

Applying integrated, spatial tools in the framework of the EU cohesion policy (2014-2020).

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Abstract

The need for a thorough comprehension and integration of the spatial features of European policies into the planning practice has recently emerged and has been reinforced. The recognition in the Treaty of Lisbon of the territorial cohesion as being the third target of the Policy, combined with the aims of the financial and social cohesion has further strengthened its spatial dimension. The 2014-20 EU Cohesion Policy phase introduced and integrated a place-based approach along with the promotion of spatial governance. In this context, ITI and CLLDs were adopted by EU member states in different territorial units. The present paper investigates the degree of integration of the spatial dimensions of the Cohesion Policy by the member states during that period. What is pursued is an evaluation of the way and the degree of the place-based approach adoption in the frame of the Integrated Territorial Development policy. Thus, each country's spatial dimension of development planning will be assessed within this context. The research is based on a comparative analysis of Member States' key policy documents. The key questions focus on functionality and potential scope, the integration approach, and the utilization of the territorial tools of spatial development. The main findings indicate the decisive role the new tools play in the strengthening of the spatial dimension of cohesion policy along with the need for strengthening governance structures.

Keywords

Integrated Territorial Development, Place - based Approach, Cohesion Policy, Spatial Governance, Spatial Policy

Introduction: The integrated approach in the framework of the European Cohesion Policy.

The implications of the current trends of globalisation in shaping the economic geography of places and strengthening the importance of local conditions and material and non-material assets on which competitiveness depends, highlighted the often neglected role of space (Capello & Nijkamp, 2009; Rodriguez-Pose & Crescenzi, 2008). Thus, sites and their interaction, gradually, acquire more importance concerning economic growth (Rodríguez-Pose, 2011). The theoretical interest in the territorial dimension of policies is linked to the evolution of EU cohesion policy. Emphasis is given on the territorial framework and the emergence of the role of a spatial unit in policy design and implementation (Medeiros, 2017; Camagni, 2011). The conceptualisation of the spatial dimension has been a process associated with the gradual increase in the importance of cohesion policy, as a tool for reducing the development disparities among different regions and mitigating the backwardness of the less

favoured (Bradley & Zaucha, 2017). The related tools are the Structural Funds (Dao et al., 2017: 647; Hübner, 2011), at various spatial levels (national, regional, local, urban), with the support of national, sectoral, regional programmes and cooperation schemes respectively (Medeiros, 2016; Luukkonen & Moilanen, 2012).

The last two decades have been marked by a wide-ranging debate on the shift in the regional policy model that addresses both the theoretical foundations and its practical application. This shift includes new objectives, a new geographical area, a new governance approach and new regional policy instruments (Bachtler & Yuill, 2001; Koudoumakis et al., 2021). E. Medeiros (2022: 20) composes an interesting “theory of everything” for regional development processes, denominated as “strategic-based regional development”, which embraces “sustainable-, institutional-, knowledge-, place-, infrastructural-, and balanced-based paradigms”.

The previous model of regional policy focused on decision-making following a top-down approach, while ignoring the mixed, integrated, and/or bottom-up approaches (Barca et al. 2012: 26; Wolfe, 2011). It was characterised by an emphasis on the design of sectoral development programmes without coordination among policy areas. Moreover, similar issues with spatial differentiation were treated without taking into account the specificity of the wider regional and local context (Barca et al., 2012). This approach led to an unbalanced policy, thus questioning its ability to ensure sustainable development (Pike et al., 2007). At the same time, the effectiveness of the unified model of regional development based on the “one size fits all” approach (Barca et al., 2012; McCann & Ortega-Argilé, 2013; Petrakos, 2012; OECD, 2009b) is questioned (Ahner, 2010: 3; Barca, 2009: 5-6; Camagni, 2011: 78; European Commission, 2010a: XI; OECD, 2009a, 2011: 25 & 41; Rodrigues, 2011: 150; Barca et al., 2012). As reported by Barca et al. (2012) the empirical observations of the changes in the geography of development and the progress in the effort to understand this process and to form a competent theoretical framework is accompanied by a corresponding transformation of the way a policy is planned and implemented (Faludi & Peyrony, 2011; Asprogerakas & Zachari, 2020).

The spatial dimension of the EU Cohesion Policy was strengthened especially after the inclusion of the Territorial Cohesion Goal (Szlachta & Zaucha, 2010) through the emphasis on enhancing territorial development by encouraging consideration and exploitation of its inherent characteristics and strengths (European Commission, 2007: 11). According to Commissioner Hubner (2008: p. 2) "The addition of territorial cohesion to the objectives of the Treaty clearly recognises that 'geography counts'. In other words, greater attention must be paid by all the Union's policies to the need for a harmonious and balanced development of its territory. The aim is to make better use of its diversity and potential. This intention points to greater EU involvement in the field of spatial planning (Asprogerakas & Zachari, 2020).

The territorial dimension is now an integral part of European decision-making processes, in the sense that it has been incorporated into: (a) the EU guidelines for each of the individual sectoral policies that have a territorial impact, i.e. directly or indirectly affecting its territory

and development - with particular emphasis on Cohesion Policy - (b) its individual Directives with a view to transposing them into national law but also (c) the regular and interim Cohesion Reports with particular emphasis on the last three (European Commission 2010, 2014, 2017: 96). Each of the reports emphasises the importance of the spatial dimension. The impact of policy measures in different areas of intervention differs significantly among regions (Bradley & Zaucha, 2017: 54), highlighting the need to adjust the geographical level of policy analysis and implementation to functional spatial units of different geographical scales (macro-regions, metropolitan and rural regions, groups of rural areas and cities, etc.). The latter should be independent of existing administrative divisions and administrative spatial units (NUTS) (European Commission, 2010: 96).

In contrast to the "space-neutral" or "spatially blind" approach to policies that are "designed without explicitly taking into account space" (World Bank, 2009: 24), the "place-based" approach is opposed, recognising that the characteristics of the area are important and shape its development potential (OECD, 2009a, b; European Commission, 2010a; Barca, 2009). The "new model of regional policy" is "location-based, multilevel, innovative and geared to different types of regions" (OECD, 2009b, 2011; Bachtler, 2010), while presupposing that the geographical context (in terms of its social, cultural and institutional characteristics) is important. Barca (2009: vii) outlined the place-based approach as "a long-term development strategy aiming at reducing persistent inefficiency (under-utilisation of local opportunities) and inequalities (share of people below a certain level of prosperity) in specific places". Several approaches formulated at a theoretical level afterwards, substantiate the original idea. According to Garcilazo et al. (2011), modern regional development policies are based on three critical pillars: (a) the process of identifying specific development factors that contribute to regional or local capital, (b) the complementarity of individual policies in order to maximise the efficiency of regional and local economy; and (c) multilevel governance arrangements to coordinate the objectives in various levels. They consider that the idea of a place-based approach has become the new conventional philosophy in the practice of economic development and planning (Collinge et al., 2010). As Zaucha et al. (2014) observe, the literature provides convincing evidence that paying due attention to the territorial context increases the effectiveness of development policy. The effectiveness of the place-based approach to achieving territorial cohesion, ensuring a balanced development of all EU territories, is emphasised by the European Commission. Five common features of the successful implementation of the place-based approach are identified (European Commission, 2015a): (a) the important role of assessing the value of local identity; (b) expansion beyond geographical and sectoral boundaries; (c) an open system of governance; (d) strong leadership; and (e) experimentation and learning through practice.

For the 2014-20 programming period each Member State has drawn up a Partnership Agreement (PA) in cooperation with the European Commission. This is a reference document for programming interventions from the Structural and Investment Funds and links them to

the aims of the Europe 2020 strategy. It defines the strategy and investment priorities chosen by the relevant Member State and presents a list of national and regional operational programmes (OPs), as well as an indicative annual financial allocation for each OP. In this framework, the so-called Integrated Territorial Development strategies were introduced (section 3 of the OP) launching a more strategic and holistic approach. A minimum of 5 % of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) resources that are allocated to each member-state should be invested in integrated actions for sustainable urban development, through the Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) tool (Medeiros & van der Zwet, 2020). ITI should be managed and implemented by local actors as provided in the EU Regulation for the ERDF (No 1301/2013). This tool promotes a horizontal approach, regarding the implementation of operational programmes, and supports a thematic rather than a sectoral approach, which facilitates a combination of actions according to certain urban development strategies. It allows the managing authorities to delegate the implementation of parts of different priority axes in order to ensure that investments are undertaken in a complementary way for a certain administrative or functional area. The integrated nature of the ITI is sought through the complementarity of the action plan as well as the representativeness of the governance scheme (Asprogerakas, 2020).

The Community Led Local Development (CLLD) adhered to the promotion of the Europe 2020 Strategy. It is implemented at a sub-regional level, as a complement to other developmental means. In this frame, local communities and stakeholders can be mobilised to achieve the goals of the Strategy, fostering territorial cohesion and reaching specific policy objectives. It is based on the perspective of the LEADER programme and refers to all the European funds included in the Partnership Agreement. The holistic territorial perspective which is embedded in this tool brings again in the foreground the “urban-rural partnership” which was previously proposed in the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (Zahari & Asprogerakas, 2013).

The present paper investigates the degree of integration of the spatial dimensions of the Cohesion Policy by member states during the 2014-2020 programming period. It focuses (a) on the scope and (b) the functionality of the Integrated Territorial Development Strategies. What is pursued is an evaluation of the way and the degree of adaptation of the place-based approach to the frame of the Integrated Territorial Development policy. Initially, the comparative evaluation of the Member – States’ choices in relation to the implementation of EU cohesion policy focuses on the adoption of the Integrated Territorial Development approach. Then, on a second level, the evaluation of specific parameters includes (a) the territorial focus, (b) the integrated character resulting from the thematic targeting, and (c) the governance scheme and main issues that arise. The evaluation takes into account the adoption of territorial tools (ITI, CLLDs) by EU Member States for the development of the different types of regions they choose. Following the description of the main elements, as they emerged

from the comparative evaluation of the PAs of the EU Member States (section: results), certain points are highlighted (section: discussion) guiding the conclusions.

Data and methodology

The research is methodologically based on a qualitative approach, having as a key element the comparative analysis of the main documents governing the implementation of EU cohesion policy for the 2014-2020 period and in particular the approved EU Partnership Agreements of the 28 Member States (EU, 2014). The specific documents are directly related to the central research question, while at the same time their selection ensures the authenticity and reliability in relation to the expression of the relevant policy as they are officially approved. They are part of the conceptual framework of the research both by definition and due to specifications and are expected to include elements that highlight aspects of the issues under investigation.

A series of qualitative analysis methods that have been elaborated and described in the relevant literature (e.g. Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Bengtsson, 2016; Vikal, 2017; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Bowen, 2009; Schreirer et al., 2019: 170; Gaur & Kumar, 2017; Duriau et al., 2007; Krippendorf, 2018; Esser & Vliegenthart, 2018) compose the central methodological approach for conducting the research: Document Analysis, Thematic Analysis and Content Analysis were used both for the evaluation of documents and the construction of the theoretical framework and as a key element for the triangulation of results through the combination of the approaches in the study of the same phenomenon (Tsiolis, 2015). The selected analysis process reduces the volume of the collected text and facilitates its comprehension (Bengtsson, 2016). Finally, comparative analysis is selected, which according to Esser & Vliegenthart (2018) enables the formation of conclusions as a whole, allowing the identification of differences and similarities among the objects of analysis. The similarity of the structure of the documents (Regional Development Programmes) and in particular of the section referring to the integrated spatial development (section 4) ensures the comparability of these texts and the drawing of useful conclusions. The comparative analysis and evaluation are done on the basis of specific parameters.

Results

Adoption of Integrated Territorial Development by the Member-States (MS)

For the 2014-2020 programming period, a key feature of which is the emphasis on the territorial dimension of cohesion policy, 9% of the cohesion policy budget (around € 31 billion) is allocated to integrated territorial and urban development. The ERDF contributes € 25.5 billion and the rest comes from other European Structural Investment Funds (ESIF). The comparative study highlighted differences among EU MS in the adoption of territorial tools.

In some MS a fairly large part of the Cohesion Policy resources corresponds to the respective tools, while others covered the requirement for mobilisation of at least 5% of the ERDF resources for Sustainable Urban Development (SUD).

The utilisation of the new territorial tools, as defined in the ESIF Regulations, is reflected in Strategies that are prepared after a corresponding invitation. They may relate to new plans as the choice of the ITI tool indicates as a goal a more innovative and integrated approach. However, for some MS the tool is not something new (e.g. Portugal, Czech Republic, Slovakia) as for example in Estonia, where Integrated Territorial Development at the level of urban and functional areas will concern the updating of existing plans.

The benchmarking of the Partnership Agreements in terms of the Integrated Spatial Development approach and its description - detailed in some MS, indefinite in others - could be used as a criterion for assessing the significance that some MS attach to new territorial instruments as key tools for addressing territoriality in cohesion policy implementation (e.g. Czech Republic, Slovakia and Croatia). Thus, the importance of an integrated territorial approach is emphasised in Austria, Belgium, but also in Italy, where it is pointed out that interventions now need to be focused and clearly targeted, avoiding an all-inclusive approach. In Bulgaria the need for an integrated approach to the country's spatial development stems from the fact that there are inequalities among its regions in relation to the EU average, but also interregional inequalities due to the monocentrism of Sofia, leading to serious imbalances and the objective impossibility of exploiting the full potential of the territory (PA Bulgaria 2014: 126).

Croatia chooses the implementation of Integrated Territorial Development with the contribution of ESIF in order to promote more balanced development and the use of the competitive advantages of the different territories. In France, each of the territory types (urban, rural, coastal, mountainous) is characterised by common development challenges that go beyond regional administrative boundaries. Thus, following its experience from previous programming periods, the country will continue to pursue integrated spatial development through interregional programmes, utilising the new tool of ITI in conjunction with multilevel governance.

As it is characteristically emphasised in the NSRF of Greece *"the new approach for Integrated Spatial Development within the framework of the 2014-2020 NSRF, defines as strategic goals the achievement of employment, social cohesion and conservation of resources, focusing on the carrying capacity and special needs of the individual spatial units and using as its engines, competitiveness and local entrepreneurship"* (PA Greece, 2014: 163). Lithuania considers as a challenge for the country the identification of solutions that meet the needs and capabilities of each region through the use of new implementation mechanisms in line with EU Cohesion Policy regulations. Poland places special emphasis on the territorial expansion of its development planning, seeking the greatest possible decentralisation of the management of ESIF resources through regional programmes as well

as the territorial concentration of resources of National and Regional Programmes in the so-called 'Areas of Strategic Intervention'. The latter ones are considered as the basic tool of Poland's development policy. The territorial approach is based on the assumption that regions should not be perceived in terms of administrative boundaries, but rather in terms of their inherent potential, barriers and interdependencies.

Slovakia seeks, through the adoption of integrated spatial development, to reverse the approach that prevailed in the country during the 2007-2013 period, when the selection of individual projects had a limited impact on achieving the objectives of the 2007-2013 NSRF for the country. Thus, during the 2014-2020 programming period, the focus of ESIF resources was sought in addressing specific regional problems and the better utilisation of local potential and resources, with the contribution of strategic planning mechanisms and decision-making along with direct participation and responsibility of stakeholders in territorial development through a Partnership Agreement (PA Slovakia, 2014: 275).

Territorial focus

According to the comparative analysis of PAs, the spatial tools are applied in different types of territory with particularly natural or geographical characteristics or areas that face phenomena of poverty or social exclusion, depending on the particular characteristics and priorities of each MS. The urban dimension of cohesion policy is emphasised as cities are considered to be development generators, and the interventions provided under the SUD are aiming at enhancing their attractiveness and competitiveness.

The CLLD approach applies as mandatory mainly in "rural areas", under the LEADER/EAFRD programme, as well as in fisheries and coastal areas, under the EMFF in 21 MS. In more than half of the MS the CLLDs tool is used in "cities and urban areas", while in countries of a compact size the whole territory is selected (Slovenia, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta) (table 1).

The limited utilisation of CLLDs among the EU MS in urban areas is generally pointed out. In the cases of MS that choose to implement this tool in urban areas, there is insufficient description, with the extent of its use and the degree of its integration in Strategies being not yet clear. This trend could initially be interpreted as lack of information at the sub-national level (regions, cities and neighbourhoods) of the potential of the tool in urban areas, or even as indication of confusion or ignorance in relation to its application as an integrated spatial development approach. Another key reason - pointed out in many PAs (e.g. Scotland, Luxembourg, etc.) - is the sense of the high level of administrative risk caused by its use. An exception is Lithuania, where the CLLDs will be implemented as a mandatory part of the ITI Strategies in order to be developed under the SUD and in specific areas. The country will further utilise CLLDs in the Danube Delta region to support investment in the region. The degree of integration of the CLLDs also remains unclear in the case of non-urban ITI.

The selection of intervention areas for the CLLDs tool is based on the population criterion (10,000 - 150,000 inhabitants) in specific sub-regional zones including cities and urban areas, with the possibility of sufficiently justified derogations (European Commission, 2014b). This criterion is modified on the basis of local peculiarities such as low population density or the existence of remote areas or islands, as in the case of Greece and Sweden, or due to the high population density as observed in Belgium and the Netherlands. Germany will also, in justified cases, deviate from the limits of the Regulation mainly for reasons of geographical, historical, administrative, political, environmental, and economic cohesion of the regions, as stated by the PA.

Member States	Types of Territory			
	Rural	Fishing & Coastal	Urban	Others
Austria	X			
Belgium	X			
Bulgaria	X	X		
Croatia	X	X	X	
Cyprus	X			
Czech Republic	X			
Denmark	X	X		
Estonia	X	X		
Finland	X	X	X	
France	X	X	X	
Germany	X		X	X
Greece	X	X	X	X
Hungary	X		X	
Ireland	X	X		
Italy	X	X	X	X
Latvia	X			
Lithuania	X	X	X	
Luxemburg	X			X
Malta	X			
Netherlands	X			
Poland	X	X		X
Portugal		X	X	X
Romania		X	X	
Slovakia			X	
Slovenia		X	X	
Spain		X	X	
Sweden	X	X	X	
UK	X	X	X	

Table 1. Territorial Focus of CLLDs in EU Member States (Source: MS Partnership Agreements, elaboration by present authors)

In the case of SUD, in accordance with Article 7 of the ERDF Regulation, in a broader territorial planning framework the emphasis is given not only on urban areas but also on their functional areas, metropolises, development poles, city networks, and on urban-rural relationship (Table 2). Population, as a criterion for selecting the intervention areas, varies and ranges from very small (sometimes less than 10,000 inhabitants) to metropolitan areas with more than 5 million inhabitants. It could be stated that in areas of large population there

are clear opportunities for territorial integration. However, in the context of SUD, the metropolises receive special treatment since entire OPs are prepared for such areas (eg. Italy).

Member States	Territorial types					
	Urban Areas	Functional Areas	Metropolitan Areas	Growth Poles – Gates – Hubs	Urban-Rural relationship	City networks
Austria	X					
Belgium	X		X			
Bulgaria	X				X	
Croatia	X					
Cyprus	X					
Czech Republic			X			
Denmark	X				X	
Estonia	X	X				
Finland						X
France			X			
Germany	X	X	X			
Greece	X					
Hungary	X					
Ireland	X					
Italy			X			
Latvia						X
Lithuania	X					
Luxemburg	X					
Malta	X					
Netherlands	X					
Poland		X				
Portugal			X	X		
Romania	X			X		
Slovakia	X	X		X		
Slovenia	X			X		
Spain		X				
Sweeden		X				
UK		X (Wales)			X (Wales)	X (Scotland)

Table 2: Territorial focus of SUD (Source: MS Partnership Agreements, elaboration by present authors)

Emphasis is placed on the role of small and medium-sized cities in achieving territorial cohesion, cities that are considered as hubs or centres of development of national interest such as Latvia, a fact that should be taken into consideration in the future planning of Integrated Territorial Development. It is also worth mentioning that the local urban authorities of that level have less experience in the implementation of corresponding integrated interventions.

Some MS, such as Denmark, the United Kingdom, and Bulgaria also address the issue of relations among rural and urban areas within the BAA, while a significant proportion of MS focuses on functional urban areas (Poland, Spain, Estonia, Germany, Poland, Slovakia, Sweden, UK/Wales) and in accordance with the ERDF Regulation. Cooperation among neighbouring municipalities is also encouraged in order to promote urban-rural connections and functional coordination in metropolitan areas. In Denmark it is mandatory to include both

urban and rural needs within an urban strategy and the same applies for each of the designated metropolitan areas/cities in the Czech Republic.

Member States	Criteria					
	Compatibility with National and Regional Strategies and spatial planning documents	Population criterion	Administrative capacity and Ability to prepare Strategies - Previous experience	Contribution of cities to the development process of the regions and the MS	Cities with socioeconomic and poverty problems	Direction for specialization at regional level
Austria	X					
Belgium					X	
Bulgaria	X					
Croatia					X	
Cyprus	X					
Czech Republic	X					
Denmark		X				
Estonia		X				
Finland				X		
France	X					X
Germany					X	X
Greece	X	X			X	
Hungary	X				X	
Ireland	X			X		
Italy	X					X
Latvia	X					
Lithuania					X	
Luxemburg	X					X
Malta					X	
Netherlands						
Poland	X			X		
Portugal	X					X
Romania				X		
Slovakia	X		X			
Slovenia						
Spain		X	X			
Sweeden		X				X
UK		X (England)				X

Table 3 : Criteria for selecting SUD intervention areas (Source: MS Partnership Agreements, elaboration by present authors)

Emphasis is also placed on functional geographical areas, so that more integrated approaches to regional/urban development beyond administrative boundaries can be established. In fact, the selection of functional areas could be a good practice in terms of territorial integration and territorial cohesion. The territory types for SUD, in the majority of MS are specified in Strategic documents of development or spatial character. These include Spatial Plans of regulatory nature or urban policy documents (e.g. Austria, Belgium, Spain). Thus, in many cases, a pre-planning exists.

In several MS there was a need to focus on a limited number of Strategies in order to ensure some critical size, especially in the case of the SUD with the aim of achieving greater efficiency, effectiveness, and impact for the invested resources. In a future evaluation of the SUD Strategies implementation, it will be appropriate to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of the tools in terms of scale and size of the application areas.

MS	ITI areas	Territorial Types
Belgium	Three ITI only in Flanders Limburg, Ceben and West Flanders with the option to add others during the programming period.	Areas with particular socio-economic problems .
The Czech Republic	Seven ITI in metropolitan / urban areas of national importance	Metropolitan areas
Finland	One ITI for SUD, in the 6 largest cities 6AIKA "The Six City Strategy - Open and Smart Services"	Network of 6 cities
France	Settlements, metropolitan areas and urban areas, priority areas in cities; rural areas	Metropolitan areas, urban areas, rural / urban areas
Germany	In Schleswig-Holstein (West Coast Tourism and Energy Region) and in Baden Württemberg, all sub-regions (some functional areas) can apply for ITI flagship plans.	Functional areas, Sub-regions areas
Greece	Sub-regional areas with special characteristics and challenges, inter-regional areas with homogeneous characteristics, less-favoured geographical areas, areas of influence of sectoral interventions, (e.g. Regional Framework for Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development & Sectoral Operational Programmes).	Areas with special characteristics, disadvantaged geographical areas
Luxembourg	Urban areas of Luxembourg, Nordstadt, and the Southern part of the country (cross-border dimension)	Urban, Cross-border areas
Portugal	Metropolitan areas (Lisbon, Porto), main centres of the national urban system of the country and their functional areas	Metropolitan areas Urban functional areas
Romania	Danube Delta Biosphere	Areas with special features
Slovakia	Based on the so-called Regional Integrated Territorial Strategies (RITS) / 8 RITS in each NUTSIII level region	regions of the NUTSIII level
Spain	Azul, Mar Menor (Murcia), la provincia de Cádiz (Andalucía), Industrialización Extremadura.	Areas with particular socio-economic problems / Cross-border areas.
The United Kingdom	Scotland plans two ITIs for areas with special socio-economic needs: in the highlands (Highlands), the islands in northern Scotland and the south-west of the country	Areas with particular of socio-economic problems Areas with special geographical features

Table 4: The use of non – urban ITI tool (Source: MS Partnership Agreements, elaboration by present authors)

The promotion of polycentric and balanced development is one of the main policy priorities indicating the effort to adopt a spatial dimension of development (TA 2020, 2011; TA2030, 2020). Thus, integrated spatial development in a multicentral model, has been supported in several cases, aiming at reducing socio-economic and territorial disparities (Bulgaria, Ireland, Latvia, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Germany, Slovakia). The creation of networks among cities that do not consist of a functional urban area is also an interesting approach. Finland is a typical example, forming a common strategy for the network of the six largest cities in the

country, Scotland with the 'Cities Alliance', and also Latvia. (SUD intervention areas criteria are reported in Table 3). On the whole, the ITI tool has geographical flexibility covering a wide range of territories such as areas with specific challenges or socio-economic problems, less-favoured geographical areas and protected natural habitats, and urban functional areas of regional importance (Table 4).

Thematic targeting - integrated character

Despite the differences observed in the choice of thematic objectives, common thematic areas can be identified among MS. The implementation of the CLLDs tool seeks to tackle poverty and social exclusion - mainly in rural areas - to create jobs and harness endogenous local potential, to achieve growth and improve the quality of life and income. The goal is to mitigate migration and avoid future population decline. The strengthening of relations between rural and urban areas, and also the diversification of the economy in rural and fisheries areas is emphasised together with the protection of the environment and adaptation of the effects of climate change.

In the case of SUD, the main challenges are social inclusion and the fight against poverty in urban areas, the improvement of the urban environment, the adaptation to the effects of climate change, the revitalisation and upgrading of degraded areas and the strengthening of urban and economic development in general. Emphasis is also placed on promoting urban innovation/Smart Cities approach in order to enhance the competitiveness on national level. ERDF co-financed interventions cover a different thematic mix related to the most important urban challenges (urban mobility, the physical, social and economic revitalisation of intervention areas). The most common Thematic Objectives (TO) encountered are TO4 and TH6. Regarding the ESF, TO8 and TO9 are the main focus, while TO11 is absent (Table 5).

Respectively, in the case of non-Urban ITIs, the TO are not identified in the PA document, but either during the preparation of the Operational Programmes or during the preparation of the ITI Strategies. In some MS non-Urban ITIs have a broad thematic focus, which may include: promoting innovation and competitiveness (Belgium, Finland, France, the Czech Republic, Germany, Greece), strengthening the economy (Belgium / Limburg), support for entrepreneurship (Belgium, Spain), environmental protection and adaptation to climate change (Greece, Portugal, Sweden), the use of renewable energy sources and the low carbon economy (France, Portugal, Britain, Slovenia), social cohesion, regional disparities and employment (Belgium, Greece, Czech Republic, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain), public services (Portugal) and ICT (France, Greece).

In order to achieve the TOs set in the PAs, resources primarily from the ERDF are used, secondarily from the ESF, while only five PAs include ITIs funded by the Cohesion Fund (Czech Republic, Greece, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania). In addition, funding from the EAFRD is provided by France, Portugal and Romania and additional support from the EMFF is provided by Spain, Romania and Portugal. Extra resources will be secured from state and

municipal budgets. Private investment is also expected to be mobilised through public-private partnership initiatives (Lithuania). Greece emphasises that resources from various ESIF and OPs can be combined in the ITI tool, but points out concerns about the ability of other resources to leverage. In fact, this ability is a key criterion for the selection, approval, and financing of the Strategies. Therefore, the comparative analysis of PAs shows that the multi-fund approach is not particularly adopted by MS, mainly due to differences in implementation practices among ESIFs. The adoption of the single-fund approach is more evident in the case of CLLDs, which may lead to missed opportunities in creating more effective local development strategies, combined by ESIFs other than the EAFRD and the EMFF.

Thematic Objectives	Preference
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	-
***: Main choice	
** : Secondary option	
- : Limited choice	

Table 5: Preference of Thematic Objectives during the design of ITI / SUD (Source: MS Partnership Agreements, elaboration by present authors)

Governance issues

The differences observed in the way of governing the territorial tools result mainly from the degree of decentralisation of the Local administration in the respective MS. Their common feature is that institutional bodies at regional, sub-regional or local level participate in the process of preparation and implementation of ITI strategies, while the coordination of the whole process is the responsibility of competent Ministries and /or Coordination Committees (e.g. Hungary). In Lithuania and Malta, the Ministry of Interior functions as the ITI coordinating body.

The majority of EU MS do not adopt the practice of delegating responsibilities for the implementation and management of the Strategies to Intermediate Bodies in both the case of ITI / SUD and non-Urban ITI. In some cases, new bodies have emerged, or existing actors have been engaged in new roles, such as coordinating, managing, and implementing or even advising on strategic planning. In this context, additional consultation platforms are used,

with the example of the Czech Republic providing a permanent consultation platform at national and regional level in order to ensure interconnection and coordination between the state and the regions in the implementation of these programmes.

A particularly interesting point of governance arrangements in the context of ITIs implementation, is the creation of city networks, as mentioned before (Finland, Scotland), and also some new structures of cooperation (Poland, the Czech Republic) between the central cities and their immediate hinterland (Table 2). According to the research of Mendez et al. (2021) based on the case study of Poland and Spain, the establishment and consolidation of city networks and project partnerships contributed to stronger networked governance and learning among SUD actors.

More than half of the MS will use ITI as a mechanism for implementation of the SUD (with a total budget of 8.9 billion euros), with other choices being a defined Priority Axis of the ERDF OP, a separate OP mainly in the metropolitan centres or some form of integrated urban development strategy (Table 6). Most of the Strategies will follow a competitive selection process, with some differentiation in specific practices regarding the approval of the individual acts. For example, in Poland, a pool of ITIs projects is created, which may be implemented, on a priority base, depending on the availability of resources. The same practice is followed by Denmark, which directs 7.5% of the country's ERDF and ESF resources to a national funding pool to fund interregional projects.

Tool	Member State
ITI	Croatia, the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden
A defined Priority Axis of the ERDF OP.	Austria, Belgium / Flanders, Estonia, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Romania
A separate OP	Belgium / Brussels, Hungary, Italy - OP Metropolises
Other forms of integrated urban development strategy	Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark

Table 6 : The implementation of Integrated Territorial Development in Operational Programmes for the 2014-2020 period. (Source: MS Partnership Agreements, elaboration by present authors)

Discussion

The comparative analysis of the Member States PAs highlighted a wide range of territorial realities in the EU and therefore the need for different approaches and strategies in addressing the issues that arise. Territorial tools are applied to different types of spatial units organised in typologies with different criteria depending on the specific characteristics and priorities of each MS. The relative flexibility in the application of the tools allowed differences in the interpretation and adoption of the integrated territorial development approach. It remains a common finding that the new approach, which seeks to achieve the goals of Cohesion Policy

and the Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive development, is recognised as an important instrument in addressing economic, social, and environmental challenges providing a framework of holistic planning in contrast to the previous series of fragmented interventions.

Integrated Territorial Tools are planned and implemented at various area types. The related typology includes urban, rural, urban/rural, functional units, areas with special natural or geographical characteristics, areas with critical levels of poverty or social exclusion. The specific choices are depending on the special territorial characteristics and the spatial level of implementation (national, regional, local). A particular emphasis on functional urban areas is noted, suggesting the crucial role they can play in enhancing integration but also in establishing closer links between urban areas and their rural hinterlands. According to Fioretti et al (2020), the majority of SUD strategies focuses on cities, towns or suburbs (45%), followed by districts/neighbourhoods (31%), functional areas (20%), city networks (4%), and a territorial unit with specific features such as a park, an archaeological zone or an island (0.4%).

Governance innovation through multilevel cooperation and a more integrated approach to regional/urban development, came up as an important reason for the use of territorial tools. In many MS it is argued that ITIs, and in particular CLLDs, are expected to increase the involvement of stakeholders and lead to their greater empowerment. The creation of new or the strengthening of existing networks both during the preparation and implementation stages, with the participation of a significant and representative number of actors is supported by several MS. However, it is observed that the involvement of urban authorities or other actors on sub-regional level is quite limited. This fact may be attributed to a lack of trust by National or Regional administration to the local level Authorities due to a deficit in their administrative capacity and ability to manage and respond to the relative requirements in a strict institutional framework. The ability to plan and manage the actions of the Strategies, especially the SUD, by the Urban Authorities, is highlighted as a major issue on the PAs, while many MS set it as a criterion for choosing a strategy.

As a rule, MS, in the case of Integrated Territorial Development, utilise the significant experience of programme design and implementation gained in previous programming periods, and rely on it. This previous experience, especially in the case of the CLLDs tool, which is largely based on the experience of implementing LEADER, is considered very important. It might be an indication that the know-how for implementing bottom-up development initiatives has already been established at various planning levels. Respectively, for the ITI tool, there is a corresponding experience in several MS, as the philosophy of the tool penetrated the design and implementation of development interventions in previous periods (see also Asprogerakas, 2020) not only within the principles of the public sector but also among local actors.

A number of municipalities shows a greater degree of maturity than others in terms of urban and spatial planning or development programming and familiarity to the concepts of

the integrated approach to planning. In fact, in many cases, this maturity has been the criterion for the selection of intervention areas for the SUD. Particular emphasis is placed on the urban dimension of political cohesion, and on the important role that cities can play in the development process at local, regional and national levels. This element is reflected in the institutionalisation of a National Urban Policy, in the preparation of corresponding frameworks that provide the guidelines for achieving the SUD, but also in the individual efforts of several municipalities to draw up their policy that will function as a reference framework for the design of integrated BAA Strategies and similar interventions. Many EU Member States, after drawing up and approving the Partnerships Agreements for the 2014-2020 programming period, have already proceeded with either creating or updating strategies that take into account recent policies in their spatial and development planning, such as, for example, the directions of the URBAN Agenda of the EU, but also of the SUD Goals for 2030.

Conclusions

The dialogue in regional development at European level and the relevant scientific literature provide convincing evidence that due attention to the spatial context increases the effectiveness of development policy. The related approaches have changed in recent years to meet real challenges and have revealed a number of factors that underline the role of the territorial dimension in the development process. The place-based approach, as the new model of regional policy, emphasises the recognition of the growing importance of territorial issues, while the role of spatial units is considered important for the implementation of cohesion policy. The aim is to achieve a balanced development, reducing existing inequalities, and encouraging the use of their inherent characteristics and potential.

The enhanced territoriality of the EU Cohesion Policy, expressed by the aspirations of the EU Member States in the context of the integrated territorial approach, provides the key features for the development programmes of 2014-2020 period, as expressed by the choice of territorial types for the implementation of related tools and the concept of a holistic approach in the planning of the necessary interventions facing spatial challenges. The introduction of integrated approaches helps to strengthen, at least to some extent, the strategic thinking in regional policy-making at the EU Member States, as they have to raise funds in certain spatial units and justify their choices. It is clear that, in most MS, CLLD and ITI are considered to be the main tools for strengthening the territorial dimension of cohesion policy and achieving territorial cohesion. Furthermore, the level of innovation and adaptation, elements that characterise the territorial instruments of the previous period, may lead to significant changes in the planning of spatial development during the 2021-2027 programming period.

While designing the content of the tools, strategic documents of development or spatial character are taken into account and the need for a cross-sectoral and multilevel approach is highlighted, which introduces spatial policies and issues such as rural-urban relations,

polycentrism as a model of development, and also the protection of the environment and adaptation to the effects of climate change. The multi-fund approach is chosen more in the case of ITIs, thus achieving synergies among ESIFs in a specific area of intervention, in order to address the challenges in a more integrated way. The targeted capacity building of the institutions should be pursued to facilitate the mobilisation of funding from different sources.

In view of the 2021-2027 programming period, the need for strengthening urban authorities (Managing Authorities, Urban Authorities, Local Action Groups e.t.) and the simplification of the rules governing the implementation of SUD projects is recognised, as in many countries local administration has been weakened after many years of austerity policies. Stakeholders' participation is strengthening the sense of "ownership" of the developed strategies. In this direction, the creation of new and the strengthening of existing cooperation networks, both during the preparation and implementation phase, the capacity building for the local stakeholders, the utilisation of the experience gained so far and the provision of the conditions for strengthening the related institutional and operational capabilities consist significant challenges.

The further evaluation of the integrated development strategies can be based on the analysis of the implementation of the strategies and their results in physical space and also in relation to development indicators. Furthermore, the relevance and complementarity of integrated territorial tools to the respective strategic and spatial planning may be exploited, thus questioning the policy synergies. It is also important to address the degree of the constructive participation of the stakeholders in the context of multi-level governance and according to the regulations of the ESI Funds.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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