studies in development and economic sociology pointed out that external developmental organisations, such as the EU and domestic policy regimes, can support local development by setting framework conditions that enable local actors with capacities "from above" to mobilise resources "from below". In this view, external developmental interventions can be successful if they nurture the capacities of local public and private actors to induce institutional change for development. An "enabling" domestic state, along with the EU, can provide positive resources and capacities for local development through a "virtuous relationship" between various scales of government and policy coordination that favour the evolution of institutional arrangements for cooperation, dialogue and the distribution of authority.

This study analyses the implementation of the Give Kids a Chance programme in the small town of Encs, located in the northeast periphery Hungary, and the marginalised neighbourhood therein. The aim of the paper is to study the possibilities and constraints of this place-based intervention as affected by the domestic policy regime.

The Give Kids a Chance programme started as a progressive place-based initiative in a disadvantaged micro-region with high rates of child poverty<sup>3</sup>. Between 2009 and 2012, the programme was extended to 23 of the most disadvantaged micro-regions. During this upscaling, the programme gradually transformed into a top-down policy tool, it's the components of which increasingly came to be defined and managed centrally through administrative measures. The programme focused on disadvantaged children suffering from deprivation and lack of access to public services that would ensure a healthy childhood. Thus, Give Kids a Chance aimed at transforming local institutions to enhance the quality and accessibility of local child welfare services for deprived children.

In the following sections we overview the debate on place-based interventions and dilemmas of external involvement in domestic development. We then proceed with a discussion about the role that local institutions can play in improving the conditions of disadvantaged populations. Introducing the case of the Give Kids a Chance programme in the district of Encs, we analyse its institutional evolution within the territorial context through the example of a stigmatised neighbourhood located in the district centre, the town of Encs. . In the final part of our analysis, we draw conclusions about factors that resulted in the diversion of Give Kids a Chance from its original place-based objectives in the district of Encs.

Empirical evidence for the article was gathered in the framework of the RELOCAL project<sup>4</sup>, and supplemented by NRDIO post-doctoral fellowship (112659)<sup>5</sup>. Between 2017 and 2018, our research team carried out 27 Hungarian-language stakeholder interviews with different organisations in three settlements, as well as at the district-, regional- and national policy levels. We also conducted participant observations.

## Conceptual background

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3. Child poverty has been indexed in Hungary by the "disadvantaged child" indicator, which refers to parents' employment status, qualifications and housing conditions. Disadvantaged children in Hungary are eligible for both monetary and in-kind benefits (Bauer *et al.*, 2015).

4. RELOCAL project: Resituating the Local in Cohesion and Territorial Development H2020 Framework project No. of Grant Agreement 727097. The case study can be found at [www.relocal.eu](http://www.relocal.eu).

5. The three-year post-doctoral research project was funded by the Hungarian National Research, Development and Innovation Office.

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*The narrative of place-based development and spatial justice*

The place-based approach, mostly known as the reform agenda of the EU's Cohesion policy, was created to improve the Cohesion policy's weak capacities for alleviating territorial disparities within the EU in terms of economic convergence and social cohesion. It builds on the idea that place matters in terms of the institutional arrangements in which development takes place. It matters not only from the perspective of local social and economic characteristics, but also in terms of the local knowledge that is necessary for building the capacity to design tailor-made local institutions. This knowledge is not readily available everywhere: underdevelopment traps that inhibit local development and perpetuate local social exclusion can be the result of local elites' inability to act, or of a status quo in local social relations. In these cases, the place-based approach suggests producing new knowledge and ideas through the interaction of local groups and the widening of the integration of diverse local actors in making decisions about developmental goals. Local elites' lack of either the capacity or the willingness to distribute public goods within the community based on spatial justice and authority in developmental decision-making can be remedied by a development and public policy regime that generates domestic and local alliances that support new institutions (Jacoby, 2008). External framework conditions also need to promote the emergence of actors that are empowered to participate in planning, monitoring, enforcing, and upgrading rules (Bruszt-Vedres, 2013).

According to place-based narratives, however, none of the external agents have the capacity to design good, spatially fair local development policies "from the centre". States do not know better, and a balance must therefore be called for between exogenous and endogenous forces by which local actors set targets and design projects while the external "development agency" sets the general conditions that the former must follow and tailor to specific places (Barca *et al.*, 2012). Thus, interventions and the mobilisation of local knowledge and resources should be based on "partnerships between different levels of governance, both as a means of institution-building and also of identifying and building on local knowledge" (Pike *et al.*, 2007, cited by Barca *et al.*, 2012, p. 147). To achieve this, the policy process should be based on the reciprocal interaction of local actors with external agents (the central state) to provide channels for feedback from the bottom to the top. Such overall governance arrangements can ensure appropriate institutional procedures at the local level to better distribute resources and opportunities, as well as "better mechanisms to ensure democratic participation and accountability" (Madanipour *et al.*, 2017, p. 75). Distributive and procedural justice is thus synergistic: inclusive and

deliberative institutional arrangements can have the capacity to guarantee the fair distribution of public goods.

### *Narratives of local development and their relations to local institutions*

The place-based approach is anchored in institutionalist readings of regional development and economic growth (Amin and Thrift, 1994; Cooke and Morgan, 1998), which claim that development is about the transformation of institutions. Integrated policy coordination that distributes authority among diverse stakeholders and empowers marginal social groups, it is argued, fundamentally contributes to the development process (North, 1991; Sen, 1999; Evans-Syrett, 2007).

This view has spurred new understandings of sub-national development which emphasize the significance of institution-building through cooperation and alliances organised endogenously by local actors. In these accounts, the governance of development is primarily about the power to decide who has a say and what counts in planning development (Bruszt, 2007). Therefore, discussions of developmental governance must take into account dimensions of the distribution of power (Bruszt, 2007). There is interplay between development and institutional change; non-hierarchical methods of coordinated institution building based on inclusive and deliberative decision-making mechanisms are expected to provide positive resources for development (Hirschman, 1958; Sen, 1999; North, 1991). Local capacities for development – partnerships, trust-based alliances, institutional thickness and stability, social relations – are not fixed once and for all, but can evolve in qualitatively different ways shaped by local agency under the influence of framework conditions (Trigilia, 2001; Pike *et al.*, 2007).

External conditions set by policy regimes of the state and of transnational actors can help local actors *from above* to mobilise resources *from below* for the kind of institution building that more fairly distributes public goods through the inclusion of diverse local actors. This can take place in a regulative framework which applies principles of political accountability as its benchmarks and rules, and which enables weaker actors to define a legal basis for their actions *vis á vis* domestic governments. This legal basis must rely on a “virtuous relationship” (Trigilia, 2001) between various levels of policy coordination that restrains attitudes toward collusion and rent-seeking and hinders any single actor from monopolizing the definition of regional and local developmental goals and means.

A “virtuous relationship” refers to the triadic relationship between *organisations*, which structure the life of a local population, *systems* of governance, in which organisations are embedded, and *institutions*, which regulate the operation of both (Scott and Small, 2013). In the literature on urban poverty, formal organisations,

institutional regulations and norms and the structure of the systems are seen to play a major role in “how well disadvantaged people do” (Scott and Small, 2013). Urban neighbourhood organisations provide resources such as information and services that “buffer individuals against the effects of poverty” (Small, 2006). In this sense, urban neighbourhood organisations act as resource brokers that “tie separate organisations to one another to accomplish local neighbourhood tasks and build community capacity” (Small, 2006). Resource brokers are typically composed of a diverse membership pursuing collective goals through the concertation of heterogeneous interests, which makes them sites for social interaction and social capital building (Small, 2006). Local organisations do not act in response to a single factor; through their heterogeneous membership, they are influenced by norms and conventions, and through their embeddedness in governance systems they are subject to “coercive” institutional pressure from larger authorities such as the state (Small, 2006).

Local institutional arrangements play a fundamental role in shaping local organisation into resource brokers or into sites of social fragmentation. In the first case, institutions – formal rules and informal norms – encourage local organisations to establish ties to one another and to “broker” information, resources and services for a heterogeneous audience. This is especially important for marginalised communities whose disadvantages do not merely result from living in poor, stigmatised neighbourhoods, but from non-participation in local social networks or non-access to local organisations/institutions (Small, 2006). On the other hand, local institutional arrangements can serve to stabilise and legitimise social boundaries and to recreate territorial stigmatisation by encouraging organisation to provide resources, information, and services for particular social groups and in specific neighbourhoods rather than granting access to these public goods to disadvantaged populations in degrading, stigmatised neighbourhoods.

### **Place matters: social and spatial fragmentation in a deprived town**

Our research took place in Encs, a small deprived town of 6,434 inhabitants at the northern edge of Hungary. The whole region, as well as the town itself, is characterised by economic decline and a concentration of poverty, and features very high unemployment, a low level of educational attainment and a concentration of Roma population. Due to its favourable geographical location, the previously village-style settlement became the centre of public administration (*járás központ*) for the neighbouring villages after World War II. As a result, the main institutions of public administration and service provision like the district court, police and fire stations, the

health care centre and ambulance service, secondary schools, and commercial and social services were all settled in this locality in the 1960s. As the district centre, Encs, with its own labour market, better public transport possibilities and available social services, became the migration destination for the educated, younger and more affluent people from the neighbouring villages. This ultimately caused intra-regional inequalities within the micro region, manifested as hierarchical dependencies of the villages on the district centre and anomalies of availability, accessibility and affordability of service provision.

The institutional developments of the socialist period divided the town into two parts. The old town centre, a village-style neighbourhood with small peasant houses that have traditionally been the dwelling places for Roma and non-Roma poor, is located on one side of the railway, while a Roma neighbourhood is situated at the edge of this part of the town. The other side of the railway is the modern part of the town with new institutions and residential areas that were built during the 1970s and 1980s when Encs reached the threshold of town status with 5 000 (1984) after the merging of neighbouring villages. This area is inhabited by young, educated families that moved from the neighbouring villages. The original town and its previously neighbouring villages are always distinguished in local narratives.

The main narrative on spatial injustice in the town, as elsewhere in the neighbouring villages and in the country at large, is strongly connected to the presence of Roma ethnicity. Generally, representations of Roma ethnicity are based on external categorization processes imposed by the majority society. There is little to no opportunity for Roma to voluntarily choose their group belonging or to rise to a position of recognition and empowerment (Neményi-Vajda, 2014). This external categorization is distinguished by the presence of unequal social and power relations and often associated with poverty, social problems and crime. Thus, the concept of Roma is a construct of the majority society which reflects its perceptions rather than actual ethnic community/group belonging (McGarry, 2014). The local narratives often determined by Roma-phobia and the fear of growing demographic dominance of Roma (in Hungarian *elcigányosodás*) are based on differences in fertility rate, mobility aspirations and territorial stigma.

Despite external categorization of ethnicity, the Roma population is highly fragmented in terms of socio-economic status, ethnic background, lifestyle and spatial location (Virág-Váradi, 2018) as reflected in the segregation map<sup>6</sup> of the town.

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6. A map of segregation is a mandatory element of the Integrated Development Strategy and made by the National Statistical Office based on the national census. Definition of the segregated unit: where the rate of the households with elementary education and without regular income within the active age group is higher than 35% and the territorial unit has a minimum 50 inhabitants.

Abaújdevecser, one of the small villages that was merged into Encs, is a dwelling place for the 'well-to-do' Roma, and thus is not designated as a segregated area in the 'official' map of segregation. These distinctions are reflected in the narratives:

"Officially we are all from Encs, but the indigenous local dwellers know who is from Abaújdevecser, Fügöd or Encs. This triad exists. And in more detail, he/she lives on Béke street, in the Szug or Fügöd, etc. The Roma from Béke street say that the millionaire Roma live in Szug, because they are involved in the construction business. Fügöd is another question. They appear as an enemy [...] Abaújdevecser is in another situation again. There has never been a separate Roma neighbourhood or even a street, Roma have always lived scattered and the coexistence with the non-Roma neighbours was a daily routine. They worked for non-Roma as daily workers, and later on, together in the cooperative."<sup>7</sup>

The segregated units of Encs are located on the other side of the railway, far from the centre in the old part of the town which is traditionally Roma and poor. In terms of ethnic composition and infrastructural developments, these village-style neighbourhoods are further differentiated by socio-economic status. In the 'Béke street' neighbourhood, most families live in moderate poverty with cultivated gardens and domestic animals. In the 'Szug' and 'Old town' areas, only a few impoverished families live in dilapidated shanty houses. Due to its orderly exterior and in spite of its physical distance, this part of the town does not appear segregated in local narratives. As a result of the efforts and willingness of the local municipality, the status of this area has been greatly advanced by infrastructural developments in recent years.

The area beyond this neighbourhood, located at the end of the town, is Fügöd, a stigmatised and criminalised space. Previously a small neighbouring village, Fügöd was annexed by the town in the 1970s. Today, there are only a few elderly non-Roma people residing on the Main Street in the middle of the neighbourhood, where houses are relatively orderly. On the rest of the neighbourhood's three streets, more than 350 Roma live in dilapidated shanty houses. There are no fences or yards; most households use illegally connected electricity and have no bathrooms, plumbing or modern heating. Families usually get water from public wells which are closed from time to time. This neighbourhood is not only distant from the city centre but is also set apart from the town by sharp mental boundaries. From the perspective of local stakeholders that work for the municipality and its institutions, this area is a "neighbourhood of exile" (Wacquant, 2007), a "no-go-area" that hosts the town's outcasts (Wacquant, 2007). In order to keep social and ethnic problems at a distance

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7. Interview with a civil activist.



from mainstream families in the town's centre, stakeholders have tried to keep Roma families living in this segregated neighbourhood invisible. The occasional appearance of Roma families from Fügöd in the town centre always reminds the inhabitants of Encs of the fear related to their proximity to the stigmatised place. "In the shop, everybody recognizes who is from Fügöd and who is from another part of the town. They feel it as danger."<sup>8</sup>

**Map 1. Segregated units in Encs**



*Source: Encs ITS 2015, p. 129-130.*

### **Domestic policies and their impact on local institutional arrangements**

The last two decades have witnessed pervasive structural and institutional transformations in Hungary's public policy regime and state administration. Institutional changes entailed a move away from the logic of "good governance", horizontal coordination and the "enabling state", towards a Neo-Weberian

<sup>8</sup> Interview with a programme participant.

understanding of the “good state” based on hierarchies and bureaucratic solutions (Pálné, 2014).

In the country’s sub-national development regime, centralisation began in the early 2000s with restrictions on local actors. By the time Hungary joined the European Union in 2004, the organisational structure and institutional background of micro-regional associations –the former organisational frame for local development and service provision – were defined by the central state, which ordered the establishment of mandatory multi-purpose micro-regional partnerships (MPMP). The formation of MPMPs was based on statistical administrative micro-regional units and their delegated task was to coordinate the provision of education, health care and social services, and to design and implement regional development projects (Keller, 2011). The mayor of the micro-regional centre usually became the formal leader of the MPMP – in our case the mayor of Encs – and the core team (operative staff) was recruited from the staff of previous sectoral associations. The transformation process switched gears in 2010 with the coming to power of a new conservative/right-wing government that began intensive centralisation in public policy making by pulling administrative and executive functions away from local governments in policy areas such as public education, child welfare services and public administration. Changes in the country’s public administration and public policy system increased bureaucratic control over local governments by the central state and decreased their room for manoeuvre in making autonomous decisions about public service provision and local development (Pálné, 2014).

Distributive injustice in Encs and its district settlements can be identified in anomalies of availability, accessibility and affordability of services that are mostly supplied in the town centre but not at its peripheries, nor in marginalised neighbourhoods. In addition, as human capacities are concentrated in the town of Encs, its access to development funds is much higher than in the surrounding villages. Services offered in the town are unaffordable or difficult to reach by those who live in deprived villages/neighbourhoods, and the quality of available services is much worse in stigmatised villages/neighbourhoods than in the centre of Encs. Schools and kindergartens are less equipped, human resources and staff competencies are often inadequate, and buildings are often in bad conditions as highlighted by the following example of the town and its marginalised neighbourhood.

Both an elementary school and a kindergarten are locally available for inhabitants of the stigmatised neighborhood of Fügöd. However, the provision of these services in this segregated part of the town does not aim to strengthen services locally, but rather to control access to institutions and prevent Roma children from Fügöd from attending facilities in the centre of the town. The kindergarten in the centre of Encs is

newly renovated using EU Structural Funds, and features a big, well-equipped courtyard with outdoor toys for children. Its member institution in Fügöd<sup>9</sup> operates in a small house with an ever increasing number of children. The house has a small, dirt floor courtyard and a few outdoor toys. This building was also recently renovated, but from meagre local governmental resources. Due to a general labour shortage of kindergarten teachers, it is very difficult to find such professionals at peripheries like the district of Encs. At the peripheries of the periphery, however, it is impossible.

The elementary school in the town centre has always been considered an elite school in the region. It is a newly built, partly renovated modern school building. Due to its good reputation, the school has been well-supplied with children from better-off families from the neighbouring settlements and has never suffered from a lack of students. Its member institution with primary classes (grades 1-4) has operated in Fügöd since the 1980s, taking exclusively Roma children from the neighbourhood. In the last decade, the town school was unable to handle the behavioural problems and low knowledge base of the children arriving from the segregated primary classes of Fügöd to the upper four grades. Therefore, the school leadership and decision makers at the municipality decided to “help the children” by starting the upper four grades at the Fügöd school as well. In essence, this meant the completion of the segregation of elementary education in the town of Encs. Despite the discursive reasoning behind the “nationalisation” of public school maintenance in 2017 – to equalize education services in the whole country – the social and infrastructural gap between the main school institution in the centre and its division in Fügöd are striking. The school building in Fügöd is run-down, not significantly different from the shanty houses of the neighbourhood. The classrooms are small, undecorated and equipped with old furniture. The school is overcrowded and some children study in parallel classes (i.e. two classes in one room taught by the same teacher), which is indicative of the shortage of teachers and competent staff (e.g. pedagogical assistants). There has been a strong social expectation in the town to keep the “ghetto” school and kindergarten in Fügöd operational, thus keeping “problematic children” away from “regular” children in the rest of the town. “It would be an explosion if those children from Fügöd appeared in the town school.”<sup>10</sup> The complex interplay of spatial, social and ethnic marginalisation is thus reflected in the provision of public services and “worthiness” for development resources.

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9. Education and social provisions can have “member institutions” that function as divisions of the organisation in another geographical location. Member institutions are financially and administratively not autonomous.

10. Interview with a municipality officer.

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## **Possibilities and constraints of place-based development in a stigmatised neighbourhood**

In the district of Encs, local governments decided to keep their existing MPMP for providing social care services in member settlements after the reintroduction of public administration districts. The operative staff of the MPMP was integrated into different departments of the town's local government, and runs micro-regional development programmes such as Give Kids a Chance. The central goal of Give Kids a Chance was to improve living conditions for disadvantaged children by enhancing the quality and accessibility of existing services and transforming local institutions to provide equitable access to child welfare services. Due to serious disinvestment of public education and child welfare policies<sup>11</sup> by the Hungarian state, inefficiencies in service provision and delivery have been prevalent in the whole country, but especially in deprived localities with low human and financial capacities. As a result of low salaries in the education and social care sectors and mounting social problems in the locality, the district of Encs has struggled with the outmigration of its elite (teachers, child welfare and social care professionals) for over a decade. Give Kids a Chance intended to fill such gaps in existing services, and although it officially targeted disadvantaged children, the programme was "translated" as "just another Roma programme" by some stakeholders in the context of local narratives determined by Roma-phobia.

### *Struggling to temper power relations on a different scale*

The Give Kids a Chance Office (referred to here as "the Office") was set up within the MPMP for the management of the programme. The staff of the Office consisted of education and social care professionals who were part of the operative staff of the MPMP for two decades and had developed project competencies, local knowledge and embeddedness through involvement in numerous development projects. Their extended personal and professional networks ensured the representation of all policy sectors relevant for children's well-being – education, social care and healthcare – and enabled them to rely on less formal and bottom-up deliberation in the planning and implementation of Give Kids a Chance.

The coordination of the programme at the micro-regional level was also facilitated by the central state through a priority programme scheme. It was coordinated by a consortium between the Ministry of Human Resources, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) and the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta (or Málta, as they are called colloquially, and as we will call them hereafter in the text). In the

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11. According to the OECD, Hungary spent 0.78% of its GDP on primary education and 0.86% on early childhood education in 2018.

district of Encs, Málta was responsible for methodological support and mentoring during local programme development and implementation, while the research team of HAS supported this mentoring with academic research such as surveys and statistical analysis. In the planning phase, mentors' duties included the facilitation of local planning through participatory events to assess and adapt local and micro-regional needs to overall programme components. During implementation, mentors were expected to provide professional and methodological support for local implementers, to ensure quality control, and if necessary, to help the operative staff in micro-regions in administrative affairs.

The priority scheme was expected to be guided by a place-based logic in which the formal institutional framework would be translated through local knowledge, tailoring the programme to local needs. Institutional conditions, however, instigated formal and top-down communication channels between upper policy levels and local stakeholders. The central state increasingly communicated with the local level through strict regulations in which it defined both the programme elements that the local level was to implement and requirements on the way it should implement them. Platforms for feedback from the bottom up were also based on unilateral and hierarchical solutions. Local stakeholders were required to provide meticulously detailed data about programme participants by filling out online feedback sheets without transparent mechanisms for following the path of these data or the opportunity to enter into dialogue with the central state. In the absence of non-hierarchical vertical coordination platforms, the successful mobilisation of local residents participating in the programme, and the struggles at the local level with programme requirements, were invisible for the central state, resulting in misaligned responses from the top. Under the pressure of increasingly bureaucratic procedures and the lack of feedback platforms, informality pervaded the entire programme. Mentors of the priority programme sometimes acted as "the middle-man" between the central state and local stakeholders, while at other times local stakeholders found solutions to coordination and supply problems through their informal contacts in the lively network of the MPMP.

The coordination of the micro-regional developmental planning in Encs took place on two parallel platforms: *thematic workshops* organised by the local Office for local stakeholders and service professionals, and *forums* organised by mentors of Málta. Both platforms failed to integrate and empower marginalised groups in developmental planning. Thematic workshops were partly formal events for fulfilling programme requirements, but on the other hand, they were regular events that local stakeholders regularly organised at the micro-regional level for the planning of development projects. Methods and old practices of associating diverse local actors were easily mobilised for new purposes in the Give Kids a Chance programme, the

greatest impact of which was defined by local stakeholders as "*the re-strengthening of professional cooperation and networks*"<sup>12</sup>. However, local stakeholders' thematic workshops were closed events for the local intellectual elite that did not incorporate representatives of the Roma community.

In addition to thematic workshops, the priority scheme of Give Kids a Chance also offered horizontal platforms for planning through Málta's mentors who organised focus group discussions and informal public forums. The latter relied on the "Presence methodology" of "playing together" events (Csonkáné, Dusa, Fehér, 2011)<sup>13</sup>. Experiences from these events along with basic statistical data were compiled in a strategic document<sup>14</sup>, Micro-Regional Mirror, which also included recommendations about the distribution of programme components based on identified needs.

Eventually, the local Office staff harmonized the results of the stakeholder workshops with findings of the Micro-Regional Mirror and compiled them in the final documents. The local Office team had limited room for manoeuvre in this as their actions were guided by striking a balance between local needs expressed by stakeholders and mandatory programme components defined by the central state and the recommendations of Málta compiled in the Micro-Regional Mirror. Endowed with informal discretionary rights by the central state, Málta's mentors had a mandate to approve or disapprove local decisions on micro-regional programme design, despite the original principle of the priority scheme which was merely to facilitate decision-making based on collaborative platforms. In the absence of similar entitlements, the local Office staff was constrained in coordinating the programme autonomously. The process was often laden with tension between mentors of Málta, the local Office staff and programme implementers, as local stakeholders often felt that Málta went beyond its role as facilitator and directly influenced decisions on behalf of particular interests. In the implementation phase, tensions persisted between representatives of Málta and local stakeholders as the latter felt that their embedded knowledge of local communities and local specificities were sidelined by uniform methodological solutions proposed by Málta's Presence programme, without their mentors' actual permanent presence in the locality.

Neglecting local solutions can also be seen in the way Málta failed to include the findings of public forums in the Micro-Regional Mirror. Although it complied with

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12. Interview with programme participant.

13 The methodology of the Presence programme was originally developed by Málta as a social care programme in the segregated neighbourhood of a small town in Hungary. It is based on the permanent presence of social workers and their daily encounters and conversations with local residents which help to build deep personal relations between the residents and social workers.

14 The preparation of this document was mandatory for all micro-regions that participated in Give Kids a Chance.

formal administrative requirements of the programme framework, Málta's failure to include its public forum findings with local Roma can be explained by institutional incongruities within Give Kids a Chance: changing institutional conditions favoured the fulfilment of formal and administrative project requirements rather than innovative local solutions for participation and empowerment. As a result, "[n]ot a single Roma has ever been asked anywhere about what she/he wants, what she/he is in need of. [...] In most micro-regions, local stakeholders of the care and education services sat down and planned the programme."<sup>15</sup> Horizontal relations and feedback loops functioned well among local stakeholders who shaped the local programme according to institutional assessments. Vertical platforms between "project shapers" and the target group, however, did not exist.

The way both local stakeholders and mentors of Malta failed to empower impoverished Roma families to participate in developmental planning is a reflection of a general "caring abandonment" of marginalised Roma. In this relationship, the Roma and their deprived neighbourhoods are instruments for the local elite to access EU funds and generate resources in an institutional framework that withdraws functions and resources from the local level. When disadvantaged groups and Roma are targeted by a programme, such as Give Kids a Chance, they stand as voiceless "beneficiaries" without participation and deliberation. Social relations within Roma communities often constrain the mobilisation of bridging ties (Putman, 2000) for representation in domestic policy networks. The general lack of Roma voice in domestic and local policy-making is enhanced by the seizing of Roma Minority Self-Governments (RMSG) by party politics, unequal power relations between RMSGs and local governments (Szalai, 2015), and informal, clientelistic cooperation patterns between them. In the same vein, the local RMSG in Encs, as the official and elected representatives of the local Roma community, has been unable to frame and represent the interests of that community at local institutions and in policy decisions. Although relations and cooperation between the local government and the RMSG is balanced in terms of official cooperation, the organisation remained invisible to the Roma community in segregated Fügöd, which is a reflection of the fragmentation of the Roma community by social class and status. The representation of the Roma was thus not only limited by mainstream society's perceptions, but also by the dissociation of Roma leadership from vulnerable groups. As a result, marginalised communities living in stigmatised neighbourhoods such as Fügöd had no voice in the planning and implementation of Give Kids a Chance.

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with programme participant.

### *Equity or equality?*

Despite the programme's failures to empower local Roma to make claims for a fair distribution of child-welfare services, resource allocation and the distribution of programme elements were more or less balanced between the district centre and its peripheries. The local Office put efforts into distributing services and resources to the most marginalised communities. For example, in Encs – in addition to many other services allocated to the centre – two Sure Start houses were established to provide early childhood educational services. One was in the segregated neighbourhood of "Béke street", while another, as a reflection of the fragmented local Roma community, was established in marginalised Fügöd in order to make services available locally. This can be explained by the Office staff's embeddedness in thick professional and personal networks within the entire district.

"The project had lots of mandatory elements [...] that we had to implement whether we liked it or not. But we still managed to put local requests in the final tender in a way that fulfilled the requirements. [...] We played equal; for us all kindergartens were the same, we tried to bring in the same services everywhere."

Due to the relative scarcity of financial resources in Give Kids a Chance, and other structural constraints like the lack of professionals and additional infrastructural resources in the most deprived villages, such equalizing mechanisms prevailed over equity-based allocation of programme components. Structural deficiencies often paralyzed the programme and enabled Give Kids a Chance to only temporarily supplement missing services that the central state had withdrawn. The programme thus represented an oxygen tube for marginalised communities, and temporarily resuscitated tragically weak child welfare services that local governments struggled to maintain once the programme ended.

The evolution and demise of the Sure Start House in Fügöd is illustrative of the way structural constraints of the institutional system enhanced the reproduction of complex socio-spatial inequalities through a place-based intervention. The Roma community in Fügöd had not only faced local prejudices for decades, but was also abandoned by Málta during programme implementation as a result of insufficient capacities for mentoring allocated in the programme. Although the House was initially successful in the mobilisation of Roma families, the local government of Encs struggled to find competent staff once the head staff left. Two social workers eventually took the position and began to represent Fügöd's interest *vis-à-vis* local stakeholders. The staff also built networks within the Roma community and managed to mobilise families again. However, their attempt failed to connect to decision makers and professional networks in local institutions (kindergartens, schools, child welfare services, home visiting nurses and special education professionals). In the



absence of institutional incentives for equitable service distribution, and under structural constraints of resources, local stakeholders did not and could not provide the staff with the resources they needed to offer equitable services in stigmatised Fügöd. Local perceptions attached to the “non-deserving Roma” in Fügöd were reanimated in 2017 when a local conflict broke out which was generated by a food donation from an external organisation on the premises of the House. At this point, it was easy for the local government to explain the shutting down of the Sure Start House in the stigmatised neighbourhood but to hold on to the other Sure Start service “in the town”.

## Conclusion

Findings in this study suggest that in the absence of institutional incentives from the domestic policy field, the Give Kids a Chance programme gradually lost its place-based character and failed to enhance local capacities for institution-building to guarantee equitable distribution of child-welfare services and participative local decision-making. Instead of triggering institutional change to challenge the local status quo based on prejudices and stigmatisation, in the absence of institutional expectations *vis-à-vis* the local level for spatial justice, the programme enhanced existing local hierarchies, fragmented social networks, and unequal access to public services.

The programme could only provide temporary relief for marginalised communities in accessing child-welfare services, and alleviate scarcities fed by the dysfunctional bureaucratic institutional structure of child-welfare policies. The failure of this place-based intervention to change distributive and procedural aspects of spatial injustice at the local level was due to the lack of well-defined domestic policies and institutional arrangements suited to the logics of less hierarchical modes of governance applying principles of distributed authority, integration and partnership.

Changes in the country’s public administration and public policy system had a pervasive impact on the governance of the Give Kids a Chance programme. Stripping local governments of functions and resources was devastating for settlements and regions characterised by heavy outward migration of their competent professional elite. Transformation of domestic framework conditions influenced the content and legitimacy of the programme and curtailed the capacity of the local level to make autonomous decisions about its own developmental goals. Changes left less room for manoeuvre for local incumbents while introducing increasing bureaucratic control over programme implementation. In the absence of an institutional framework based on non-hierarchical policy coordination and a long-term vision about spatial justice

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in child welfare, Give Kids a Chance came short of triggering more pervasive institutional changes dedicated to spatial justice at the local level.

Ultimately, Give Kids a Chance showed that project-based development programmes cannot fill gaps in service provision caused by the disinvestment of domestic states in welfare policies. In the district of Encs, the complex interplay between the capacities of the local level, local social relations (including solidified prejudices and social boundaries in local institutions), and the lack of institutional incentives of the policy regime, contributed to the failed implementation of spatial justice in Give Kids a Chance. The main mechanisms that drove spatial injustice in Encs were the hierarchical dependencies of a variety of local actors. The dependent position on the district centre and on external resources by the small settlements and neighbourhoods disabled relationships based on dialogue and partnership. The dominant role of local governments in development processes, and the absence of competing developmental visions, were the result of a general lack of local civil society which could challenge existing hierarchies and social relations. Under these circumstances, the perceptions of social and spatial injustice and unequal power relations determine developmental outcomes. Hierarchical dependencies also mean constraints for the representation of marginalised groups in the design and implementation of place-based interventions. The procedural injustice of marginalised groups not being given a chance to make claims about the goals and methods of the local Give Kids a Chance, either by external or by local actors, is indicative of the general lack of equitable distribution of developmental resources to localities inhabited overwhelmingly by Roma.

This study shows that although domestic states “do not know best”, they are still important intermediaries of place-based governance modes through the framework conditions that they set in domestic policy regimes. The place-based literature, however, seemed to have forgotten about the state – the entity that defines parameters of the domestic institutional framework and filters EU programme requirements. This resulted in a skewed focus of the place-based approach on endogenous conditions and neglect of external conditionalities that enable or disable place-based policy implementation. In Cohesion policy, the contractual relationship between the Commission and Member States gives leeway to the latter for accommodating the particularities of domestic policy regimes. Our study documents that if this is not based on a “virtuous relationship” between scales of policy coordination and a benevolent state, but rather on hierarchical systems of domestic governance, then place-based interventions have weak capacities for implementing spatial justice at the local level.

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