

III CONFERENCE ON PUBLIC POLICIES

PLACE BASED POLICIES

TERRITORIAL PLANNING AND SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT (P3DT)

Place-Based Policies - III Conference On Public Policies, Territorial Planning and Spatial Development. / José Alberto Rio Fernandes, Inês Rocha, Thiago Monteiro Mendes (Organizadores). - Porto, 2018.

ISBN: 978-989-54104-4-6

Suporte: Eletrónico

Formato: PDF / PDF/A

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V. N de Gaia, 1-2 March 2018

The role of the spatial dimension in development policies. Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Strategies, an example from Spain.

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Abstract

Since 2015, Spain has developed three public calls for cities pursuing to obtain financial support from the ERDF fund in terms of Urban Sustainability. To this purpose, the Urban Initiatives Network (RIU) produced a guideline oriented to the elaboration of the different Strategies of Integrated Sustainable Urban Development (EDUSI). The strategies must territorially delimit the scope of the action, must reflect an integrated analysis and a diagnosis on which an action plan will be developed. The action plan that can be monitored and assessed in the future thanks to a series of indicators. Public participation and the thematic objectives defined in the ESDP are transversal axes of the whole strategy. By now, 123 strategies have been approved and are currently in their development phase.

Keywords: Integrated, Sustainable, Urban, Development, Spain

1. Introduction

In November, the British astrologist⁷ Martin Rees was interviewed at the University of Porto, where he pointed out “This century is special. It’s the first in 45 million centuries that the Earth existed when one species, namely ours, can determine the planet's fate”. In recent decades, concern about the future of the planet has increased. Climate Change conferences (Bodansky, 2010), warnings from the scientific and academic communities and the depletion of natural resources lead us to think of a future plenty of radical changes (Ripple et al., 2017). In some sense, what should be addressed is how we manage the Earth, not only from a negative point of view reduced to a dark future and a frightening final countdown, but from a conscious and active present in which we assume the inescapable questioning of social, territorial and economic management model. The warnings produced by the oil crisis in 1973 resulted in a complete reformulation of our way of seeing the planet. On the one hand, there is an economic reaction, based on liberalization and obtaining benefits in a short period (Peck, 2010)., On the other, the emergence of social movements focused on environmentalism, limits-to-growth and sustainability (Brundtland, 1987).

At the European level, the alterations produced by economic and social structures demanded a

⁷ <http://tv.up.pt/videos/ttlp-czo>

critical review of the principles governing the organisation of space to avoid their being wholly determined by short-term economic objectives without taking into consideration social, cultural and environmental aspects (CEMAT, 1983). Thus, was agreed in the 6th Conference of European Ministers responsible for Regional Planning held at Torremolinos (Spain) in 1983, which is considered as a milestone in the history of regional planning in Europe. Despite institutional announcements, it was not until 1999 in Potsdam (Germany) that the European Union included the spatial approach (ESDP, 1999). For all these reasons, its geographical interest is unquestionable. The document is a landmark for the development policies across Europe because of the inclusion of transversal aspects such as the overcoming of sectoral policies in favour of an integrated perspective, the reduction of regional disparities, and the goal of achieving a sustainable development. In this huge task, the role of the Structural Funds and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in particular, was and is still crucial. Among the key principles of European Regional policy, Urban Sustainability is the main one. The economic resources invested in urban areas within the period 2014-2020 will be more than 50% of the ERDF. Almost 70 % of the EU population lives in an urban area, and these areas generate more than two thirds of the EU's GDP. However, they are also places where persistent problems are concentrated. (European Commission, 2014).

The second chapter of ERDF regulation is concerned with specific provisions on the treatment of particular territorial features. It includes, in the article 7, a statement oriented to sustainable urban development. Therefore, its first point is aimed at supporting integrated strategies that tackle the economic, environmental, social and demographic challenges of urban areas. The second one announces that integrated territorial investment should be undertaken through a specific operational program. The third epigraph details that each Member State shall establish its Partnership Agreement (EU Regulation, 2013). In 2015, the European Commission approved the Operative Program for Sustainable growth in Spain for the period 2014-2020. This program was announced as a help to recover the competitiveness of Spanish economy through a more sustainable resource efficient model under four priorities:

1. Transition towards a low carbon economy (39%)
2. Sustainable transport (30%)
3. Sustainable and integrated urban development (18%)
4. Improved water quality (13%).

According to Steurer et al. (2010) Spain and Portugal, are both states of the so-defined Mediterranean welfare-states model, which are characterized by fragmented support focusing on income maintenance and are still under development, making older systems of social support (family, church) still necessary. Moreover, Dall'erba (2004) pointed out the increasing disparities

among Iberian countries. Under this conditions, place-based policies have the potential to impact in some socio-economic factors as Kline and Moretti (2014) holds. Therefore, the Spanish previous experience in URBAN programs and the Urban Initiatives Network (RUI) are both fundamental pillars to build the place-based policies oriented to achieve urban sustainability.

2. Strategies structure

Since 2015, Spain has opened three public calls in which several cities have presented strategies. The public organism Urban Initiatives Network (RUI) published a reference guide advising municipalities on how to elaborate an integrated sustainable urban development strategy, whose acronym in Spanish is EDUSI. One of the positive outcomes of the reference guide elaborated by the RUI is the homogeneity of the documents in spite of the amount of candidatures. Therefore, all of them have almost the same chapter structure.

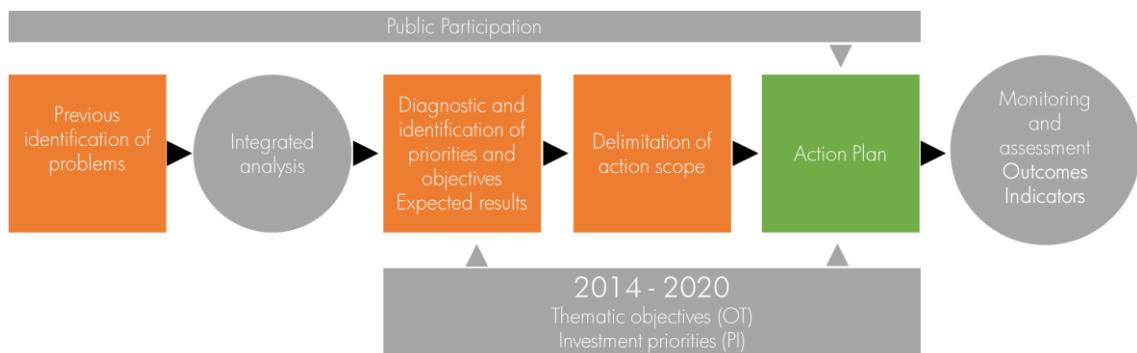


Fig. 1: *Indicative diagram for the development of an integrated sustainable urban development strategy.*
Source: Own elaboration from RIU, 2015.

According to Fig.1, the role of spatial dimension is essential and, as such, the delimitation of action scope is one of the requisites to obtain financial support. Another innovation in this way of proceeding is the requirement for a related integrated analysis as stated both by the ESDP and ERDF regulations. The investment priorities and the thematic objectives defined by each city should be linked with those defined in the ESDP and will be the basis for the definition of the measures included in the Action Plan. The ERDF supports eleven investment priorities, which are named as thematic objectives. Each Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Strategies (EDUSI) should be based on these objectives:

1. Strengthening research, technological development and innovation
2. Enhancing access to, and use and quality of information and communication technologies (ICT)
3. Enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)
4. Supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors

5. Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management
6. Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency
7. Promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures
8. Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility
9. Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination
10. Investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning
11. Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration

As mentioned above, the structure of the different strategies is mostly the same. The first chapter is devoted to integrated analysis, which consists in an exhaustive analysis of several topics: environment, social, economy, territorial, etc. In its social component, recent demographical dynamics have a strong presence. Despite the integrated analysis announced, most of the strategies merely presented as a compilation of sectorial analyses. So is explained in the Final Report of EDUSI published by the Spanish Ministry of Finances Civil Service (MFCS, 2018) in which, the Evaluation Committee assessed the adequacy of the strategies according with the horizontal principles and strategic goals slightly higher 50%.

Only a few of them show relations between the topics or carry out a properly integrated approach. The following chapter covers the diagnosis in the traditional form of SWOT analysis, that is, a matrix in which strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats are put in common. Both the analysis and the diagnosis are related to the thematic objectives in two dimensions:

- Horizontal integration: trying to avoid unlinked, isolated or disconnected actions, as well as sectorial policies.
- Vertical integration: a hierarchical scheme in which all Administrative Levels take part. This is axial in Spain due to its decentralised government structure.

The role of this place-based policy is easily recognizable in the chapter that deals with the delimitation of action scope. A polygon should be accurately defined in terms of location, area and boundary. Thus, a specific part within the urban fabric will be the target of the investment and not the whole city. The subsequent chapters address the temporal development and the implementation. Both are included in the so known Action Plan, which is composed of a chronogram and detailed program dates, actions and financial support needed. Finally, a set of monitoring and assessment outcome indicators are defined. A transversal axis along the elaboration and monitoring of the Strategy is the Public Participation. One of the pillars of urban sustainability is the ability to achieve wide and durable consensus involving the citizenship in the decision-making process. As a consequence, after consulting many of the strategies and having

taken part in some processes, Public Participation has become a requirement in order to obtain the financial support offered by the ERDF and, hence, a huge increase in this kind of processes is noticeable in the last decade. However, not all of them answer to a true citizen control, but, easy and sadly, it is rather frequent to find examples of what Arnstein (1969) called tokenism; among which the survey or consultation are included. Moreover, the Final Report of EDUSI evaluation reinforce this criticism, because the degree of satisfaction of the Evaluation Committee was 52% and; therefore, in the concluding remarks it is recommended to promote and improve Public Participation (MFCS, 2018)

3. Distribution of allocated funds

According with the provisions of the Operative Program, the Urban Axis is endowed with 1.012.754.015 Euros of ERDF assistance. The allocation of funding is executed through open calls, through which the EDUSI Strategies will be selected. The first call ended on December 2016, when 83 Strategies were approved and a percentage slightly higher than 70% was allocated. The second call resolution was published on July 2017, in which 40 cities obtained funding assistance reaching 29% of the resources. The third and last call was opened on 21 September 2017 and is currently in the evaluation phase.

| Autonomous Region | First Call | | Second Call | | Total | |
|----------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------|---------------|
| | Cities | Mill. € | Cities | Mill. € | Cities | Mill. € |
| Andalucía | 24 | 239.976.552 | 15 | 104.296.975 | 39 | 344.273.527 |
| Aragón | 2 | 8.888.000 | | | 2 | 8.888.000 |
| Asturias | 2 | 14.999.705 | 1 | 10.308.120 | 3 | 25.307.825 |
| Cantabria | 1 | 3.891.000 | | | 1 | 3.891.000 |
| Castilla - La Mancha | 5 | 43.984.000 | 3 | 19.078.341 | 8 | 63.062.341 |
| Castilla y León | 3 | 24.450.000 | 1 | 14.068.685 | 4 | 38.518.685 |
| Cataluña | 2 | 30.000.000 | 2 | 17.555.778 | 4 | 47.555.778 |
| Com. Valenciana | 10 | 83.030.999 | 5 | 35.584.770 | 15 | 118.615.769 |
| Extremadura | 5 | 50.000.000 | 3 | 20.000.000 | 8 | 70.000.000 |
| Galicia | 12 | 83.137.999 | 4 | 35.000.000 | 16 | 118.137.999 |
| Islas Baleares | 1 | 12.710.000 | | | 1 | 12.710.000 |
| Islas Canarias | 5 | 48.855.494 | 3 | 22.130.721 | 8 | 70.896.215 |
| La Rioja | | | 1 | 1.961.815 | 1 | 1.961.815 |
| Madrid | 6 | 30.463.201 | 1 | 3.428.176 | 7 | 33.891.377 |
| Murcia | 3 | 24.999.134 | 1 | 14.070.973 | 4 | 39.070.107 |
| Navarra | 1 | 266.3000 | | | 1 | 2.663.000 |
| País Vasco | 1 | 9.289.000 | | | 1 | 9.289.000 |
| Total | 83 | 711.338.084 | 40 | 297.484.354 | 123 | 1.008.732.438 |

Table 1 shows the number of cities and the amount of resources obtained by each Autonomous

Region. Summarising, there are 123 cities, where Strategy has been approved. The detailed dataset can be found in the State Agency Official State Gazette (BOE).

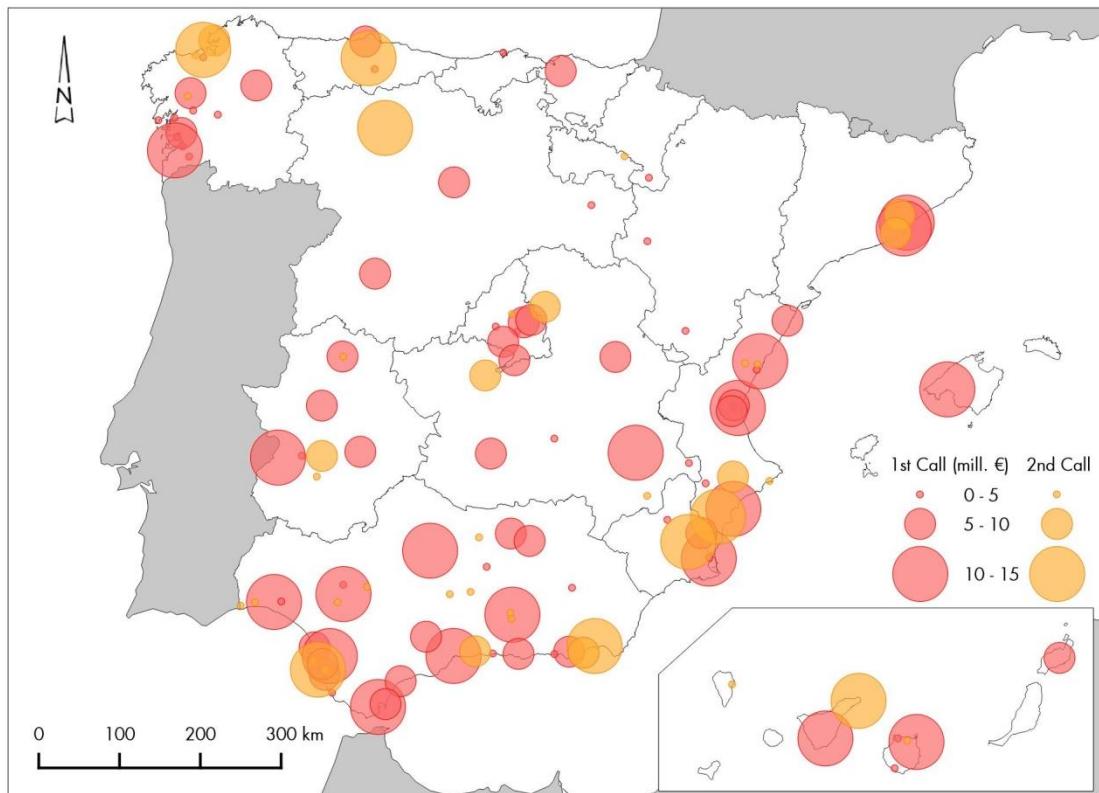


Fig. 2: *Spatial distribution of allocated funds based on data collected from BOE.*

The spatial distribution of allocated funding is shown in Figure 2. The map represents a clear dichotomy between regions. Cantabria, País Vasco, Navarra, La Rioja and Aragón in the North East side of the Peninsula are characterised by few funds because they are included in the group of more developed European regions, according to the criteria established by the cohesion policy. Thus, funding is concentrated in Mediterranean regions such as Andalucía, Murcia, Comunidad Valenciana and Cataluña. Other benefited regions are Canary Islands, Extremadura, as well as Galicia and Asturias in the North West.

Conclusions

The main challenges faced nowadays by the society should be solved, to a greater extent, in cities, since more than the half of world population lives in them. Environmental, societal and economical questions have been addressed from sectorial and fragmented perspectives. However, in the last decade, more and more often the world bets on integrated approaches.

Among the key principles of European Regional policy, Urban Sustainability is the main one. The European Union, through its structural funds, has defined a set of thematic objectives aiming to solve the principal urban problems. The economic resources invested in urban areas within the

period 2014-2020 will be more than 50% of the ERDF. Based on the cohesion policy principle - which is to diminish the regional disparities - and the subsidiarity principle - to solve problems as closer as possible to where they occur, the European Commission approved in 2015 the Operative Program for Sustainable growth in Spain for the period 2014-2020. This program was announced as a help to recover the competitiveness of Spanish economy through a more sustainable resource efficient model.

Since then, 123 Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Strategies have been selected in two different calls. The Strategies are characterised by an integrated approach, the role of the territorial frame defined by the delimitation of part of the urban fabric, the presence of public participation processes and a set of outcome indicators intended for assessment and monitoring purposes. The first public call was carried out during 2016 and the third one is still pending resolution. Therefore, in the next years the impact of these integrated sustainable urban development strategies in Spanish urban areas could be analysed. It is still early to assess the impact of these strategies because their implementation is affected by the slowness of bureaucracy, the governance problems and thus, it will be necessary to direct future research to prove if the strategic goals have been met.

In general terms, the strategies approaches the challenge, but will be no solved only in this period, more efforts in terms of governance and allocated funds will be needed. However, the program shows some advances, especially in the integrative perspective and the inclusion of territorial dimension of development. Despite the homogeneous structure of the documents, the several Action Plan proposed and the diversity of delimited areas in size, functionality and population, offers a wide range of *ad-hoc* solutions for each city interests. Nevertheless, based on the very first implementations governance problems, some improvements could be implemented in future programs such as, the requirement of an operational team with budget and execution capacity to facilitate the decision-making process and the ability to expedite measures.

Acknowledgments

Financial support from FPU grant (FPU14/04710) from the Spanish Ministry of Education is gratefully acknowledged.

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