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4.6.

Assessing integrated territorial development strategies

Eduardo Medeiros³⁵

Key words: urban dimension, EU Cohesion Policy, polycentrism, integrated sustainable urban development strategies, Urban Community Initiative, Polis

i) Introduction

This article seeks to propose a framework for the assessment of EU integrated sustainable urban development strategies (ISUDSs) based on a six-vector typology. It starts by discussing the advantages associated with the implementation of ISUDSs, while justifying the framework of the methodological approach proposed (section ii). The Portuguese case study is then used to empirically test the methodology proposed (section iii). More concretely, it examines the extent to which the implementation of two Urban Community Initiative (CI) programmes (1994–2006) and two Polis programmes (2007–13) had a fully integrated territorial policy approach, based on available evaluation reports.

ii) Evaluating integrated sustainable urban development strategies

Integrated territorial investment (ITI) is a new policy tool for the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) programming period, the main goal of which is to “make it easier to run territorial strategies that need funding from different sources. ITI also promotes a more local or ‘place-based’ form of policy making” (European Commission 2015). This more integrated approach to policy intervention entails more collaborative models of governance and covers different territorial scales. In the present EU Cohesion Policy programming period, at the urban level, the European Commission supports the implementation of ISUDSs across hundreds of European cities, as a somewhat novel policy tool for urban development.

Conceptually, the paper proposes a framework for the assessment of the territorial approach that is based on six vectors (integration of policy areas, impact of operations, planning horizon, territorial targeting, inclusiveness and strength of the monitoring framework). The article focuses on the case of Portugal, which has offered a wide set of EU-financed integrated urban development strategies since 1994 (under the Urban CI, Polis and Portuguese sustainable urban development strategies (SUDSs)) in the major urban agglomerations.

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From a methodological standpoint, this paper is mostly based on literature review. However, it also uses data collected for a case study, carried out during 2017, that analysed the 103 Portuguese SUDSs (van der Zwet et al. 2017), as well as information collected several years ago to evaluate the implementation of the Urban CI in Portugal.

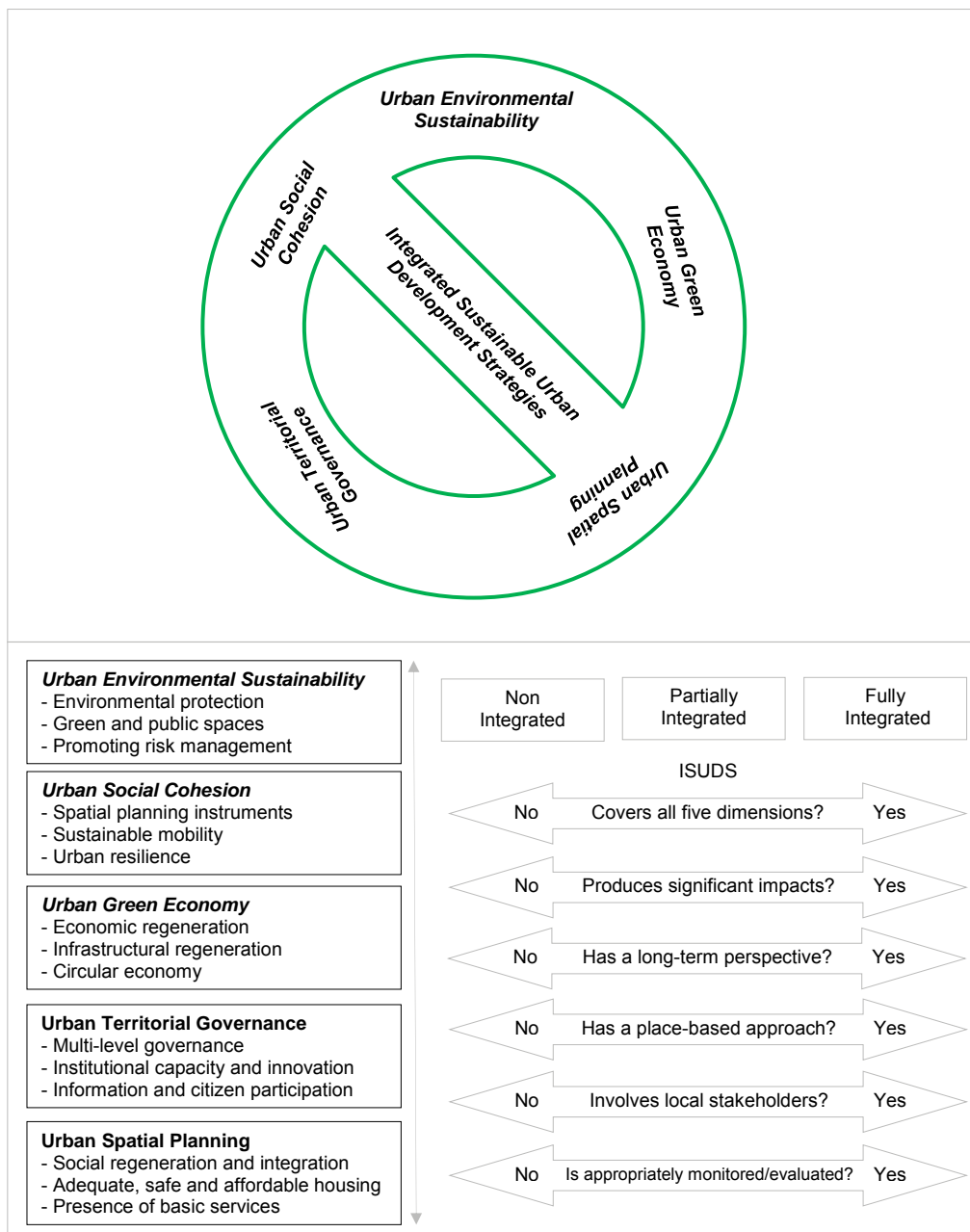
The idea behind the implementation of integrated territorial policy approaches is not new. By way of illustration, any sound and effective policy development plan requires a holistic and integrated intervention strategy. This rationale is based on the notion that the efficiency of policy implementation is increased by combining several types of funding and thematic objectives when addressing territorial development and territorial cohesion goals (Medeiros 2016).

The implementation of integrated territorial strategies is, nevertheless, difficult to achieve. First, there are issues in terms of competing policy agendas, which may prevent integration. Second, benefits are only achieved as part of a long-term visionary framework. Third, the lack of or insufficient coordination between levels of governance and sectoral legislation can affect the effectiveness of these strategies. Fourth, integration can only take place once a specific territorial scale has been defined in a functional (rather than administrative) manner. Lastly, the impact of the integrated approach has to be clearly defined and, added to that, the monitoring and evaluation processes of ISUDSs needs to be redefined, since available indicators favour a policy sectoral evaluation prism.

Among the identification of 12 major priority themes and cross-cutting issues, the Urban Agenda for the EU identified the need to promote a balanced, sustainable and integrated approach towards urban challenges with a “focus on all major aspects of urban development”. This requires the establishment of “more effective integrated and coordinated approach to EU policies and legislation with a potential impact on Urban Areas” (Urban Agenda 2016:5). Assessing the achievements and the effectiveness of these ISUDSs is, however, a complex process, despite being fundamental. In roughly equal parts, successful ISUDSs require a place-sensitive approach, as well as an effective territorial governance system and a proactive mobilisation of local/regional actors.

Despite these challenges, from a methodological standpoint, I propose an evaluation typology built around five main analytical dimensions, and their respective components (Figure 4.6.1). In essence, I suggest that ISUDSs can fit within three different categories: (1) non-integrated; (2) partially integrated; or (3) fully-integrated. To guide this assessment, I propose the analysis of six distinct evaluation vectors. First, from a strategic viewpoint, fully integrated ISUDSs should account for all urban development dimensions and most of the related components shown in the model. Second, ISUDSs should produce the desired results and impacts. Third, ISUDSs should take a long-term perspective and be integrated within local/regional development strategies. Next, they should follow a place-based strategic approach and be built from a bottom-up perspective. The design of the ISUDS is also important and its implementation should involve local/regional stakeholders. Finally, fully integrated ISUDSs should incorporate well-designed, holistic, realistic and fully functioning monitoring and evaluation systems.

Figure 4.6.1.
The dimensional circle of ISUDSs and a proposed evaluation typology



Source: Author's own elaboration, 2018

iii) The Portuguese case study

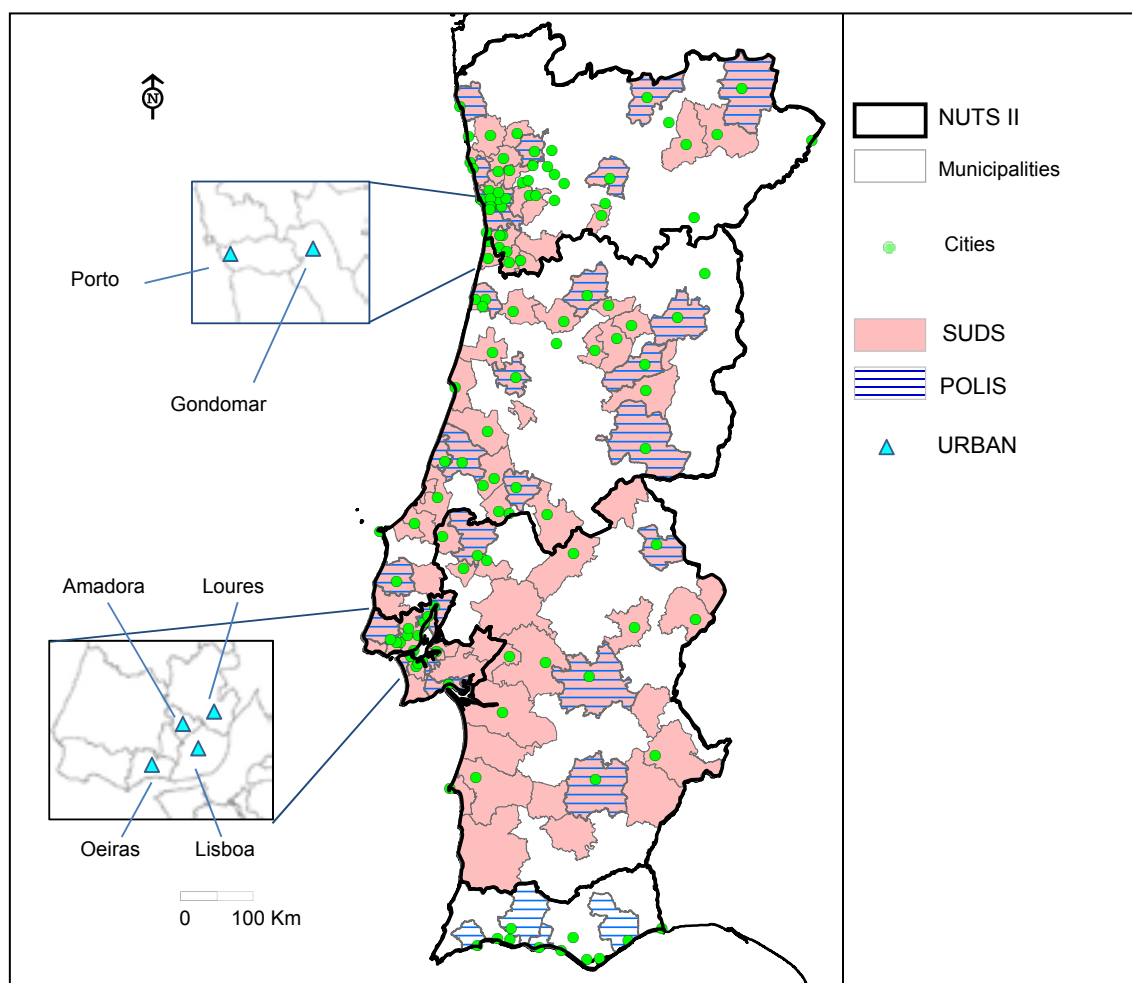
By envisaging an integrated approach, the implementation of Portuguese SUDSs encompasses at least 3 of the 11 thematic objectives of EU Cohesion Policy 2014–20: (1) supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors; (2) preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency; and (3) promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination. For Portugal, 103 SUDSs were approved, covering all Portuguese NUTS 2 regions with the exception of the Algarve region, with a total budget of EUR 19 million. For the most part, the approved SUDSs follow previous urban development strategies, implemented via the Urban CI and the Polis programme. Their strategic guidelines incorporate suggestions from public consultation processes and propose monitoring and evaluation plans, with clearly defined results and indicators, and risk analysis. For the most part, the responsibility

for the preparation of the SUDSs was adopted by local authorities, giving these types of strategies a clearly decentralised stance. It is still too early, however, to assess the impacts and added value of the Portuguese SUDSs, as they have been approved and implemented only in the last 2 years (2016–18). However, available literature points to their potential positive effects (van der Zwet et al. 2017:61):

- strengthening the profile and strategic framework of regional policy;
- encouraging integrated governance and strengthening capacities;
- promoting experimentation and innovation, with interventions facilitating greater cooperation and collaboration among policy-makers and stakeholders at different levels.

The large majority of the 103 Portuguese SUDSs focus on supporting social integration, physical renovation and sustainable mobility trends, while a few (between 1 and 4) focus on problematic urban neighbourhoods, which are either an old city centre or peripheral, socially degraded urban areas. Furthermore, in certain cases, the SUDSs use place-based measures to stimulate the local economy, for instance through the promotion of tourism-related activities. In a few cases, the improvement of governance models is also promoted, namely in larger urban areas. Curiously, the Algarve NUTS 2 region did not apply for a SUDS, as it did not have enough financial capacity for an autonomous development axis with the 3 required intervention dimensions, and also because the required 5 % for European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) urban investments was already assured by the remaining Portuguese regions.

Map 4.6.1.
Urban CI, Polis programmes and SUDSs in Portugal



Source: Author's own elaboration, 2018

Finally, one relatively positive outcome of the implementation of SUDSs in Portugal has been the allocation of responsibility for developing strategies, implementing projects, and monitoring and evaluation to municipality associations and metropolitan areas. In a sense, the SUDSs can be seen as a tangible policy tool for implementing bottom-up and place-based territorial development strategies. At the same time, “several ITIs are planned for the metropolitan areas Lisbon and Porto and for intermunicipal associations at NUTS 3 level (or spanning several contiguous NUTS 3 areas)” (van der Zwet 2014: 19). In other words, the regional level is taken into consideration for implementing SUDSs, as long as they are linked to the thematic objectives set out in the relevant operational programme(s). Based on previous remarks and our own field work, namely in evaluating the Urban CI and Polis, an attempt to fit Portuguese SUDSs into the evaluation typology proposed leads to the following conclusions concerning their integration level:

1. **Do Portuguese SUDSs cover all five dimensions?** Portuguese SUDSs, as a group, tackle, in general, all aspects related to the main dimensions for promoting urban development (urban environmental sustainability, urban social cohesion, urban green economy, urban territorial governance and urban spatial planning). Indeed, they are mostly focused on improving environmental aspects of urban development, as well as on promoting social regeneration and integration. Furthermore, economic regeneration, governance and spatial planning goals are directly and indirectly covered in the SUDS strategic documents, although to a minor degree.
2. **Do Portuguese SUDSs produce significant impacts?** Based on previous experiences (Urban, Polis), there is an expectation that the implementation of SUDSs in Portugal will have a positive impact. These, however, are not likely to fully solve all the urban problems that affect the targeted neighbourhoods. Instead, they are likely to mitigate them, while introducing and reinforcing new policy approaches that could bring longer term policy benefits to the development of Portuguese urban areas.
3. **Do Portuguese SUDSs have a long-term perspective?** For the most part, the Portuguese SUDSs follow previously designed and implemented urban development strategies. This means that there has been a continuation in implementing them in past decades. As such and taking into account the unlikelihood of solving all urban related issues in the following years, there will be a need to continue the implementation of ISUDSs after this programming period.
4. **Do Portuguese SUDSs have a place-based approach?** The strategies proposed in the 103 Portuguese SUDSs have instructive elements that demonstrate that they follow a place-based approach, adjusting policy interventions to the needs of specific urban areas.
5. **Do Portuguese SUDSs involve local stakeholders?** As previously mentioned, one of the most positive outcomes of the implementation of the Portuguese ISUDSs is their governance framework, which is based on a bottom-up and a place-based policy rationale, involving local/regional stakeholders in policy strategy design, implementation and evaluation processes.
6. **Are Portuguese SUDSs appropriately monitored/evaluated?** All Portuguese SUDSs propose concrete mechanisms to be evaluated, mostly by the urban authorities that implement them. These mechanisms include the collection of qualitative and quantitative data to analyse the changes/causalities of previously identified indicators, and the consultation of monitoring committees. It remains to be seen, however, how effective these monitoring and evaluation procedures will become.

iv) Conclusion

Based on the conclusions of the evaluation reports of the two abovementioned Urban CI programmes and the two Polis programmes, it can be concluded that the Portuguese SUDSs can be situated between the partially integrated and fully integrated types of ISUDSs, as there is still a need to assess their potential impacts in the urban areas being targeted. From a purely strategic perspective, however, they are able to reflect this emerging axiom for a more integrated policy approach, which has been permeating academic and EU political discourses in the past decades. In view of the above, one needs to revise this evaluation proposal a few years after the first set of Portuguese SUDSs have been fully implemented, to make a more robust evaluation.

Since the implementation of SUDSs is relatively recent, this article adds an innovative perspective to their potential evaluation, by presenting a concrete methodology and applying it in a case study. At the same time, it contributes to improving the understanding of European territorial development and cohesion by highlighting the most positive impacts of the ISUDSs analysed in promoting urban development in the intervention areas. Furthermore, the proposed methodology can be generalised to other European countries and adjusted to all territorial levels, as it can easily be adapted, for instance, to be used in the evaluation of regional ITIs, making it particularly relevant for policy-making.

Evidently, as regards the currently implemented Portuguese SUDS, our findings are still preliminary, since the implementation process is still at an early stage. As such, a more robust and sound evaluation needs to take place after they have been fully implemented. For this, a rigorous quantitative (statistical indicators) and qualitative (questionnaires to involved stakeholders and population) approach must be applied, to fit each ISUDS into our typology appropriately.

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