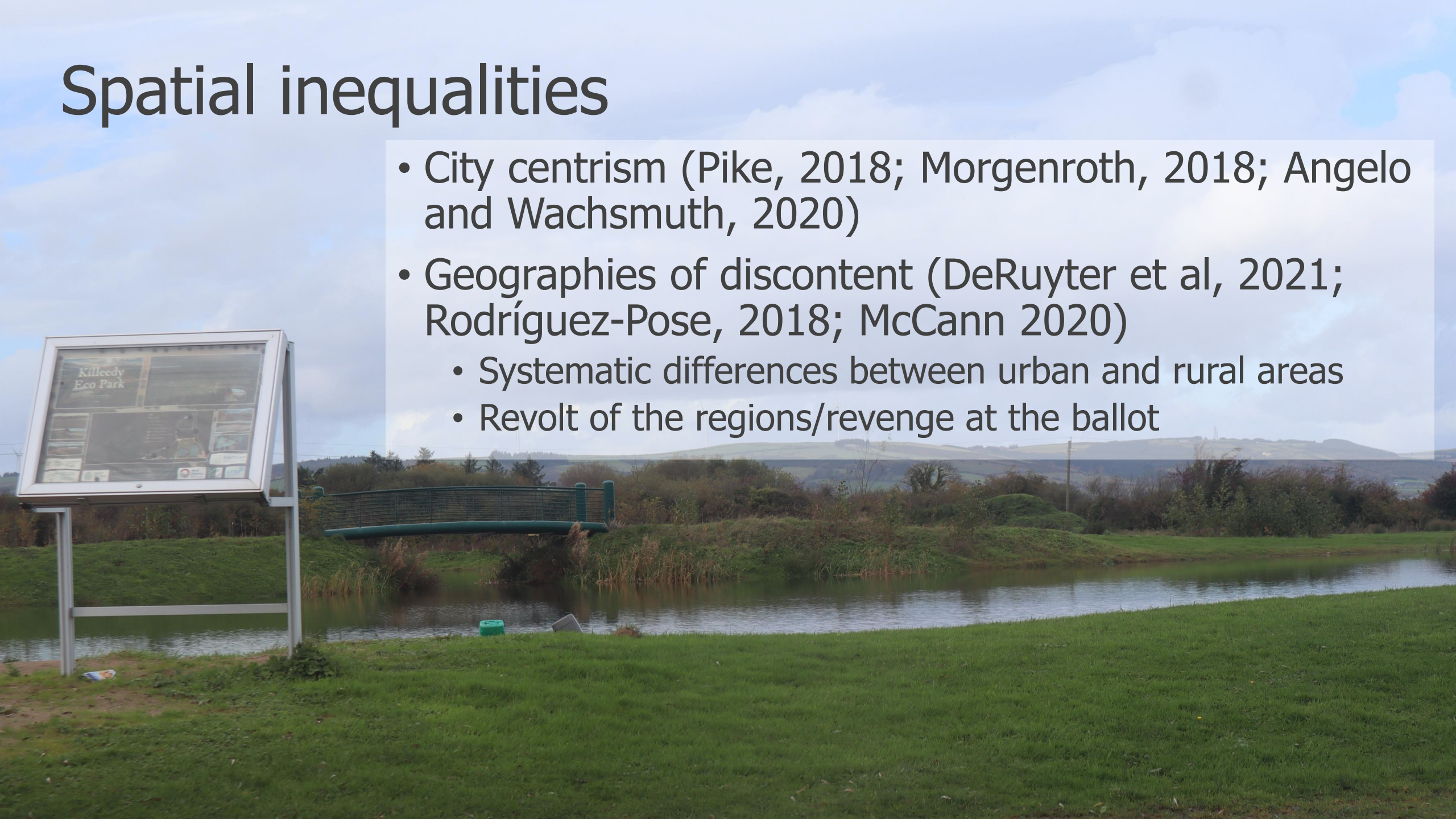# Achieving Regional Equality

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Spatial inequalities

- City centrism (Pike, 2018; Morgenroth, 2018; Angelo and Wachsmuth, 2020)

- Geographies of discontent (DeRuyter et al, 2021; Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; McCann 2020)
  - Systematic differences between urban and rural areas
  - Revolt of the regions/revenge at the ballot

Factors contributing to spatial inequality in Ireland

- One of the most centralised states in the EU (Reidy 2018; Breathnach, 2010)
  - Lack of meaningful tier of regional or local government
  - No regional identity
- Lack of urban & metropolitan policy (Moore-Cherry and Tomaney, 2019; Breathnach, 2014)
- Dominant rural representation (Callan and Loughlin, 2021; Daly, 1984)

Immature multi-level governance

Regional development

- Regionalism is messy and incremental
- Regions are always becoming, rather than being (Paasit and Metzger, 2017)
- Help the "becoming" go in the right direction.
  - Identify places that require policy interventions
- Social infrastructure (Tomaney et al, 2023)
- Social capital (Rodríguez-Pose, 2021)
- Place and well-being (Tomaney, 2017; MacKinnon, 2019)

Cities, Governance and Sustainability

Co-production of knowledge

- Place-based

- Co-learning

- Semi-structured interviews

- Walk/talks

Place evaluation

"I think we are so focused on kind of this idea that economic development is only driven by large population clusters and often miss the economy that is going on outside of all of that."

"I feel that a lot of times like closing any services around here, somebody from the top says, 'Ok, we have to arrive at this figure, do what you have to do to get to this figure,' and they chop chop chop and like, no one looks at the consequences of it."

"I suppose people's personal geography is a defining factor that they don't maybe think about."

Realities

Concern with neglecting quality of life benefits found in smaller settlements

Hard fought for services diminishing:

- School bus routes, autism services in schools, community centres and senior services

Localities want to feel empowered to drive growth rather than deriving benefits from cities

Gateways vs Gatekeepers

Emergent forms of competition:

- To attract resources away from regional cities
- To compete against each other, leading to arguments around hierarchical rankings (i.e. key town versus town versus small town, etc.).

Highlight strengths to make places gateways and not gatekeepers.

Identify strengths

"… I think they are coming at it from the wrong mindset, they are trying to compete directly with the city, they are putting everything in there. Stop looking at the city, look at what you have and look at how you can make it better."

Economic
Tourism
Transport hub
Factory

Cited quality of life amenities

Swimming pool   Better broadband
Cinema   Late night dining
Theatre
Hospitals and health care

Prioritise accessibility to social infrastructure that allows people to have a higher quality of life.

Build capacity

- Empower and resource community leaders
- Bridge settlements proximate to each other
- Develop social infrastructure 'mind map'
- Valorise and maintain hard-fought services
- Use policy to help communities maintain social bonds and community capital

Educate and build awareness

"But key to what? I have a fundamental problem with that. I think that all of the towns of County Cork should be on a level par and they can be certainly categorised as regards key for x, key for something. So, sorry you stoked the fire there now. I mean who actually designated that?"

- Transparency
- Training elected members
- Definitional and functional clarity of metropolitan and regional scale

Ensure representational diversity

"…so I'd say a good percentage of our time range at various meetings would have been taken up with something like consideration of one-off rural housing, and it's not necessarily to the detriment of urban or city issues, but this, kind of, crowding out, not necessarily deliberately as I say, but crowding out discussions of things that might be more relevant to cities."

Create strong collegiate networks

"I mean, there's no fellow feeling with Wexford or with Wicklow in County Cork. There's no animosity, but there's no commonality, you know?"

Promote success

"...'Right, ok, what's different now that there is a RSES compared to before where there wasn't necessarily that impetus for that cooperation?' So we'll be able to say in five or ten years down the line, 'This is something that happened as a result of the RSES and it was something beneficial.'"

Why it matters

- Establish legitimacy, purpose, function and benefit of regional and metropolitan tiers

- Increase awareness of regional assembly

- Exert pressure on central government and its departments to better acknowledge the capacities of sub-national government and to finance them appropriately.

- Prevent perception of regional assemblies and their executives as agents of central government but rather as independent organisational bodies in need of greater autonomy.

Cities, Governance and Sustainability

Thank you

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