Minister Půček, Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to be allowed to speak to you as an academic who has made it his business, as a spatial planner, to study EU regional and cohesion policy, and in particular territorial cohesion policy. The difference between regional and cohesion policy has everything to do with my theme:

Where is the local in local development?

I start with the rise of the local and local initiatives. In the 1970s, French state funds earmarked for the Bretagne were reduced because the new European Regional Development Fund gave Community support to this region. The logic behind this was that EU regional policy was there to subsidise national budgets. This against a view of the EU as a club of member states where other authorities where not at the negotiating table.

The change came with Integrated Mediterranea Programmes involving local stakeholders in programming, based on the argument that development is inevitably local in that actors have addresses; they live in places which they know and generally love.

It follows that opportunities and constraints are best identified and dealt with locally, and this is the philosophy also behind cohesion policy. The Lisbon Strategy, too, is in the end local development.

In fact though, it was local authorities as the proxies of ‘the local’ that were the winners. However, a local administration within its given jurisdiction may, or may not, be the relevant reference point for indentifying ‘the local’. In other words,
there is a danger of merely replacing a large box – the nation-state – with many small containers.

More generally speaking, the danger is thinking exclusively in terms of administrative containers.

Evidence from Germany shows, however, the conditions of success in local development to be networking and cooperation in clusters involving private stakeholders, and place-branding. Why? Because ultimately the success of local development hinges on an orientation to external markets. So casting a clear image is important. Where, however, does this locate the local?

Let me give another, more personal example. I am a proud citizen of the lovely ancient city of Delft, but the emotions are not evoked by the abstract jurisdiction, but by the city centre, where I live, and also the university campus where I walk to on my way to work. There are also the railway and the motorway giving me access to my extended network. Not living at Delft, other university staff have even less affinity with the jurisdiction. So, is Delft University of Technology of Delft? Is it local development. The spin-offs are not contained by the Delft boundaries, and the competitors are other universities worldwide. So, where is the local in local development?

The answer is: the local is not a given, but the outcome of process, of forming coalitions around projects. Local development may relate to parts of, or it may be criss-crossing bounded jurisdictions.

But for government, and for democratic legitimacy, we need containers. The problem is that, from within them, we face a world of networks. To put it differently:

- local development takes place in soft spaces formed ad-hoc by whoever comes on board;

- local authorities operate in fixed, hard spaces as containers.
In fact, government and administration at all levels, and not just the local one is boxed in.

Again an example: When Dutch parliament discussed the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion, the issue raised by parliamentarians was generally not Community value. It was: what’s in it for the electorate? They were boxed in by the conditions of democratic elections.

Asking for the local in local development thus makes us face a dilemma: How to face a world of networks from within boxes.

Replacing the boxes with larger ones, or splitting them up – government reorganisation – is ultimately no answer. It’s merely reshuffling the boxes.

Nor is creating one large EU box as a depository of all our problems. It would be a very large box indeed!

So the problem is being boxed in.

Indeed, we need to recognise that we are torn between

- dealing in ad-hoc manner with the soft spaces of projects and
- hard regulations and budgets administered by jurisdictions.

The problem is particularly virulent in cross-border and transnational situations. European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation and, on a different level, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region are interesting attempts to deal with this problem outside the box.

More experiments of this kind, involving territorial cooperation and mutual learning are needed.

Why? Because of uncertainty, reflecting the condition we are in. This condition is characterised by a three-fold dilemma:
• we have a controversial EU trying to cope with globalisation;

• we have nation-states that are changing, but in which direction we don’t know;

• boundaries around jurisdictions no longer give protection.

Indeed, we need to re-think how to deal with development in soft spaces. Authorities dealing in regulations and budgets – hard measures relating to hard spaces for which they have a clear responsibility – are but one element of the equation. What is needed are soft methods: qualitative analyses and joint strategies. Indeed, there can and should be many such strategies for the many hard and soft spaces in our splintering world.

The outcome will be confusing, but we should not resist complexity. At the same time, we should continue to promote coherence and cooperation.

With this I end by recapping my answer to the question: where is the local in local development? It is where stakeholders decide to cooperate on joint projects, pursuing a strategy, or vision, helping them to find their bearings in the complex and confusing world of the 21st Century.

Thank you very much for your attention!