

# Building Bridges between Research & Practice on Local Development

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Local development policies can be defined as area-based, integrated strategies that activate a variety of local stakeholders and assets towards the attainment of long term structural change. To be effective local development initiatives need to be grounded on a solid knowledge of the specific context of intervention. Namely, its territorial, social and economic features, dynamics and emerging trends.

An evidence-based approach capable of supporting planning and policy decisions with sound scientific findings is therefore key to the success of local development initiatives.

In his recent book "[Knowledge, policy-making and Learning for European Cities and Regions: From Research to Practice](#)", Nicola Francesco Dotti indeed investigates the research-policy nexus in urban and regional policy. Dotti deals with the "Fourth Mission" of Universities and Research to cooperate with governments to improve policy-making, and introduces the concept of "knowledge brokers" in an attempt to gather two key – but often non-communicating – academic communities: the one of policy studies (focused on processes of decision-making) and the one of urban and regional studies focused (on the contents for those decisions). As Dotti argues " the primary opportunity for researchers is to get involved in real-world policy going out of the 'Ivory Tower', and understanding how 'their' knowledge is 'used' and 'translated' for policy-making; for policymakers, they can acquire the knowledge they do not have (yet)".

On very similar grounds, LDnet and the European Commission are very keen on building bridges between research and practice and on making sure research results are used and benefit practice. A community of experts dealing with local development could help harvest lessons learnt and overcome silo mentality.

My short article is the first step in this direction, and it will provide an initial overview on the state of play and emerging trends of the work of selected LDnet members and friends, active either in the academic or in the practice fields.

Specifically, it will be organised along the following three main categories:

- Research and reports on the EU Cohesion Policy framework and instruments;

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- Research work on relevant urban or rural local development case studies;
- Ongoing projects and initiatives for local development.

## **Research and reports on the EU Cohesion Policy framework and its instruments**

Under this first strand I included those studies focussing on the institutional/policy-making and implementation dimensions of Cohesion Policy.

LDnet Secretary-General **Haris Martinos** (with Jürgen Pucher, Serafin Pazos-Vidal, and Jasmin Haider) recently carried-out a [study for the REGI Committee](#) assessing the role of the EP in the field of cohesion policy since the Treaty of Lisbon introduced ‘co-decision’ procedure whereby Parliament and Council have equal powers in agreeing the regulations of the EU Structural and Investment Funds. In addition to the formal processes, the study also considers the informal ones from policy development at the pre-legislative stage to the interinstitutional negotiations as well as the Parliament’s scrutiny role over cohesion policy. The study concludes putting forward two key recommendations:

- Setting-up of a CP-wide ‘steering committee’ as a vehicle for exploring and agreeing positions across political groups and CP-relevant committees, supported by a ‘task force’ inside the EP Secretariat that would be linked to an external ‘technical support group’ drawing upon the CP policy community.
- Establishing an ambitious forward-looking and proactive policy cycle. This should encompass an active internal/external research programme into forward-looking policy issues, aiming to give Parliament an edge over the Commission’s legislative initiative and the more advantaged role of Council in the MFF.

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In her paper “[Local knowledge-based development: What can local governments do for it?](#)” Professor **Ilona Pálné Kovács** argues that local governments are very important actors in local development, but to be able to fulfil this function it is necessary to improve their capacities and to increase their local knowledge. The author outlines the theoretical frames of knowledge-based governance and development, like the urban regime theory, local knowledge, and regional innovation theories. Based on her own empirical research experiences the author introduces the main characteristics of the Hungarian local government system which tends to be limited in its scope and competences in local development due to the legislation in the last years referring. The paper concludes that the European, so called place-based development policy cannot be implemented in this very centralised governance context.

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**Loris Antonio Servillo** is currently one of the main researchers investigating the implementation of the Community-Led Local Development instrument across the EU. In his recent article “[Tailored polities in the shadow of the state’s hierarchy. The CLLD implementation and a future research agenda](#)”, Servillo combines different streams of thought within the Multi-Level Governance debate to approach the subject of investigation, which includes more than 3.000 local initiatives across the EU. An institutionalist perspective enables a reflection on the multi-level normative dimensions of the generated local

initiatives. The paper claims, on the one hand, the CLLD enables spatial-temporal fixes in which a deliberative polity pursues a spatial imaginary for an ad-hoc territory. The consequent analytical dimensions can be found in the relationship between attendant ad-hoc polity, policy agenda, territorial design and societal processes. On the other hand, the evidence demonstrates how the bottom-up constituency of this institutional technology takes place in the shadow of hierarchy, in which the multi-level decision-making is a determinant meta-governance factor.

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In his [contribution for LDnet](#), **Stefan Kah** focuses on the implementation of EU Cohesion Policy through the multi-Fund CLLD. Specifically, Kah analyses how ESI funds are used and combined to support Local Action Groups across all EU Member States, and ultimately identifies a number of positive effects and shortcomings in the Multi-Fund CLLD.

In terms of positive effect overall, CLLD (multi-Fund) enables a genuine bottom-up approach (broader range of eligible themes); allows targeting of urban territories; increases synergies between different policy areas; brings simplification (for beneficiaries!) by providing a one-stop-shop for project applicants; creates economies of scale (e.g. in relation to communication or marketing efforts); allows capitalising on existing LEADER experience + expertise coming in from other ESI Funds; and increases the funding allocation for LAGs.

On the other hand, the main shortcomings include administrative effort and capacity challenges for MAs and LAGs; regulatory complexity; silo mentalities; and a discussion more centered on the administrative effort and on maintaining control over “own” funding by different MAs rather than on actual content and opportunities for rural/regional development

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Finally, in my short paper [“Overcoming EU Discontent in ‘Places That Don’t Matter’ through Community-Led Local Development”](#), I discuss the potential of the Community-Led Local Development and the ‘potential pitfalls’ of CLLD’s participatory arrangements’, as well as the scope for integrating digital tools in citizen participation strategies. In concluding, I argue that if supported by an adequate and open strategy for citizen engagement, the Community-Led Local Development could be an appropriate means to overcome EU discontent in the so-called *places that don’t matter*.

## **Research work on relevant urban or rural local development case studies**

Under this second strand I grouped research work based on the analysis of relevant local development case studies.

**Alistair Adam-Hernandez** is currently researching in the area of rural development, specifically with respect to the resilience of rural communities. In the context of declining populations, economic degrowth and ecological imbalance, village communities in so-called shrinking rural areas are perceived mainly as losers. The contentious concept of resilience may possibly deliver empowering answers for dealing successfully with these threatening processes of change in the countryside. Adam-Hernandez set off to develop a “diagnostic tool” to measure rural community resilience and his research ultimately aims to contribute to

further theory development as well as to establishing resilience research in the context of spatial and regional sciences. How to build and manage resilience in villages will be examined by setting up a conceptual framework for rural and village resilience based on three bodies of research of particular importance for the conceptualization of resilience in the spatial and regional sciences: social ecology, psychology and community development. Also the interdisciplinary, systems and complexity thinking approach is of vital importance for his research. This framework is to be put to the test in a comparative European study in a German, an English and a Spanish village. Here is a link to his most recent article: "[A Proposed Framework for Rural Resilience – How can peripheral village communities in Europe shape change?](#)"

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In my article "[Towards an inclusive and sustainable CLLD: lessons from neighbourhood management in Berlin](#)" I deal with 'urban CLLD', which builds on experiences, particularly, from the URBAN Initiatives and the LEADER programme. My research is based in Berlin and is within the policy context of the German Soziale Stadt programme (Socially Integrative City, SIC). Fostering both physical rehabilitation and social, cultural, and employment goals, SIC intends to improve both living conditions and the attractiveness of neighbourhoods by the creation of stable social structures and the enhancement of life opportunities for residents in the fields of education, employment, social and ethnic integration. In the specific case of Berlin, the national SIC framework is put into practice through the Soziale Stadt Berlin (SIC Berlin) programme, which has unique features compared to other German cities, especially concerning the way target areas are identified and the scheme for citizens' participation adopted. The specific target area of the research is the Körnerpark neighbourhood (or Körnerkiez), in the District of Neukölln, in the southwest part of Berlin. The Körnerkiez has been for several years a very neglected neighbourhood, characterised by high rates of unemployment and welfare dependency and by a high concentration of ethnic minorities. The paper explores how far the strategy pursued is capable of addressing local needs and discusses issues of inclusiveness in the local governance framework, arising from the Körnerpark experience, which highlighted that in the practice, a community-led development initiative may risk to be captured by a dominating coalition of stakeholders, and to achieve results far distant from the redressing of social imbalances and inequalities.

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**Robert Lukesch** (ÖAR GmbH) is working on the EU-Horizon 2020 research project [SIMRA \(Social Innovation in Marginalized Rural Areas\)](#). Led by Hutton Institute at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, UK, the project seeks to identify features and patterns of social innovations which provide hints for transferring or initiating social innovation in marginalized rural areas, particularly in Southern Europe and the Mediterranean region (three of the overall 26 project partners are from Tunisia, Egypt and Lebanon), to raise the level of probability of social innovation above that of mere chance. The project produces guidelines for policy makers and practitioners, a guidebook for evaluation of SI initiatives and projects, a MOOC online course and many other interesting things.

Specifically, Lukesch is contributing to the conceptual framing of social innovation and the development paths of SI initiatives, as well as to the policy analysis. Additionally he will be drawing conclusions from 11 in-depth case studies (plus a host of more case studies analyzed

with lesser intensity) and derive recommendations for policy makers.

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**Katalin Kolosy** (AEIDL) is a member of the scientific advisory board for the [RELOCAL project](#). In this context, researchers selected 33 locality-based/targeted case studies from all over Europe that represent different welfare regimes, rural and urban areas, disadvantaged and better-off localities and various cultural and historical contexts. Each individual case is designed to provide a holistic picture of place-based targeted actions and their interaction with the spatial justice context. These interactions are analysed through various dimensions such as (a) promoters and inhibitors, (b) competences and capacities and (c) procedural and distributive justice. A quick review of 8 draft case studies reveals some early findings:

- In several cases (Rotterdam Zuid / NL, Alzette-Belval /FR-LU, Kotka / FI), the voice of local citizens as beneficiaries of the action is weak;
- Conversely, successful citizens' initiatives and civic engagement can raise issues of accountability or legitimacy in the field of urban planning and access to funding;
- Case studies related to LEADER (HU, RO, UK) all reveal that there is little direct attention on social issues; however, there is an important and positive impact on the sense of belonging;
- A negative spiral of inequality is observed in places of poverty: contextual area deprivation can influence individual socio-economic outcomes, which in turn contributes to greater inequality of opportunity;
- The reference to smart villages calls upon the social capital theory of linking, binding and bridging and may concentrate on smart 'villagers' instead, avoiding the revival of the old trench war between human geography and spatial planning.

### **Ongoing projects and initiatives for local development**

Under this third strand I grouped a number of relevant local development initiatives that are currently being carried out by LDnet members across the EU.

**Cristina Duarte** is working on the [FatorC project](#): a CLLD developed in the municipality of Cascais, aims at increasing employability and employment rates among residents of Alcabideche and São Domingos de Rana – two parishes in Cascais. Through the management of ESI Funds (ERDF and ESF), FatorC is currently supporting 15 micro and small local enterprises with 430.00€ for investment and creation of 42 new jobs for people in vulnerable socio-economic situations. A new funding opportunity was created in March with the goal of facilitating the transition of young people to active life. The approval of 10 projects is allowing 33 youngsters to implement their own ideas within the community and hence to develop their soft skills. Over the last year and a half, there have been multiples Q&A sessions and workshops to elaborate applications for the funding opportunities either for local entrepreneurs and youngsters. Also 3 seminars about "Potential success business areas in Alcabideche and São Domingos de Rana" were organized within the community involving the public and private sectors, and the local citizens. The personalised guidance to entrepreneurs and youngsters in the development of their projects, the participation in multiple events in the municipality, the integration and coordination of local partnership networks, contributes to the increasing recognition of FatorC as an important player in the

construction of public policies and in the topic of employability and support to local enterprises.

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**Katalin Kolosy** and **Giuseppe Pace** are working on [Underground4value \(COST Action CA18110\)](#), which is a four-year project (2019-2023) establishing an expert network from more than 20 countries, with the objective of promoting balanced and sustainable approaches for the conservation and promotion of underground heritage. The originality of the approach is that it is geared towards assisting local communities' decision-making with cultural, scientific and technical knowledge of the underground built heritage, from many different perspectives: archaeology, geo-technics, history, urban planning, cultural anthropology, economics, architecture, cultural tourism and ecology.

Additionally, **Katalin Kolosy** is also coordinating this year [AEIDL 30th Anniversary \(Y30\)](#). In this context, Kolosy is working on two key initiatives.

On the one hand on the launch of a pan-European community of like-minded individuals who are involved in the revival of historic buildings and cultural places that get off the beaten track of conventional heritage preservation, going beyond established frameworks. The Campbase is building upon the dynamics created around a [HURBS](#) bidding exercise coordinated by AEIDL, conveying a place-based dimension to activities that are bridging the arts and culture, craftsmanship, economic development, ecological transition and greening strategies, education, enhancing or producing social and cultural integration. It brings together key stakeholders combining a wide range of experiences and expertise, skills, tools, networks and contacts, who met for the first time during the Campbase.

On the other hand on the topic of citizen-led climate action for the 2021-2027 Programming Period. The rationale behind this Y30 AEIDL project is that climate emergency is becoming more and more important for a growing number of 'ordinary' citizens all over Europe and the world, as witnessed by the increase of climate marches and militant movements. Solutions to this emergency are often small scale and low tech, such as saving electricity, water or waste with simple individual habits, also known as 'energy sobriety'.

Over recent years, many citizen-led schemes have flourished, often transposed to the wider community and mainstreamed through public policy in various fields of interventions such as energy efficiency, low carbon economy, integrated energy market, zero carbon technology development, etc. Hence many public policies, including cohesion instruments intervening for the development of rural areas, cities and regions, contain milestones and targets to measure the performance of climate change support. Their scope is very wide, from soft mobility or biodiversity preservation to waste management or district heating. When translated into operational schemes by the Managing Authorities, is there any room left for citizen-led climate action? This is the open question that will be discussed on 21st September 2019 in Brussels during a focus group gathering experts, practitioners and AEIDL staff, under the auspices of the [European Day of Sustainable Communities](#).

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Finally, **Marijana Sumpor** is interested in the practice of urban CLLDs and is prepared to

launch in autumn 2019 a pilot project on neighbourhood level in the capital city of Zagreb, which is a quite centralized city with poor governance structures on lower levels. The Leader/CLLD model is implemented in Croatia through the Rural Development Operational Program, while larger urban areas currently are not eligible to participate in this programme. Sumpor worked as a researcher at the Regional development department of the Institute of Economics, Zagreb with focus on integrated approaches to participatory strategic planning on all levels of governance and grew experience with the ITI mechanism in Croatia and would like to contribute to developing new knowledge and practice with the application of the CLLD model in urban areas. Currently she is leading a small political party and she is a member of Zagreb's assembly in the ranks of the opposition.