

# The Integrated Approach in Urban Policies: European and Spanish Experiences

*EUKN Policy Lab for Spain, November 2021  
Report*



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The EUKN is the only independent, Member State-driven network in the field of European urban policy, research and practice. Our primary focus is working with European national and regional governments to promote sustainable urban development. We provide our members with expertise and tailored events, as well as fostering collaboration within our network, to create the just, green, productive and digitised cities of the future.

We work closely with our members as they develop and evolve their National Urban Policy, facilitating transformative development on city, regional and national levels.

We also collaborate with European and global partners on agenda-setting research in urban development. With a focus on implementing sustainable, inclusive urban policy worldwide, our collaborations include projects for the Urban Agenda for the EU, the New Urban Agenda and the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

For more information on the EUKN, visit [www.eukn.eu](http://www.eukn.eu) and subscribe to our [Newsletter](#).

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# Background

**This Policy Lab was a hybrid event designed to support the ongoing collaboration between the Spanish Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda (MITMA) and Spanish cities to develop and trial Local Action Plans in the framework of the Spanish Urban Agenda (SUA).**

## The New Leipzig Charter

The integrated approach in urban policies has come a long way since its adoption in 2007, in the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities, to move past the silo mentality and towards an ‘integrated approach’ in urban policies. The 2020 New Leipzig Charter – the transformative power of cities for the common good<sup>1</sup> – reiterates the core message of its predecessor: overcoming silo thinking and moving towards an integrated approach in urban policies, harnessing digitalisation to achieve productive, just and green transitions.

Having entered the political mainstream of EU Member States<sup>2</sup>, the implementation of the integrated approach to urban development has nevertheless been riddled with challenges. The definitions and local policy translations of this concept have had to adapt to rapidly changing urban dynamics, influenced by global forces for change such as climate change, migration, rising inequalities, the new economy, and digitalisation, among others.

## The Spanish Urban Agenda

Launched in 2019, the Spanish Urban Agenda (SUA)<sup>3</sup> is a strategic non-binding document which pursues the achievement of sustainability and an integrated approach in urban development policies. The SUA constitutes a working method and a process for all actors, public and private, who intervene in cities and who seek equitable, just, and sustainable development from their different fields of action. It makes available to those interested in its implementation a true “à la carte menu” to tailor-make context-specific Action Plans and strengthen multilevel and participatory governance.

## Policy Lab objectives

During the event, pioneering examples of the integrated approach in urban policies at different scales within the Spanish and the wider European contexts were explored. The cases presented encompassed the local, the national, and the EU levels, facilitating experts exchanges on context-specific policies and programmes to derive bottlenecks and opportunities for further uptake and experimentation in the post-pandemic period.

[Check the Policy Lab website](#)

1. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/newsroom/news/2020/12/12-08-2020-new-leipzig-charter-the-transformative-power-of-cities-for-the-common-good](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/news/2020/12/12-08-2020-new-leipzig-charter-the-transformative-power-of-cities-for-the-common-good).

2. See: “Ten years after the Leipzig Charter” study conducted by the EUKN Secretariat (2017).

3. Available at: <https://www.aue.gob.es/>.

# Political Context

## The integrated approach in international agendas

*Contribution by David Lucas Parrón, General Secretary of Urban Agenda and Housing, MITMA*

As highlighted by the UN New Urban Agenda (NUA) and the Urban Agenda for the EU (UAEU), in an increasingly urbanised world, addressing global challenges should start at the local level, through towns and cities. Both agendas recognise the fundamental role of municipalities to achieve global sustainability objectives, placing the urban dimension as transversal to other areas of life, from the quality of the environment to social justice, economic wellbeing, and so forth.

Tracing back the rationale for the integrated approach, one is reminded of the Millennium Development Goals, whose implementation was hindered by two main problems. Firstly, the lack of an integrated policy approach hampered public awareness of their social importance. Secondly, an emergently clear need for policies that were interconnected, tailored to local circumstances, and led by local authorities themselves.

MITMA is supporting local authorities to play this vital role, ensuring that urban policies are backed by tangible actions. To adopt a multi-level governance paradigm, common grounds must be found between stakeholders to define truly integrated solutions that can address the complex challenges of the 21st century.

## The integrated approach in the Spanish Urban Agenda

*Contribution by Iñiqui Carnicero, Director of Urban Agenda and Architecture, MITMA*

The Spanish Urban Agenda is a strategic, non-regulatory and therefore non-binding framework that aims to provide a roadmap for public and private decisions related to integrated urban development. MITMA, the driving force behind the SUA, is also the Spanish Government's focal point for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

In this context, the Ministry is planning and developing strategies for financing, governance, and dissemination and exchange of knowledge between cities to strengthen experimentation. A fundamental aspect in this regard is the implementation of the AUE at the local level, with the offer of the Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan's 20 million euro programme for the development of local pilot projects. One hundred twenty-one local entities have been pre-selected to receive funding based on the quality, unique character, and exemplary capacity showcased.



*Image 1: Round table of experts, 16th November 2021, Madrid.*

# European Experiences

## The integrated approach and the urban dimension at the EU level

*Contribution by Valentina Corsetti, Programme Manager, Unit Spain and Portugal, DG REGIO, European Commission*

### Horizontal, vertical and functional integration

The evolution of the urban dimension of EU policy has gone hand in hand with horizontal, vertical, and territorial integration of EU policies.<sup>4</sup> In the past 20 years, this process has involved the integration of thematic (or sectoral) policies, the strengthening of multi-level governance, as well as territorial cooperation, culminating in the focus on functional areas in the 2014–2020 programming period. Functional areas, encompassing different and interdependent dimensions of urban and peri-urban life, require a high degree of inter-institutional cooperation to be successful.

### The EU closer to its citizens

In the post-pandemic era, increasingly complex and nuanced challenges call for the mainstreaming of the integrated approach in urban policies more than ever before. The new Cohesion Policy (2021–2027) highlights a fundamental role for cities to rebuild a smarter, greener, more connected, social Europe which is closer to its citizens, providing different territorial instruments for integrated and participatory development. With Spain being among the main beneficiary countries of the NextGenerationEU,<sup>5</sup> the EU Recovery Fund, Spanish cities are presented with great opportunities to drive the country's sustainable recovery.

## Germany, the Social Cohesion Program

*Contribution by Tilman Buchholz, Deputy Head of the Urban Development Policy Unit at the German Ministry of the Interior*

### Multi-level governance

Germany fully reflects the integrated approach in the governance of its National Urban Development Policy, involving all levels of government, from the Federal State to the Federated States (or *länder*), and the local authorities. The establishment of an integrated legislative framework combining these three levels has resulted in the co-funding of three major federal assistance programs, addressing vitality in urban centers, social cohesion in disadvantaged neighborhoods, and sustainable growth and renewal. Launched in 1999, the Social Cohesion Program promotes an interdisciplinary take on upgrading deprived neighbourhoods, combin-

ing interventions in the built environment with social and economic measures.

### Interdepartmental strategy of the Social City

Approved in 2016, the objective of the Social City Strategy is to combine public funding from different departments in a strategic way towards disadvantaged neighbourhoods with particular integration problems. An evaluation of this strategy was carried out in 2021, and the citizens were very positive, outlining that the adoption of a long-term approach has generated reliability and trust.

4. Find more information in the '[Handbook of sustainable urban development strategies](#)'.

5. Available at: [https://europa.eu/next-generation-eu/index\\_en](https://europa.eu/next-generation-eu/index_en).



Successful examples of **interdepartmental projects** launched in Germany include:

- Improving consumer Protection in social city neighbourhoods (together with Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection);
- Mentoring for young refugees and migrants in social city neighbourhoods (together with Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth);
- Funding of art and cultural projects in disadvantaged neighbourhoods to promote citizen empowerment (together with High Commissioner of Culture and Media);
- Healthy Food, equal opportunities regarding public health for people in social city areas (together with Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture).

## Lisbon, the BIP/ZIP Programme

*Contribution by Rui Neves Bochmann Franco, Deputy City Councillor at Lisbon City Council*

### Poverty as the result of overlapping dynamics

Launched in 2008, Lisbon's Local Development Strategy links city-wide strategic development to local, surgical interventions that empower communities in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Through the BIP/ZIP programme,<sup>6</sup> recognised internationally as a good practice, this area-based strategy looks at urban poverty as the result of intersected and compounded dynamics that combine the social, economic, environmental, and spatial dimensions. Most importantly, the Strategy aims to empower citizens to actively participate in the development of their own (built) environment.

### Tools for integrated implementation

The Strategy entails four integrated tools: a priority mapping of disadvantaged territories building on local residents' perceptions; the BIP/ZIP local partnerships program funding projects collaborative developed by local NGOs and community groups; a co-governance model based on participatory decision-making through local support offices (GABIP); and the establishment of a Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) Network channelling EU funds and supporting bottom-up co-governance through thematic task-forces.



The Lisbon CLLD Network established a **comprehensive online support programme** to limit the impacts of covid-related restrictions on school activities and students' academic performance. Its success inspired a new call for proposals to replicate the programme in the following years.

Moreover, as part of the BIP/ZIP program, a **non-speculative community currency** has been created. This promotes the city's local economy, increasing transactions and creating resilient communities.

6. Standing for Programme of Neighbourhoods and Areas of Priority Intervention Neighbour ("Bairros e Zonas de Intervenção Prioritária"). More information available at: <https://bipzip.cm-lisboa.pt> (PT).



## Tilburg, Urban Network Holland

Contribution by Martijn Kanters, Urban Development Manager at Tilburg City Council

### Regional integration

After years of decentralisation, the Dutch government started regaining leadership in the definition of urban policy, expanding the allocation of funds towards this area. With a new National Spatial Vision based on regional integration, a new definition of the 'Urban Network Holland' emerges. Through the stipulation of Regional Urbanisation Agreements, Dutch cities have now access to investments for large scale, integrated urban development subsidised by the central government. While one of the key national priorities remains

increasing housing stocks, other dimensions such the economy, mobility, nature, and energy are incorporated into investment schemes.

In this context, the Breda-Tilburg functional area is being redefined. Planning includes the provision of 100,000 new affordable housing units, while transitioning to a knowledge-based economy, increasing green public spaces, and designing a new sustainable mobility plan, among other actions.



The city centre of Tilburg aims to transition towards a **knowledge and service-based economy**. Planning includes an improvement of the train station and transport alternatives near the university to encourage sustainable transport, emphasising energy efficiency.

'Area development coalitions' are also being formed across the Netherlands, underlining a new approach to stimulate cooperation with actors from the private sector, while the municipal government fulfils coordination and oversight functions.



# Spanish Experiences

## Zaragoza, the Ebrópolis case

Contribution by Mar Rodríguez Beltrán, Technical Coordinator of Ebrópolis

### A new multi-actor governance model

The Association for the Development of Zaragoza and its Surroundings, Ebrópolis, counts with almost 30 years of experience in strategic urban planning. The organisation, established by the municipality to represent the Saragossan society from a polycentric viewpoint, adopts a metropolitan approach that brings together more than 200 members. Ebrópolis promotes participation and consensus in urban development processes, supporting balance between the city, its surroundings and the autonomous community through a holistic, multi-level, and multi-actor governance

### Zaragoza Urban Agenda

The strategic vision for Zaragoza as a “real city” (Zaragoza+20) articulates along the short, medium, and long-term, as well as across different territorial levels, from the neighbourhood to the larger metropolitan scale. Strong connections between the urban and the rural are also created,<sup>7</sup> while promoting alignment with national and international sustainability agendas. In this framework, the Urban Agenda of Zaragoza (AUZ) pilot focuses on three key areas: the fight against climate change, social cohesion, and smart cities.



Zaragoza has established an **Urban Observatory** to analyse, diagnose and assess urban problems. Its work is based on defining and evaluating strategies, as well as monitoring the impacts of specific interventions in the shortest possible time. The Observatory supports the integration of SUA system indicators to strengthen the city and its benchmarking with other Spanish and European cities.

## Sant Boi de Llobregat, interdisciplinary work

Contribution by Francisco Gutiérrez, Head of the Mayor's Office, Sant Boi de Llobregat City Council

### Unit for Planification and Evaluation Assistance (UAPA)

Sant Boi de Llobregat hosts two psychiatric centers that, together with the logistics industry, represent the main economic engine of the city. Transforming what can be considered a social stigma into an asset,<sup>8</sup>

the city became a reference for good practice concerning urban health, and specifically mental health. The creation of a multidisciplinary unit to assist city departments in planning and evaluation, facilitated, over time, the dissolution of sectoral silos towards integrated municipal policies. Supporting the city in accessing

7. A sensibilisation and awareness-raising campaign was catalysed by the joint action of the regional Government of Aragon and Zaragoza's Provincial Council to create rural-urban agendas towards an integrated metropolitan vision, with small towns adapting and approving their own Local Action Plans.

8. Sant Boi was known as “the city of mad people”.

different funding opportunities, including at the EU level,<sup>9</sup> the unit also strengthens efforts to locally translate national and international goals.

### City Strategy 2030

Sant Boi's City Strategy 2030, the Government Plan 2023, as well as the Local Action Plan created in the framework of the Spanish Urban Agenda stand as great

examples of such efforts. Providing an integrated vision for Sant Boi's sustainable transformation, the City Strategy 2030 breaks down the sectoral, technical and political structures of the city council, creating a city model dependent on inter-departmental coordination. In this context, urban planning processes are moved by a participatory, transversal and network-oriented vision.



As Sant Boi's municipal council was reviewing its policies on participation and economic promotion, a decision was made to convert an unused municipal Civic Centre into a **public innovation laboratory: CoBoi**. This hybrid space now helps to generate disruptive thinking and emerging policy scenarios.

## Alfaro, the SUA Local Action Plan

*Contribution by Jose Ramón Bergasa, Alfaro's Municipal Architect*

### Place-based adaptation of the SUA

The municipal territory of Alfaro is far-reaching and encompasses a great variety of altitudes, landscapes, biodiversity and, thus presents extremely different land-uses. This heterogeneity bears influence on spatial planning, based on the delineation of a series of protected areas. The recently developed SUA Action Plan defines 10 strategic objectives along respective thematic axes, each containing a multitude of indicators and actions.

### Local priorities

Municipal priority actions are rooted in four fundamental strategies: (1) to valorise the rural-urban relationship, valuing cultural heritage; (2) to retain the talent of young people; (3) to rehabilitate and regenerate the city's historic center; (4) to enhance the quality of life of elderly citizens. A product of an interdisciplinary consultation, Alfaro's Action Plan will require the expert support of architects and biologists during its implementation phase.



Alfaro is a paradigmatic example of an Urban Agenda pilot for small municipalities, demonstrating that the lack of extensive resources for or experience in strategic planning is not a barrier to adopting the integrated approach. Alfaro's Action Plan has become a great resource for the sustainable development of the municipal territory and its articulation with the wider region.

9. A specialised body, the European Resource Management Office (EDUSI), was created by the municipality to be in charge of this work.

# Working Groups

**The objective of the working groups was to interactively discuss the application of the integrated approach in urban policies at various levels. The small-group discussions helped to extrapolate key lessons from the SUA in the context of the New Leipzig Charter at a local and practical level.**

Participants were divided into working groups led by three moderators: Marta Lora-Tamayo, National University of Distance Education; Omar Bouazza, Complutense University of Madrid; and Francisco Javier González, European University of Madrid. The key lessons gathered from the small-group discussions are presented below.

## The key elements of municipal urban policies

**Administrative coordination for effective governance:** A strong need for change in the administrative culture of urban policy was highlighted. In particular, it is necessary to overcome the segmentation of policies (horizontal integration) and to promote the articulation of strategies and actions between various administrative levels (vertical integration). A decisive factor is the development of techniques for administrative cooperation and coordination.

**Place-based decisions:** Administrative efficiency is essential to ensuring the spatial concreteness of the integrated policy approach and its link to urban planning. It is important to consolidate knowledge, building networks of stakeholders that are able to provide and exchange information and experience. The scale of action is another factor to be considered for the optimum implementation of comprehensive policies, along with the capacity to turn difficulties into opportunities through in-depth knowledge of the territory.

**Institutional pedagogy and leadership:** Inclusive and shared leadership with political will and commitment to action is indispensable. Similarly, initiatives to foster new institutional learning and a new, comprehensive vision of urban reality are also needed. It was insisted on the importance of promoting skill-training and awareness-raising within city councils themselves, among other actions.

**Citizen participation:** The importance of participatory processes for detecting real needs and fostering inclusion, integration and improved allocation of public resources was emphasised. Citizen participation must take place *ex ante*, as an instrument for correcting dysfunctions that may arise, as well as *ex post*, in the form of citizen control and monitoring of implementation.

*“Active citizenship is the basis of governance”*

## Barriers that hinder the implementation of the integrated approach

**The sectoral nature of administrative structures:** Public administration is traditionally structured in a sectoral fashion without contemplating linkages and interconnections that could facilitate transversal policies. Municipal organisations are not accustomed to the integrated way of working or dimension of urban issues. This is compounded by excessive bureaucratisation and the resulting administrative hurdles.

**Urgency of current urban problems:** Short-term political urgency is being addressed in a context of growing individualism. Greater collaboration is needed to foster resilience and network-building. In the face of urgent global challenges such as climate change, administrative inertia is another barrier to designing (and implementing) integrated policies.

*“In the face of global challenges, administrative inertia is a barrier to sustainable adaptation”*

**Political discontinuity:** As a result of political discontinuity, planning often goes no further than the duration of a term in office. There is a need for greater compromise between political groups, with the integrated approach taking precedence over competing ideological sensitivities.

**Lack of knowledge and commitment:** It is necessary to promote education on the importance of integrated approach for the sustainable development of the different areas of social and economic life that affect the urban environment. A stronger culture of participation should be fostered both among citizens and public administrations.

**Inflexible and obsolete regulations:** Inflexible regulations and poor articulation between measures affecting physical space and social programmes are examples of the need to reinforce an integrated vision of sustainability. Urban policies are based on planning and management instruments that have become inadequate and

## Contribution of SUA and Municipal Action Plans to promoting the integrated approach

**Paradigm shift, breaking down sectoral boundaries:** The creation of Local Urban Agendas and Action Plans act as catalysts for the integrated approach, combining vertical and horizontal integration. In this sense, an integrated and multi-scale urban model is adopted, which considers the “glocalisation” of urban processes and its application to different territorial contexts. Municipal barriers can thus be overcome through conceptualisations such as functional areas, which attempt finding dynamic solutions to complex territorial problems.

**The added value of the SUA:** The SUA provides a common methodology and language to create a meeting space for all actors involved in its implementation, supporting joint action towards sustainable urban development. It is a working method that combines traditional urban planning with articulated, localised strategies that promote social and spatial sustainability. Given the SUA’s political weight and broad consensus, its approval repre-

sents an opportunity for the principles for integrated urban development to be progressively embedded into (local) urban planning legislation.

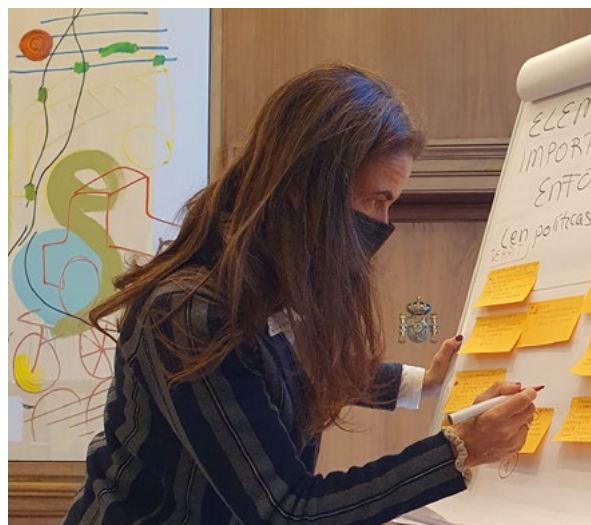
*“The SUA provides a common language”*

**Local participation and empowerment:** The SUA promotes local initiative through citizen participation in government bodies such as neighbourhood councils and general or sectoral consultation and advisory bodies (organic participation) and direct local participation. It also provides an opportunity for local empowerment, activating not only administrations but also marginal actors, giving them visibility in these processes. Meanwhile, local agendas mobilise funds to finance urban transformations, facilitating access to multilevel resources and advisory support for administrations.

**Generation and sharing of knowledge:** Local Urban Agendas are an instrument for generating knowledge of different geographical realities that can promote training of administrations in a multidisciplinary manner, while encouraging the development of pilot projects. The comparison of experiences enables learning and, by doing so, the enrichment of knowledge.



*Image 2: Participants of Working Group 1 writing down their ideas. At the back, Omar Bouazza, moderator of Working Group 2.*



*Image 3: Marta-Lora Tamayo, moderator of Working Group 1, re-arranging the inputs provided by participants.*

# Conclusions

Following the guidelines defined by the 2007 Leipzig Charter and reiterated in 2020, the recent decades have seen EU Member States increasingly adopting an integrated approach in the development of their urban policies. Nevertheless, structural challenges remain that hinder a holistic and coordinated uptake of such approach. In Spain, the approval of the Spanish Urban Agenda in 2019 has offered a viable working method available for different urban actors to develop integrated Action Plans towards equitable, just, and sustainable cities, via **participatory and multilevel governance**.

## European Experiences

At the **European level**, key institutions now consider sustainable urban development to be fundamental for promoting the wellbeing of citizens, matched by a progressive increase in funding dedicated to urban areas in the 2021-2027 programming period. **Germany** fully reflects the importance of integrated and multilevel governance, involving all levels of government in the development of its urban policy. Federal assistance schemes such as the Social Cohesion program require an integrated vision as a precondition for funding. In the Portuguese capital of **Lisbon**, the BIP/ZIP programme has been widely recognised for its success in empowering citizens in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, strengthening local organisations and catalysing bottom-up co-governance mechanisms. The Dutch city of **Tilburg** demonstrates that national funding for urban development is essential. Municipalities need financial capacity to carry out ambitious plans such as the promotion of a functional urban conurbation aimed at modernising the economy.

## Spanish Experiences

In Spain, the Zaragoza Urban Agenda serves as an example for other municipalities to develop integrated local Action Plans. In **Zaragoza**, the creation of Ebrópolis has helped to break down the sectoralisation of many departments of the administrations, creating a meeting space for the Saragossan society. In the case of **Sant Boi**, the creation of an interdisciplinary unit has helped to promote integrated urban policies in a coordinated and efficient manner. Finally, the rural municipality of **Alfaro** demonstrates that, despite limited municipal resources, creating a Local Action Plan linked to the SUA and other supranational frameworks adds value to the implementation of strategic, comprehensive, and sustainable actions.

## Towards more just, productive, and greener cities

Successful cases of implementation of the integrated approach in urban policies offer inspiration for replicating strategies and promoting experimentation in the post-pandemic period. The collaboration between MITMA and Spanish cities is essential to making this possible, with the SUA forming a strategic framework of reference, fostering citizen empowerment so that integrated policies can contribute to making cities more just, productive, and greener.