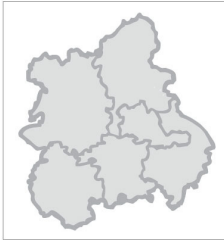


Localise



West Midlands

Introduction to the Extending Localisation project

Localise West Midlands' *Extending Localisation* (EL) project is a practical response to the interconnected challenges of climate change; peak resources and the inequities of global economic markets.

Localisation can be seen as an approach which seeks to establish future-resistant strategies for firms that are starting to experience the high cost of peak resources and carbon taxes associated with long-distance procurement and distribution. More broadly, localisation can also be seen to encompass a wider reassessment of the structures of commerce to better provide for the needs of local people with local resources in engaged, equitable and sustainable communities. These approaches to localisation, far from being mutually exclusive, are mutually reinforcing and EL is very much concerned with the full beneficial impacts of the latter.

It is important to clarify that in the EL project, localisation is not considered synonymous with traditional notions of protectionism. Traditional protectionism, as seen in the early periods of globalisation, was a strategy intended to enhance the wealth of a few strong firms. Localisation in EL project also seeks to protect trade, but the trade of small-scale diverse networks of locally embedded firms that are vulnerable to the leverage of large national and international corporations. As Land and Hines (1993) argue, there is a need to reclaim the meaning of 'protectionism' where protection infers healing of social and ecological environments.

The EL project analyses good localisation practice around the West Midlands region; and does so in order to identify the barriers that may prevent excellent small scale localised practice from becoming the wider scale norm. Using this analysis, EL identifies the policy changes and local support mechanisms that will be required to extend localisation in the region.

There is a new immediacy to this localisation agenda. The recent banking crisis and ensuing recession has revealed, more clearly and to more people, the implications of a decades-old trend towards ever-larger and more globalised commercial institutions. The ideology of profit maximisation and growth implicit in this trend has led to a disconnection between communities and commerce and a significant loss of the local distinctiveness. It is common experience in the UK that once diverse and thriving independent local trade has given way to 'clone town' uniformity; and in parallel the local circulation of money amongst local independent stakeholders has been siphoned off to a minority of non-local shareholders.

The EL project is about a direction of travel and a practical, evidenced approach. The project is not focused on the creation of an abstract ideological discourse; though clearly it is informed by an ideology of equity and sustainability. There is no set boundary for 'local' – it means simply aiming for the nearest available source that meets one's requirements. In light of this the report also includes activities that support localisation good practice in other areas and countries: the West Midlands is where we can effect change, but we share responsibility for our impacts on local economic welfare across the world.

Following responses to this initial report we will continue to research local experience within the region and produce more detailed recommendations for all stakeholders in economic activity: from regional policymakers to those running local businesses. Some of these will be ideas and initiatives that can be implemented now; others will require significant political commitment and change.

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Key impacts that can be affected through a localisation approach:

- Reduction of inefficiencies in the long-distance transportation of goods, services and raw materials;
- Reduction of impact on business travel and commuting;
- Remaking local distinctiveness and area character;
- Empowerment through local ownership of businesses and local accountability;
- Rebalancing of the relative power of producers, suppliers and consumers within the supply chain;
- Encouraging diversity and healthy competition amongst local businesses;
- The potential for local knowledge and stakeholdership to reduce the need for regulation;
- Redirection of money to local circulation and adding value into a community;
- Increased wellness factors through reconnection of people to trade
- Revaluation of social capital and the value of community trade;
- Increase in local material flows and reuse/ recycling of waste materials;
- Increased resilience to the rapid fluctuations of global markets;
- Redistribution of wealth through trade to benefit communities, locally through to globally.

Localise West Midlands
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