



Policy Evidence About the Added Value of EU-Integrated Urban Initiatives as Local Policy Mixes

*Clemente J. Navarro Yáñez, María Jesús Rodríguez-García,
and María José Guerrero-Mayo*

Abstract Have local strategies promoted better urban policies and urban spaces? This chapter reviews the main evidence about this question concerning the added value of urban initiatives promoted by the EU in Spain between 1994 and 2013. The first section summarises the evidence presented in previous chapters, in line with the two aspects of added value and the specific research questions proposed about them. The second section interprets the results of the Spanish case, in line with

C. J. Navarro Yáñez (✉) · M. J. Rodríguez-García · M. J. Guerrero-Mayo
Centre for Sociology and Urban Policies-The Urban Governance Lab,
Pablo de Olavide University, Seville, Spain
e-mail: cnavyan@upo.es

M. J. Rodríguez-García
e-mail: mjrodgar@upo.es

M. J. Guerrero-Mayo
e-mail: mjguemay@upo.es

the conceptualisation of these initiatives as multi-level policy mixes and the multi-scalar comparative analysis that is appropriate to explain local integrated strategies in the framework of the European Cohesion Policy.

Keywords Urban policy · Integrated strategy · Evaluation · Comparative analyses · European Union

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapters, different aspects of the two central aspects of added value relating to the urban dimension of the EU cohesion policy have been analysed: policy compliance and learning, as integrated urban strategies and improvements in living conditions in targeted territories. Other questions about these or different potential types of added value have not been analysed here. In addition, the study has some limitations due to its proposed aims.

First, through questions and methods, research has tried to establish—and expand—a comparative perspective for analysing urban initiatives promoted by the EU as integrated multi-level policy mixes. To this aim, research issues and the associated policy evidence are based on comparative analyses at the level of local integrated strategies and their targeted territories. Therefore, the ideas and evidence go beyond more traditional analyses that focus on the policy frame of the ECP urban dimension, studies at the programme level (at the national or regional level) or case studies in specific urban areas. We have analysed all the local integrated strategies implemented between 1994 and 2013 in Spain. Similar research questions to those in previous studies have been explored, but through developing specific ideas and research strategies that provide new and complementary policy evidence about the design, implementation and effects of EU urban initiatives.

Second, research strategies have been intentionally designed to use secondary data sources that may exist in other countries (project documentation, census data, surveys and secondary data). Therefore, other researchers, practitioners or policymakers could apply—or replicate—similar research strategies, and therefore produce evidence that could help to expand the comparative analysis of EU urban integrated strategies. The proposed research strategies allow for cross-sectional and over-time

comparisons at different policy levels (from local projects and their policy actions to policy frames).

The previous chapters have thus provided policy evidence through an extensive comparative analysis at the local level, in which local strategies are designed and implemented. Differences in policy frames are also examined across programming periods. This book does not, therefore, provide detailed information, such as case studies or the study of national policy frames and their changes according to ECP programming periods. Detailed information provided by case studies was studied to design our analytical and empirical research strategies. Further, in accordance with our perspective on urban policies as multi-level policy mixes, national frameworks are incorporated as a contextual element explaining over-time variations in policy design and policy implementation theories, and subsequently the effects of programmes. New policy evidence is provided by applying a specific analytical framework and novel or not previously used research strategies to existing data sources. As with other approaches, the evidence provided has limitations that have been indicated in each chapter. Above all, this book attempts to provide new and complementary ideas and evidence about the integrated model proposed by the EU and some of its added value aspects.

ON THE NATURE AND ADDED VALUE OF URBAN
INITIATIVES PROMOTED BY THE EU: POLICY
EVIDENCE ABOUT POLICY COMPLIANCE
AND LEARNING FROM THE CASE OF SPAIN (1994–2013)

Have urban strategies applied the ‘integrated model’ proposed by the ECP policy frame? Do these initiatives promote the improvement expected in targeted territories? This section summarises the main answers to these questions provided in previous chapters according to the specific research questions posed in Chapters 2 and 7.

*Better Urban Policies? Applying and Learning About the Integrated
Model Proposed by the EU*

Does the content of the projects come close to the idea—the policy framework—of integrated urban development promoted by the EU? Evidence is mixed because the answer differs depending on the issue

considered (Table 12.1). Local plans stand out more for their diversity than their ‘integratedness’. Goals, actors and tools across policy sectors are set. However, the complementarity and synergies that the integrated strategy entails are not as clearly evident (see Chapters 4 and 5). Other studies analysing specific CUPPA items about policy integration or applying network analysis confirm the small interrelationship between policy measures in URBAN and URBANA projects regardless of their transversality across different policy sectors (Dorado-Rubín, Guerrero-Mayo, & Navarro-Yáñez, 2021b; Dorado-Rubín, Guerrero-Mayo, & Navarro, 2021a).¹ Thus, initiatives try to promote sustainable urban development in terms of a balance between relevant policy goals (physical space, economic, social, governance, environment, etc.); however, the integrated strategy is not widely applied. The traditional sectoral logic prevails over a policy integration strategy.

This evidence does not point to an absence of added value concerning learning effects about urban policies. The quality of the local strategy design is not very high, and improvement between URBAN and URBANA initiatives is generally low. However, learning effects exist regarding the planning of instruments to ensure the coordination and participation of involved actors (governance), and to a certain extent, the policy actions included in local plans. The planning of project evaluation shows the opposite situation: the quality level is low and even lower in the last programming period. The evaluability of local strategies shows that evaluation is the cornerstone of improvements that the EU urban integrated strategy needs (Chapter 3). With regard to the implementation of the integrated strategy, the last programming period analysed (the URBANA Initiative) incorporates this policy innovation to a greater degree than previous programming periods, but more for policy content than for governance processes. However, this promotes a reduction in the relationship between policy agenda integration and governance integration from URBAN to URBANA initiatives, showing the independence

¹ Case studies have also been analysed by applying this network analysis strategy within the framework of the Urban DUSI Lab promoted by the Jean Monnet Chair in European Urban Policies (EUrPol) and the Andalusian Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FAMP). Analyses have been carried out in collaborative work between researchers and the staff in charge of integrated urban strategies in the current EDUSI programme co-funded by the European Cohesion Policy in Spain. These cases point in the same direction: diversity prevails over integration in local policy mixes.

between these two policy dimensions as regards integration in the local policy mixes studied (Chapter 5).

The policy theory behind projects shows the importance of a contextual strategy to promote better structures of opportunities (contexts) for neighbourhood residents and a more redistributive strategy focussed on residents and specific collectives through motivational policy tools (around 65% of policy actions analysed in URBAN and URBANA projects). However, an over-time comparison points to a shift from a more balanced policy theory to an approach more focussed on a ‘contextual’ strategy, trusting that improvements in the neighbourhood (as the context) will lead to improvements in residents’ quality of life (Chapter 6).

Previous chapters accordingly show that the level of policy compliance and learning is low as regards the policy frame proposed by the EU among local strategies. The policy evidence was produced by applying the comparative urban policy portfolios analysis (CUPPA) (Chapter 2). This approach provides analytical tools and a research method to perform comparative studies across local initiatives. In addition, by aggregation, comparative studies for higher policy levels (from policy actions to general policy frames) correspond with the multi-level character of policy mixes that EU urban initiatives entail. Here, some aspects have been analysed: the quality of local strategy design, the content of the policy agenda, the application of the integral strategy and the policy theory for implementation as the causal mechanisms linking goals and outcomes (according to policy tools used in policy actions included in policy mixes). This provides researchers, practitioners or policymakers with the framework to be used to attribute effects to integrated initiatives, as the theory-driven evaluation approach proposes (Weiss, 1997; Rogers, 2008), or to compare the character—and change—of different urban policies or programmes as multi-level policy mixes (Navarro, 2020, Navarro & Rodríguez-García, 2020; Navarro-Yáñez, 2021).

Better Urban Places to Live? ‘Average’ and ‘Heterogeneous’ Effects of EU Urban Initiatives

Have the initiatives produced the expected impacts on socio-spatial cohesion and the quality of life? Once again, the answer depends on which aspect is under consideration, in accordance with the distinction between the socio-spatial context as an opportunity structure for residents (physical space, infrastructure, economic activity, etc.) and different individual

Table 12.1 Better urban policies? policy quality, compliance and learning in local integrated strategies

<i>Research issue</i>	<i>Research question</i>	<i>Main policy evidence</i>
The nature of EU urban initiatives as integrated urban development strategies (policy compliance as regards policy frame)	Is the idea of integrated urban development applied? Do local projects/strategies adopt this policy frame?	<i>Sectoral logic prevails over policy integration: diversity does not mean integrated strategies</i> Local strategies include the sustainable idea (as a balance between different sectoral goals), but policy content and governance processes are not planned to produce complementation and synergy among policy sectors
	What policy theory is behind sustainable and integrated strategies?	<i>The increasing importance of a 'contextual strategy' as the policy theory for sustainable and integrated urban development</i> Policy theory combines intervention strategies of traditional urban policy sectors (their objectives and tools). However, there is a shift from a more balanced approach to the primacy of the 'contextual strategy'
Added value I: the 'learning effect' promoted by the integrated urban development strategy (changes over-time)	Does the policy design of local strategies improve over-time? Are there learning effects?	<i>Some improvements in governance and evaluation as the 'pending subject' in policy design</i> The level of policy design quality is slightly higher in the most recent programming period (the URBANA Initiative) Learning effects exist for governance, the opposite for evaluation

(continued)

Table 12.1 (continued)

<i>Research issue</i>	<i>Research question</i>	<i>Main policy evidence</i>
	Has the application of integrated strategy been extended over-time? Have local authorities adopted this urban innovation?	<i>Some increase in policy agenda integration</i> Policy integration is slightly higher in the most recent programming period (the URBANA Initiative) but more for goals than governance Thus, the timing of policy integration for content and governance are different; they are two independent policy dimensions in policy mixes (especially in the URBANA Initiative)

aspects of residents' quality of life and that of their households (education, employment, health, etc.) (Table 12.2). With regard to the first aspect, the evidence shows clear impacts on dwellings, economic activity and the density of cultural amenities, although residents' perceptions of improvements in the physical environment do not point to this as clearly (Chapters 8, 9 and 10). The effects on residents' quality of life are quite moderate, and above all, very different depending on the issue considered; a common finding in other evaluations conducted on these initiatives or similar area-based policies (Lawless, 2012; Navarro, Moya et al., 2016; Rae, 2011; Thomson, 2008). Positive effects exist for educational attainment, occupational status and, to some extent, health. However, the effects are less clear regarding employment or the household socio-economic situation (Chapters 8 and 9). Thus, the causal relationship between improvements to the socio-spatial context and improvements among residents is not clear-cut for all potential outcomes. Other analyses should be carried out into this policy theory, specifying (or proposing) more concrete causal mechanisms about the impacts of these contextual interventions on different expected outcomes. More so, if the current and following programming periods stress this trend towards a contextual approach over a more redistributive approach or a more balanced approach between them (as with the original initiatives in the 1990s).

In addition to the average effects of the programmes assessed through the comparison between all experimental and control urban areas, there is also some evidence about heterogeneous policy effects, in that the initiatives do not produce the same results for different targets; as the contextualisation approach to study ECP at the national and regional level has shown (Creszenci & Giua, 2020). In this regard, it is possible to distinguish between territorial targets and within them (for groups of residents or activities). For the former, the effects of the URBANA Initiative are somewhat more evident when the analysis focusses on the most vulnerable territorial targets (see Chapter 8). Differences in the effects of the URBAN Initiative in historic centres vary according to their socio-economic position in their cities (Chapter 10). Other analyses have shown that the effect of these and similar initiatives are different in historical city centres and peripheral neighbourhoods, in terms of different opportunity structures for the success of local plans or some of their actions (Fernández, 2021; Navarro, Moya et al., 2016).

With regard to the residents (the heterogeneous effects within targeted territories), their exposure to the neighbourhood and the local plan is

Table 12.2 Better urban places? The impact on targeted territories

<i>Research issue</i>	<i>Research question</i>	<i>Main policy evidence</i>
Added value II: The policy effects of the integral urban development strategy in integrated territories	Have neighbourhoods changed as structures of opportunities for residents?	<i>Yes, some changes promoted by programmes exist</i> Although moderate, there are impacts on housing conditions and the density of business or cultural amenities, but not on residents' perception of neighbourhood problems
	Have there been improvements in the living conditions of residents?	<i>Yes, some changes could be attributed to programmes</i> However, these are very moderate and mixed: improvements in education and, to some extent, health, but not in employment and the household socioeconomic situation

(continued)

Table 12.2 (continued)

<i>Research issue</i>	<i>Research question</i>	<i>Main policy evidence</i>
	Are there heterogeneous policy effects? (between and within targeted territories)	<p><i>Yes. Policy exposure and specific traits of territories matter</i></p> <p>1. The exposure of residents to the projects according to residential mobility. An analysis including only stayers shows impacts on education, occupational status and, to some extent, employment</p> <p>2. The starting conditions of the socio-spatial context: specific aspects make up a differential structure of opportunities for the success of a project</p> <p>Among more vulnerable contexts, programmes produce some improvements (impact) on personal health and the perception of problems in dwellings and the neighbourhood</p> <p>City centre historical areas with worse starting conditions improve to a larger extent than those with better starting conditions</p>

crucial. We have pointed to the importance of residential mobility, based on previous ideas and empirical analysis showing that the households that move away from a targeted area are those that improve their socio-economic situation, reducing the possibilities of neighbourhood revitalisation in a long-term perspective. Paying attention to these ideas and evidence may lead to better analyses and understanding of the effects of urban initiatives promoted by the EU. Nevertheless, it also draws our attention to the need to incorporate actions to reduce this type of residential

mobility and its potential effect on the reproduction of socio-spatial inequalities, as well as the potential forced mobility motivated by gentrification processes after public interventions. Thus, similar to the potential forced displacement promoted by state-led gentrification processes, upgrading residential mobility in revitalised neighbourhoods could be also a controversial outcome of urban initiatives. However, only the second aspect has captured the attention of the academic (and public) debate.

According to previous chapters, the effects of urban initiatives are more evident when the analyses only include ‘stayers’ during the entire period of the project implementation or focus on more vulnerable populations (see Chapters 7 and 8). There is also evidence about the differential effect of these or similar initiatives on different social groups according to their exposure to policy actions or contextual mechanisms that account for the so-called ‘neighbourhood effect’ that urban initiatives try to change; for example, according to gender, age, socioeconomic status or social capital in the neighbourhood (Navarro, 2020; Navarro, Rodríguez-García et al., 2016; Zapata & Navarro, 2017, 2020).

The potential heterogeneous effects between and within target territories draw our attention to the importance of applying ‘controlled comparisons’, which address other causal mechanisms that may also explain the success or failure of initiatives, regardless of programme eligibility criteria. Here, we have focussed on this key, indispensable element to attribute the effects of policies. This allows us to provide evidence about the average impact of these programmes across targeted territories that previously did not exist. Nevertheless, as indicated, this strategy cannot show the existence of compositional effects that, for instance, could explain the low policy impact of integrated strategies. Thus, we have incorporated other factors, such as specific traits of territorial targets, and exposure to the neighbourhood and the programme among different groups of residents, either because of their social traits or residential mobility processes. We could also add the heterogeneity in the intervention strategy applied by the projects, both between programmes and within the same programme (Chapter 6), not analysed here.

The main idea is to specify the causal mechanism that could promote heterogeneous effects and establish the appropriate controlled comparison in the research design to be applied (through a quasi-experimental design or comparative case studies). A *proxy* of this idea has been implemented in previous chapters. The main empirical result is that added value II is moderate, different according to the outcome analysed and

could be different (heterogeneous) between and within targeted territories. However, from an analytical point of view, the main conclusion is that more evaluative exercises, theoretically founded and applying controlled comparisons, are needed to confirm the added value of integrated strategies supported by ECP, going beyond the analyses of good practice based on cases and experiences in concrete circumstances without an explicit policy theory as an evaluative framework.

TOWARDS A MULTI-SCALAR COMPARATIVE RESEARCH AGENDA FOR EU URBAN INITIATIVES AS MULTI-LEVEL POLICY MIXES: POLICY LEVELS, INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS AND INTEGRATED LOCAL POLICY MIXES

As indicated in the first chapter, the Spanish case is an outstanding example due to the continuity and extension in applying local strategies through specific programmes co-funded by the EU. Moreover, other studies indicate the EU proposal on spatial planning and the urban integrated method have promoted relevant changes, transforming the practice of urban policies and the orientation—or policy frame—of national urban and spatial policies (Bahl et al., 2019; Carpenter et al., 2020; De Gregorio, 2017, 2018), as in the case of other southern member states (Rivolin & Faludi, 2005). However, previous analyses have shown that the potential added value regarding urban policies at the national level is not as clear at the level of actual local strategies. In addition to local characteristics explaining policy design, implementation and effects among local strategies, the institutional filters mentioned in Chapter 1 could provide some explanatory mechanisms for this issue. We will try to explain this very briefly.²

First, from a comparative perspective, the Spanish local government system represents the traditional ‘southern model’ in Europe identified by Page and Goldsmith (1987). As more recent analyses also show, this model combines substantial political recognition for municipalities, with low institutional capabilities to provide local services (Sellers & Lidström, 2007). Specifically, this institutional context promotes a high level of financial dependence on supra-municipal government as well as on

² With regard to the effects of local characteristics on policy design quality, policy integration or policy effects, see Navarro et al. (2019), Dorado-Rubí et al. (2021a).

economic activity in municipalities, especially that linked to urban development and housing in the Spanish case, because the main local resource in municipal budgets comes from taxes on this activity. This promotes specific patterns of policy strategies, coalitions and socio-spatial effects, but it also results in urban planning and urban development forming an essential policy sector in municipalities (Navarro et al., 2017). Second, in spite of the inclusion of integral regeneration initiatives in the framework of national (and regional) urban planning policies (Hernández-Aja & Rodríguez-Suárez, 2017), the spatial planning tradition in Spain focuses on urban planning without strong policy integration with other policy sectors. This is in a general administrative culture dominated by sectoral policies instead of policy coordination or integration promoting different sectoral governing coalitions in the same city (Brugué & Gomá, 1998; Farinós et al., 2005; Navarro & Rodríguez-García, 2015). Lastly, a national urban policy did not exist for the analysed period. The main policy frame was urban planning policies and their development by regional governments with regulatory competencies over spatial planning in municipalities. Only recently has the Spanish Urban Agenda represented a general framework linked to the EU-integrated model and the Urban Agenda for the European Union (De Gregorio & González, 2020).

These institutional factors could shape a structure of opportunities less favourable for the adoption of the integrated model proposed by the EU at the local level than in other member states. For example, those with a local government system providing municipalities with more institutional capacities, integrated spatial planning traditions or an explicit national urban policy including other goals than urban planning. Thus, Spain could represent a case combining a high level of compliance with the EU model at the national level and a low level of compliance at the local scale. On the one hand, the studies mentioned above about laws, regulations or programme documentation show a progressive adoption of the integrated model proposed by the EU as an innovative policy frame at the national level, compared with the traditional orientation of sectoral policies and the centrality of the urban planning in city policies. However, on the other hand, analysis of actual local strategies shows the ‘integrated model’ is not mainstream in current urban policies; above all, local strategies designed and implemented in programmes explicitly based on this model from 1994 to 2013 do not show a high level of policy compliance

with the policy frame proposed by the urban dimension of the ECP and its adaptations at the national level in Spain.

Other evidence also seems to confirm this result. Changes in spatial planning traditions between 2000 and 2016 across European countries show that policy integration is not in the mainstream of Spanish spatial planning (Nadin et al., 2021). A recent survey among Spanish researchers and practitioners shows that urban strategies remain focussed on urban planning goals and apply a low level of policy integration (Dorado-Rubín & Ortega, 2022). Moreover, the design of local strategies implemented under the most recent EDUSI programme, launched by the Spanish government for the 2017–2020 programming period, also shows a similar level of policy compliance regarding the integrated model to those implemented in previous programming periods analysed here (Guerrero-Mayo et al., 2022). Thus, potential changes in policy frames among member states do not mean the adoption of the integral strategy at the local level and their potential effects on living conditions, as two of the main added value aspects of the ECP urban dimension. More comparative analyses at the local level—between and within institutional contexts of member states—are needed in order to confirm the spread of the EU proposal and their effects in transforming urban policies and places.

We have no systematic comparative evidence about local strategies in other countries. However, based on the literature concerning urban policies and governance, ‘institutional filters’ could explain cross-sectional variations among member states and regions in terms of the content, instruments and actors involved in local strategies supported by the EU. They could also influence over-time and cross-level differences between supra-municipal policy frames and their actual implementation and effects at the local level. Examining this has been the primary goal of the current book, due to the fact that main institutional traits in Spain have remained constant for the period analysed (1994–2013). Of course, other cross-national comparative analyses could provide evidence about the explanatory capacity of policy frames and institutional contexts on local integrated strategies promoted by the EU.

In sum, the proposed conceptualisation and analysis of EU urban initiatives as multi-level policy mixes presented in the first chapter needs an appropriate multi-scalar comparative analysis that integrates policy levels and policy dimensions (Fig. 12.1). This means the study of the general policy frame proposed by the EU for each programming period, the specific policy frame designed by member states (and regions) and,

above all, local strategies as complex policy mixes combining goals and implementation styles across different policy sectors. Moreover, this book has proposed that policy evidence about the added value of ECP on the actual character and effects of urban policies can be—and should be—provided through the systematic and comparative analysis of the local strategies implemented, not only at the policy frame level.

Therefore, we do not claim that the evidence provided is similar to that of other countries with different institutional conditions. However, based on theoretical perspectives concerning urban policies and governance, systematic and replicable methodologies have been proposed and applied using data sources that may exist in other European countries. Some research strategies are new (such as CUPPA) or are used in a pioneering way to analyse the urban initiatives promoted by the EU; for example, quasi-experimental designs at the level of the territorial target to analyse change trajectories between pre- and post-implementation periods. The proposed ideas and methodologies could be used to advance the comparative study of EU urban initiatives at the local level, as the primary implementation agents of the ECP urban dimension. The main aim is to complement the traditional and more common analyses based on the

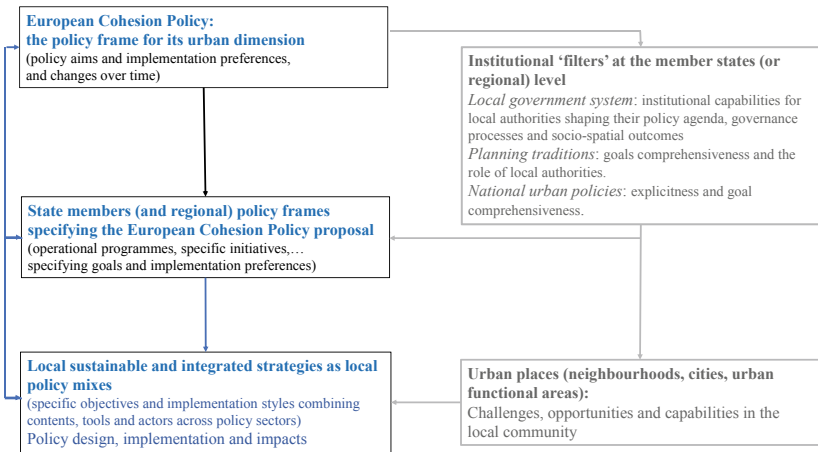


Fig. 12.1 A multi-scalar comparative approach to analyse EU-integrated urban strategies as multi-level policy mixes (*Source* Author’s own elaboration based on Navarro and Rodríguez-García [2020] and Navarro and Guerrero-Mayo [2022])

normative study of the policy frame proposed by the ECP, its specification in each member state, or through case studies. Therefore, more systematic comparative analyses of local strategies as multi-level policy mixes applying a multi-scalar comparative approach could expand the research agenda of EU urban integrated development strategies and their expected added value.

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