



Integrative Mechanisms for Addressing Spatial Justice and Territorial Inequalities in Europe

D6.5 Summary report Work Package 6: Synthesis of Findings on Multi-Level Governance

Version 2.0

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Change control

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AUEB	Athens University of Economics and Business
EU	European Union
EU-SILC	European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HFA	Health for All
HIAP	Health In All Policies
HPP	Healthy Public Policy
HUA	Harokopio University Athens
MLG	Multi-level Governance
NCD	Non-communicable Disease
NPM	New Public Management
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
RCT	Random Controlled Trial
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
US	University of Stirling
WHO	World Health Organization
WP	Work Package

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1. Introduction

The central focus of IMAJINE Work Package 6 (WP6) has been to investigate the potential contribution of multi-level governance (MLG) to addressing territorial inequalities and promoting spatial justice and the challenges involved in implementing such an approach. Policymakers face a dilemma when they seek to reduce territorial inequalities: should they expand or reduce the scale of policy design? There are convincing reasons for each. Policies for larger populations, overseen by a single authority, can help pool and share resources, avoid a 'race to the bottom', and reduce inequalities across regions. Smaller territorial scales can generate social solidarity and the sense that inequalities *within* regions should be solved. States combine policies to reduce economic inequalities via fiscal and social security policies, and mitigate their effects via the delivery of public services. These tasks could be fully centralised or devolved to encourage joined up government, or spread across multiple levels to combine centralised fiscal policies with devolved public services. The latter can produce unintended consequences when, for example, minimally redistributive national policies combine with 'universal' regional services.

Research in IMAJINE Work Package 1 found that national and regional stakeholders frequently view 'spatial justice' and 'territorial inequalities' through the comparison of policies and policy outcomes between different regions or localities within hierarchical governance structures (Deliverable 1.4). Spatial injustice could be understood as restrictions on the capacity of regional and local actors take policy decisions to address perceived needs, but equally, the uneven distribution of resources to territorial authorities or differing outcomes from decisions made by regional or local authorities could be regarded as 'unjust' and cited as examples of territorial inequalities. Similarly, analysis in WP3 identified multi-level governance as a key factor in the effective coordination and delivery of regional development programmes (Deliverable 3.4), whilst the WP4 panel survey showed broad public support for the principle of MLG, with most respondents indicating a preference for some form of balance between centralised and decentralised government, but with variations in emphasis between nations and regions (Deliverable 4.3).

Indeed, MLG is an important mechanism in EU territorial cohesion policy as it seeks to balance solidarity and subsidiarity, and is seen in some quarters as an answer to demands for greater territorial autonomy, as explored in IMAJINE WP7 (Deliverable 7.4). Yet, although MLG is a widely referenced idea in policy discourse, there are gaps in social science understanding about what factors contribute to effective multi-level and multi-sectoral approaches to policy-making, about how policy learning between different territories and tiers of governance can be facilitated, and about the impacts of MLG on territorial cohesion and spatial inequalities. It is these questions that have been the focus of work in WP6.

The work in WP6 has involved two main components. The major component, primarily undertaken by the University of Stirling, has involved qualitative analysis of the formation and

implementation of policy within MLG structures and the contribution of MLG towards addressing specific inequalities, notably in education and health. As detailed in the next section, methods for data collection and analysis were required to be reoriented in response to disruption from the COVID-19 pandemic, with qualitative systematic review adopted as the core approach. The secondary component, undertaken by AUEB, has involved a quantitative analysis of fiscal transfers within MLG systems and their impacts in addressing inter-regional and intra-regional inequalities.

The findings from this work has been reported through a series of Deliverables (Table 1) and scientific publications (Table 2). This report summarises the conclusions from these elements and draws them together to articulate a synthesis of findings on multi-level governance and to posit recommendations for features of MLG required to support spatial justice and territorial cohesion.

Deliverable 6.1: Conceptual Framework for Empirical Research Deliverable 6.2: Summary Report on Multi-level Policymaking Deliverable 6.3: Working Paper on Fiscal Equalisation and Transfers Deliverable 6.4: Summary Report on Evidence-Based Policy Learning

Table 1: Previous WP6 Deliverables

Published

Cairney, P., St Denny, E. and Kippin, S. (2021) [‘Policy learning to reduce inequalities: the search for a coherent Scottish gender mainstreaming policy in a multi-level UK’](#), *Territory, Politics and Governance*, 9, 3, 412-33

Cairney, P., St Denny, E. and Mitchell, H. (2021) [‘The future of public health policymaking after COVID-19: a qualitative systematic review of lessons from Health in All Policies’](#), *Open Research Europe*, <https://open-research-europe.ec.europa.eu/articles/1-23>

Cairney, P. and Kippin, S. (2021) [‘The future of education equity policy in a COVID-19 world: a qualitative systematic review of lessons from education policymaking’](#), *Open Research Europe*, 1, 78.

Keating, M. (2021) [‘Beyond the nation-state: territory, solidarity and welfare in a multiscalar Europe’](#), *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 9, 3, 331-45

Kippin, S. and Cairney, P. (2021) [‘The COVID-19 exams fiasco across the UK: four nations and two windows of opportunity’](#), *British Politics*, early view

In Preparation / Forthcoming

Public Policy to Reduce Inequalities Across Europe. (Oxford: Oxford University Press) (Authors: Paul Cairney, Michael Keating, Sean Kippin, Emily St Denny).

‘Policy design for territorial equity in multi-level and multi-sectoral political systems: comparing health and education strategies’ forthcoming in *Regional Science Policy & Practice* [IMAJINE-led special issue ‘Design, implementation and evaluation of territorial inequalities policies’] (Authors: Paul Cairney, Sean Kippin, Emily St Denny, Heather Mitchell)

Addressing the expectations gap in preventive public health and ‘Health in All Policies’: how can policy theory help?” in in Fafard, P., de Leeuw, E. and Cassola, A. (eds.) *Public Health Political Science: Integrating Science and Politics for Public Health* (London: Palgrave)

Table 2: Scientific outputs from WP6

2. Methods

The work package has employed both qualitative and quantitative research methods in parallel work streams attached to specific tasks within the WP. The main body of work, encompassing Tasks 6.1 (Literature Review and Framework for Case Studies), 6.2 (Comparative Empirical Analysis of Multi-level Policymaking) and 6.4 (Framework for Evidence-based Policy Learning), has involved qualitative analysis of policy documents and other materials, including policy mapping and the production of a database on the division of policymaking responsibilities across the EU. In the initial work plan, it was proposed that Task 6.2 would additionally involve semi-structured interviews with policy practitioners (including civil servants and stakeholders from public bodies and third sector organizations) in selected case studies across multiple territories.

The interviews were intended to explore how policy actors working within MLG make sense of multi-faceted terms such as ‘inequalities’, and operationalise policies, to turn vague aims into detailed objectives; use public service delivery to mitigate the effects of socio-economic inequalities; ensure that long term policies designed to reduce inequalities are not undermined by short term electoral cycles, the protection of vested interests, the tendency for more immediate policy problems to divert resources, and the impact of austerity; manage competing pressures to organise policy responsibilities at a particular scale, such as supranational trends in human rights and environmental policies, national democratic accountability (to maintain country-wide responsibilities for uniform socio-economic policies), territorial identity and demands for autonomy, and the need for local public bodies to tailor public service delivery to their areas; and reform old public service delivery arrangements to respond to new policy agendas, including the rise of ‘new public management’ reforms and the impact of reduced budgets on universal services.

A first tranche of interviews was completed before the start of the COVID-10 pandemic, however plans for further interviews were disrupted by the restrictions on travel and meetings introduced to tackle the pandemic. Although some online interviews were possible, many of the intended interviewees were directly involved in the pandemic response and as such not available for interview, especially those working in the field of public health, which had been selected as one of the key thematic foci for the research.

Accordingly, the methodological emphasis of WP6 was pivoted to the technique of qualitative systematic review, which allowed the WP6 objectives to be completed through analysis of secondary data and previous studies whilst maintaining high standards of rigour. The qualitative systematic review method extends the approach of systematic reviews that is well established in the sciences to areas of the social sciences that primarily work with qualitative data. The technique involves formulating search terms to identify and interrogate a comprehensive set of previous studies on a specific research question; the critical appraisal of selected studies to distill key features, findings and qualifications; and the comparison of conclusions from across the identified studies to elicit overarching lessons.

In WP6, qualitative systematic reviews were undertaken of evidence from previous studies relating to policy responses to socio-spatial inequalities in the domains of education and health. The review of health-focused evidence was structured around the question ‘How does Health in All Policies (HiAP) research use policy theory to understand policymaking?’ and five sub-questions:

1. How many studies of HiAP provide a non-trivial reference to policymaking concepts or theories?
2. How do these HiAP studies describe policymaking?
3. How do these studies describe the ‘mechanisms’ of policy change (in other words, the causes of policy change that are vital to HiAP strategies)?
4. What transferable lessons do studies of HiAP provide? For example, what lessons for other governments do HiAP case studies provide?
5. How do HiAP studies relate health equity to concepts such as spatial justice?

A targeted search of eight databases identified 4972 articles relating to HiAP, which further screening reduced to 113 studies selected for detailed analysis. Information was extracted from these articles on the definition of HiAP and/or the context to justify the article’s focus, the ‘story’ of the paper (a summary of its key messages), what governments can learn, the role of politics and policymaking, country of author affiliation, country/region of study, policy sector or case study issue, the theory or concept discussed, and the ‘stage’ of the ‘policy cycle’ discussed, methods, article type (e.g. research, review, commentary). To address the IMAJINE focus on spatial justice and territorial inequalities, information was also extracted on the role of ‘space’ or ‘territory’ in explanation. An inductive qualitative approach was then employed to identify key themes and categories for each paper. More methodological details for this review and the findings are presented in Cairney et al. (2021a).

The education policy research review was similarly structured around the question ‘How does education equity research use policy theory to understand policymaking?’, with the sub-questions:

1. How many studies provide a non-trivial reference to policymaking concepts or theories?
2. How do these studies describe policymaking?
3. How do these studies describe the ‘mechanisms’ of policy change that are vital to equity strategies?
4. What transferable lessons do these studies provide? For example, what lessons for other governments do case studies provide?
5. How do these studies relate educational equity to concepts such as spatial justice?

An initial list of 109 articles were identified from a search of the Institute of Education Services research database (ERIC), with 31 further articles identified through ‘snow-balling’ using references cited by the initial articles. This produced a final set of 140 studies for analysis. Information was extracted from the texts on the definition of educational equity, the ‘story’

of the article (a summary of its key messages, and recommendations if provided), and the use of policymaking concepts, as well as on the country and region of the study, country and region of the author(s), policy or case study issue, research methods and article type.

An inductive qualitative approach was again used to identify key themes from each paper, such as contestation to define education equity, and the balance between centralised and decentralised approaches to policymaking. Immersion was used to understand how the research conceptualised policymaking. It was noted that in comparison to the literature on HiAP, studies on education equity exhibited a greater focus on critical policy analysis to problematise how policymakers define problems and seek solutions and a greater willingness and ability to understand policy processes, but very little instrumental use of policy theories. More methodological details for this review and the findings are presented in Cairney and Kippin (2021).

The application of the qualitative systematic review methodology has enabled WP6 to generate an interdisciplinary approach, using policy theories (from political science) to interpret empirical data produced by health and education researchers and relate it to insights on spatial justice from geographical research. This has also been reflected in revisiting evidence from earlier work packages in IMAJINE, notably WP1, and interpreting findings through a multi-level policymaking lens.

The quantitative dimension of research in WP6 has been focused on Task 6.3, the Comparative Analysis of Fiscal Equalisation and Transfer, undertaken by AUEB. This involved the application of microsimulation techniques, using the EUROMOD tax-benefit microsimulation model for the EU and the UK, to provide descriptive statistics and estimates of the impact of 2019 tax-benefit policies on poverty and within and between-region inequality. The analysis used micro-data from EU-SILC and the Family Resources Survey, to calculate the regional distribution of various income sources, such as market incomes, public pensions, means-tested and non-means-tested benefits, as well as the regional distribution of income taxes, property taxes and social insurance contributions. This analysis has been presented in Deliverable D6.3.

3. Synthesis of Findings on Multi-level Governance

The initial review of scientific literature and EU policy in Task 6.1 re-affirmed the significance of multi-level governance to the European social model and its approaches to questions of territorial cohesion and spatial justice. As presented in Keating (2021), the European welfare state was founded on the building blocks of nation-states, in which the nation provided affective solidarity and the state provided institutional capacity. In this model, coterminous boundaries for the economy and welfare bounded social and economic interests and encouraged social compromises. However, with spatial rescaling, economic regulation, welfare provision and political identities have migrated to new levels, not only through the

consolidation of EU policy coordination, but also through devolution, localism and enhanced territorial autonomy to regions and cities that are presented as competing for economic development.

This rescaling has introduced prospects of both a 'race to the bottom' and a 'race to the top', as described in Keating (2021). The risk of a 'race to the bottom' emerges as empowered regions seek to introduce deregulation and cut spending in order to attract mobile capital, whilst the prospect of a 'race to the top' follows from regions experimenting with new forms of social provision. In both contexts, the fragmentation of national economic and welfare policies has the potential to increase inequalities between territories, whilst ideas of spatial justice are challenged as regional identities undermine national solidarity but new forms of affective solidarity emerge at different scales. Achieving a balance between solidarity and territorial autonomy and managing resulting regional disparities and perceptions of spatial injustice are key challenges for MLG.

The identification of these tensions and challenges resonates with evidence from interviews with national and regional stakeholders conducted in IMAJINE WP 1 (see Deliverable 1.4), which have been revisited as part of WP6. As discussed in more detail in Deliverable 6.2 (as well as in chapter 1 of the forthcoming monograph *Public Policy to Reduce Inequalities Across Europe* and in a forthcoming paper as part of an IMAJINE special issue in the journal *Regional Science Policy and Practice*), the research in WP1 identified high levels of ambiguity among stakeholders concerning policy concepts such as territorial cohesion and spatial justice, but also significant hope that MLG would help to address territorial inequalities by encouraging cooperation between levels and types of government to reduce policy problems. This points to three key observations that have been important in informing the subsequent work in WP6.

First, there is a *gap between expectations and experiences of multi-level policymaking*, which in turn highlights differences between visions of multi-level policymaking. On the one hand, as a policymaking design, MLG is seen as a choice by many levels and types of governments to cooperate in a way that allows them to produce policies independently *and* contribute to a wider coherent agenda. On the other hand, scientific conceptualisation in policy studies presents the absence of a single centralised government as a necessary condition of complex, advanced societies and uses MLG to highlight perennial gaps between policymaking design and actual processes.

A review of policy studies literature further shows that decisions over the distribution of policymaking competences within MLG tend not to emerge from detached technical analysis, but from contests over how should hold power in a political system in debates over issues such as autonomy and self-determination, as examined further in IMAJINE WP7. As such, the multi-level distribution of responsibilities to address territorial inequalities amplifies policy ambiguity and contestation. There is scope to agree on the broad meaning and implications

of policy aims such as spatial justice, but also great potential for confusion and contradiction when governments adopt specific policies independently of each other.

Second, there are *tensions between scales and modes of policymaking*. Although stakeholders interviewed in WP1 expressed broad support for the principle of decentralization, many also referred to tensions between different levels of government. These tensions in part related to specific relationships, such as between central government and local authorities, but also between so-called 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches to policymaking in general. 'Bottom-up' approaches prioritise autonomy not only in making decisions, but also the autonomy to define the territorial unit most appropriate to the task. In this they contrast with 'top-down' models in which the scales and territories for delegated policymaking are set by a central authority and outcomes monitored and evaluated by national or EU institutions. Accordingly, by leaning towards one or other of these approaches, central governments both encourage *and* discourage decentralization in different ways, and a vague commitment to a decentralization principle does not help to predict what happens next.

Third, *there are many ways to pursue equity in different policy sectors*. The stakeholders interviewed in WP1 commonly articulated an association between spatial justice or territorial equity and the equal distribution of access to services. In this they reflected a broader trend in EU discourse, identified in reviews of policy documents, political statements and scientific literature in both WP1 and WP2, that is moving from an emphasis on territorial inequalities measured through collective economic indicators (such as GDP per capita) to understanding territorial inequalities as disparities in individual opportunities. As argued in Cairney et al. (forthcoming a), this shift adds a further dimension to spatial justice policy: multi-sectoral policymaking. Accordingly, subsequent work in WP6 has explored the relationship between the independent pursuit of equity (or attempts to reduce unfair inequalities) in multiple policy sectors such as health and education as well as intersectoral initiatives in relation to spatial justice and gender mainstreaming.

Task 6.2 built on the observations derived by revisiting WP1 by undertaking a policy mapping exercise, charting the distribution of responsibilities in selected policy fields in selected European countries (Deliverable 6.2). The analysis revealed a highly complex situation, in which governmental structures and the allocation of competences between different scales and agencies not only varies between countries, but is never absolute or clear-cut, with significant inter-dependencies and ambiguities in the distribution between different bodies. Moreover, public-facing descriptions of governmental bodies and their competences indicate little about the actual practice of policymaking. Each country has its own narrative about the relationship between policy sectors and levels of government. Hence, whilst the policy mapping exercise helped to develop an initial sense of MLG, it also highlighted the difficulty of providing a simple comparison between states.

The complexity of MLG arrangements serves to obscure dynamics of multi-level policymaking both from researchers and from practitioners and stakeholders engaged in the system. As

such, the conclusions from Task 6.2 identified key ways in which MLG can exacerbate the problem of spatial justice, in which there is high uncertainty about who is responsible for policy instruments and outcomes, and intergovernmental relations only address coordination issues somewhat. The uncertainty begins when policymakers seek to identify which policy tools and instruments are most relevant to inequalities, and which level or type of government has responsibility for each instrument. It continues when formal responsibilities and informal powers are not described well in the public record, and is completed when attempts are made to compare responsibilities across countries. However, policymakers manage complexity in simple ways, by limiting their focus to a small number of countries from which they would like to learn, as examined in Deliverable 6.4, and to which we return later.

Further evidence of the complexities and ambiguities surrounding perceptions and expectations of multi-level governance has subsequently been provided by the IMAJINE panel survey in WP4 (see Deliverable D4.3). Key findings from the survey indicate relatively high levels of public support across the eight countries surveyed for the principle of 'vertical solidarity', that is that the national government should take responsibility for providing for the wealth and prosperity of regions, but slightly lower support for the concept of 'horizontal solidarity', where there is a responsibility on wealthier regions to support poorer regions. The difference is significant for MLG, as the former implies a more centralised state whereas the latter implies greater inter-regional cooperation within a multi-level system.

The survey also suggests that the rescaling of affective solidarity, referred to in Keating (2021), is differentially realised in different countries. When asked whether they supported the provision of financial resources from richer to poorer regions in their country, between richer and poorer regions in Europe, and to less developed countries globally, the greatest number of respondents in France, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK supported redistribution within their own country, whilst more respondents in Italy, Poland and Romania supported assistance for less developed countries. Only in Spain was intra-European redistribution favoured. Support for redistributing resources to assist poorer regions within Europe ranged from 86% in Spain and Romania to just 48% in the Netherlands (see Deliverable D4.3 for details).

At the same, the WP4 survey also shows public support in general for the concept of multi-level governance, with a majority of respondents favouring some form of decentralised state but with some notable variations. The plurality in most of the surveyed countries favoured only limited decentralisation, with regions only having competence in a few policy areas, the exceptions being Poland and Romania, where a federal structure, with regions having full competence in most policy areas was favoured. Federalism was also the preferred option in several nations and regions with strong territorial autonomy movements including Catalonia, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Italy. The survey additionally revealed diversity in public opinion with regard to which policy competences should be exercised at different levels of governance. Policymaking on culture and infrastructure are the areas that respondents most

strongly favoured being exercised at the regional scale, while there was a moderate-to-low preference for the decentralisation of policy areas that have a close and direct impact on citizens' lives, such as education, health and welfare (see Figure 1).

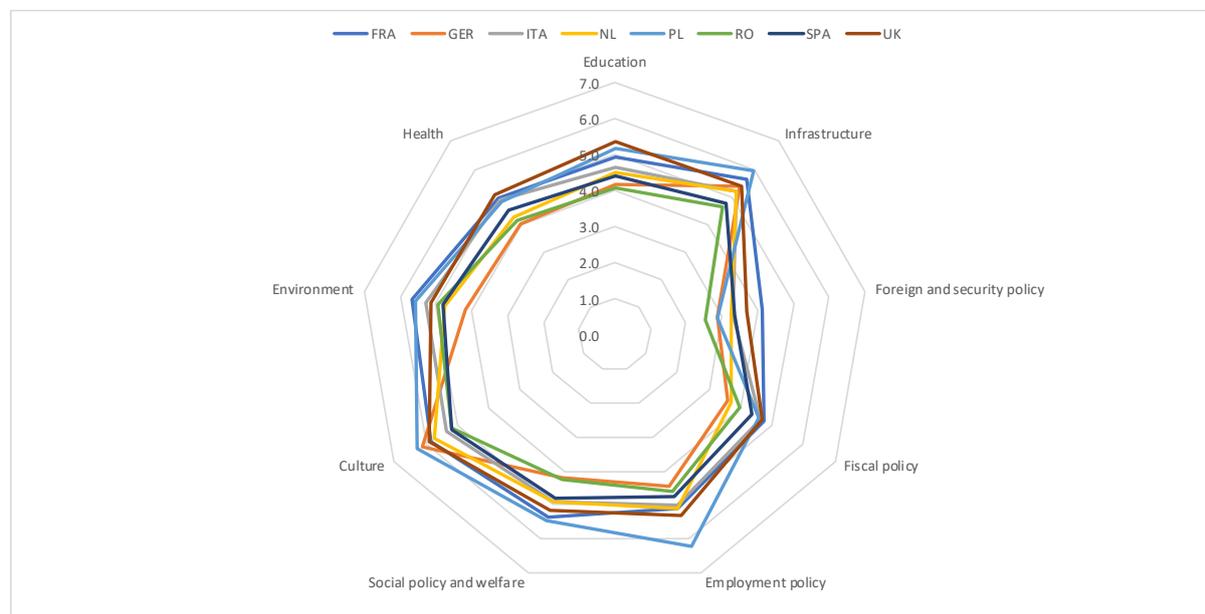


Figure 1: Preferences for the level of policymaking in selected policy areas. Average scores by respondent country on a 10-point scale. 0 = 'The central state should have full competence', 5 = 'Competences should be equally shared between the central state and regions', 10 = 'Regions should have full competence'. (Reproduced from Deliverable D4.3).

Interestingly, however, when asked to assess the performance of different levels of governance in an immediate and real situation – the management of the COVID-19 pandemic – respondents rated the response of local and regional governments above that of national governments in all the survey countries, and above that of the EU in all countries apart from Romania.

These public perceptions, like the views of stakeholders captured in WP1, are informed by a wide range of influences, including cultural and identity-based as well as economic motivations, as reflected in the claims of territorial autonomy movements examined in IMAJINE WP7. However, it is safe to conjecture that financial considerations are significant factor and that these are likely to at least in part explain some of the findings observed in WP4. For example, whilst there is interestingly little difference in attitudes towards inter-regional solidarity between more and less developed countries within the same country, it is perhaps not surprising that respondents in EU countries with lower GDP per capita expressed greater support for intra-European solidarity than respondents in countries with higher GDP. In particular, the substantially lower level of support for intra-European solidarity in the

Netherlands probably reflects a high profile debate over contributions to the EU budget (and especially inter-state transfers for COVID response and post-COVID recovery) a few months before the survey was conducted in October 2021, in which the Netherlands government had been a leading protagonist. Similarly, relatively high levels of support for decentralisation in some wealthier regions such as Northern Italy may be linked to a reluctance to share resource with regions that are perceived to be less well governed (this conjecture is supported by the detailed survey data in WP4).

These interpretations are significant for questions around the balance between expectations of multi-level governance and delivery. As noted in Keating (2021), the concept of ‘fiscal federalism’ hold that MLG systems need to retain strong redistributive competences at the centre in order to mitigate the impacts of decentralisation in other policy areas in widening territorial inequalities. The redistributive powers of the EU are constrained, such that the main mechanism for redistributing resources to target regional inequalities is through the European Regional Development Fund, the efficacy of which has been critiqued in IMAJINE WP2 and WP3. At member state level, national governments have a wider range of fiscal tools at their disposal, including through the tax and benefits system, which can have spatial effects without being spatially targeted or differentiated.

The analysis completed in Task 6.3 and reported in Deliverable D6.3 however identified tensions between the effectiveness of specific measures in addressing social inequalities and their impact on territorial inequalities. It found that policies that are the most efficient in terms of poverty reduction at the local level are not necessarily equally effective in mitigating regional inequalities. As the Task 6.3 analysis also shows that inequalities between social groups within a region is the major component in explaining total inequality, such policies can still be significant in promoting perceptions of social and spatial justice, however the analysis suggests that there is little additional benefit to be gained by devolving responsibility for taxation and welfare policies to regional authorities. Taxation policies do not appear to be able to change the balance of intra-regional and inter-regional factors in the structure of inequality, even in countries with strong regional elements in their income tax policies, such as Spain and Italy. This result highlights the core role that nationwide policies play in the shaping of the overall inequality pattern of a country even within MLG systems.

The role of multi-level governance in addressing territorial inequalities is not restricted to financial redistribution or the allocation of resources. Returning to the conclusion from WP1 that regional stakeholders frequently perceive territorial inequalities and spatial justice in relation to access to services, the qualitative systematic reviews have interrogated the inclusion of regional equity in policies for key public services in education and health. This focus has also reflected the importance of non-economic drivers of territorial inequality identified in WP2 and WP3, including the finding reported in Deliverable 3.3 that level of education is the most significant variable explaining local scale inequalities for municipalities in Italy and Spain. As argued in Cairney et al (forthcoming b), this analysis provides a

cautionary tale about equating justice (or fairness, or equity) with equal access to services. In studies of health equity, the HIAP agenda focuses on the need to move away from healthcare services towards the social determinants of health. In studies of education equity, research highlights a tendency for equal access agendas to contribute heavily to the appearance of equity while maintaining unequal outcomes.

A key conclusion that emerges from the qualitative systematic reviews, but also from the work in Tasks 6.2 and 6.3, is the importance of policy learning. This includes learning between countries about effective strategies for managing the distribution of responsibilities within MLG to promote spatial justice and learning between different agencies within a MLG structure on specific policies and actions. As discussed in Cairney et al. (2021b), policy learning can in particular be a way of addressing the policy ‘incoherence’ that is a risk arising from the complexity of MLG. Policy ‘incoherence’ describes a lack of joined-up government that contributes to a confusing mix of policy instruments. It is an inevitable feature of multi-level policymaking, in which many actors compete to set the agenda, and ‘inequalities policies’, such as gender mainstreaming, which contain multiple and often contradictory aims. This insight may prompt policymakers to learn how other governments have responded pragmatically, rather than seeking to design abstract mainstreaming policies with unrealistic levels of coherence. Yet, policy learning is a political process characterized by contestation. Many policymakers compete to define the policy problem, set the parameters for learning and determine which governments should take the lead.

Case studies of policy learning were explored through Task 6.4 and reported in Deliverable 6.4. These case studies highlighted the potential virtues of general approaches, often described as system-wide collaboration, co-production, collaborative, or multi-level governance, or joined-up government. However, many of these likely benefits are assumed, and more systematic public administration studies may provide more useful lessons.

Many strengths of the systems providing lessons appear to rest on a well-developed policymaking infrastructure specific to that country. The more we relate policy progress to a country’s history and institutions, the less confident we can be about transferring specific lessons about policy instruments. Case studies often highlight the need to balance (a) policy coherence driven by a central government with clear aims (perhaps backed by high capacity to commission research), and (b) local discretion, to help make and implement decisions at a level closer to the country's citizens, and to co-produce and tailor policies to local communities. They raise unresolved issues regarding the trade-offs between centralised and localised action. For example, local initiatives may emerge in a profoundly different form than HIAP (or perhaps gender mainstreaming) scholars envisaged.

Drawing together these findings from across the different elements of WP6, four summative conclusions can be posited as to the factors that are required to enable multi-level governance to support successful territorial cohesion policies. These are:

1. *A well-designed system of MLG with an optimal division of policymaking responsibilities.* We find that the devolution of policymaking responsibilities is more likely to relate to political debates and movements, such as territorial government demands for greater autonomy (discussed in WP7).
2. *Well-coordinated MLG and a coherent collection of regional and sectoral policies (via intersectoral action and collaboration inside and outside of government).* We find that it is difficult to find coherence *within* each regional or sectoral strategy (including intersectoral efforts to foster equity in relation to health, education, and gender). This limitation makes it difficult to imagine policy and policymaking coherence if each strategy were to speak to the other (a rare event).
3. *Systematic policy learning within the EU, states, and regions.* We find that policy learning – to inform potential policy transfer - is not a routine feature of spatial justice and equity policy and policymaking. Further, the division of many policymaking responsibilities across a complex and multi-level EU policymaking system makes it difficult to know *who* exactly is responsible for learning *what*.
4. *An assurance that spatially equal access to services fosters equity and justice.* We find, from the study of health and education equity strategies, that equal access to services can represent a misleading and damaging proxy for equity.

Overall, these insights help to identify the ambiguity of spatial justice as a concept, the contestation to define it (and related terms such as equity) in policy and practice, and the rather limited results of spatial justice and sectoral equity strategies.

4. Further Research

The disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic has delayed two planned items of work which whilst not central to the specific objectives of WP6 build on the research undertaken to date and would contribute to the overall objectives of IMAJINE. It is still intended to complete these studies within the period of IMAJINE, subject to restrictions and resources, and to make them available as stand-alone IMAJINE working papers or scientific publications.

The first is a case study of ***health equity and spatial justice in the pandemic response in Greece***, to be completed as a collaboration between US and HUA. This proposed work builds on the qualitative systematic review of research on HiAP as a mechanism to promote health equity and addresses the shortcoming that the reviewed studies were all written prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and focused non-communicable diseases. The COVID-19 pandemic has raised awareness of health inequalities, but initial assessment suggests that policy responses have not followed the trajectory that would have been anticipated from previous work on the HiAP narrative.

COVID-19 should have prompted governments to treat health improvement as fundamental to public policy. Many had made strong rhetorical commitments to public health strategies focused on preventing an epidemic of NCDs. To do so, they would address the ‘social determinants’ of health, defined by the WHO as ‘the unfair and avoidable differences in health status’ that are ‘shaped by the distribution of money, power and resources’ and ‘the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age’. COVID-19 reinforces this rationale. First, social determinants relate to health improvement (health inequalities resulting from factors such as income and social and environmental conditions) *and* health protection (people’s ability to live and work safely). Second, COVID-19 had a visibly disproportionate impact on the mortality and health of people with underlying health conditions associated with NCDs. *Yet, the opposite happened. The COVID-19 response sidelined health improvement.* Health departments postponed health improvement and moved resources to health protection. This new experience reinforces longer term experiences of limited progress to address the health inequalities associated with NCDs. Most country studies lament a major gap between HIAP commitment and actual outcomes.

The proposed case study of public health responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in Greece will explore this paradox by examining three gaps in research identified in the qualitative systematic review: the role of spatial justice and territorial engagement in HiAP; the significance of inequalities in direct access to healthcare services and in indirect access via services such as public transport; and inequalities in relation to migration. A focus on these aspects in Greece helps identify a ‘perfect storm’ of multiple causes of health inequalities: the unequal spread of NCDs among particularly marginalised populations, exacerbated by the social determinants of COVID-19 (only some can live and work safely at home), and unequal access to healthcare services to treat pre-existing conditions/ NCDs. As such, it provides an exemplar case study with the potential to provide more general lessons about mutually reinforcing causes of inequalities.

The second intended study builds on the analysis of fiscal equalisation and transfers in Task 6.3 and would be undertaken by AUEB. This would examine the ***regional effects of fiscal adjustment programmes***. Previous research has found the effects of fiscal adjustment programmes to be detrimental for both output and inequality: output falls on impact and remains below trend for some years, while income inequality rises persistently. On the other hand, the regional effects of such programs are completely neglected by the existing literature. Whereas obtaining ready-made inequality measures for different regions might be hard, so studying the effects of such programs of regional inequality might be difficult, real output measures are much easily obtained from official sources. We plan to evaluate the effect of fiscal adjustment programs by estimating dynamic models, combining the methodologies of Alesina *et al.*, (2015) and Jordà and Taylor, (2016) and applying them on regional output data: both GDP and Gross Value Added (GVA). These models allow for the identification of the *average treatment effects* of such programs. In addition, we aim at

establishing whether there are significant regional differences of tax-based vs. expenditure-based programs, placing a special emphasis on the reduction of transfer payments.

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