

INTEGRATED TERRITORIAL STRATEGIES (ITSS), ESTABLISHING A CULTURE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

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Almost 10 years ago, in 2015, the first call for **Sustainable and Integrated Urban Development (SUID) Strategies** was launched. [Between 2015 and 2018, after two further calls](#), 598 applications were submitted, with a total of 173 cities obtaining funding. In this way, practically all cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants and around 70% of the municipalities with more than 20,000 inhabitants already have a DUSI Strategy with funding through the ERDF 2014-2020 funds. Strategies that, to date, in many cases still have a budget to be implemented, having exceeded the 2023 limit established by Europe.

Since then, COVID through and before the arrival of the **Integrated Territorial Strategies (ETIs)** that will channel ERDF funds for the period 2021-2027, many cities adopted the **Spanish Urban Agenda** (whether they had a DUSI Strategy or not). Thus, in 2021, 233 applications were submitted to the call for Urban Agenda pilot cities, and a total of 121 projects were accepted and received funding through, in this case, the **Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan (PRTR)**, whose funding also comes from the European Union) deployed to address the economic crisis caused by the pandemic. Apart from the fact that the amount of funds received by each project is substantially higher in the case of the DUSI Strategies compared to the Urban Agenda pilot cities (€1,362M for 173 projects vs. €20M for 121 projects), one of the most noteworthy aspects derived from both types of calls for proposals is that Spanish municipalities have now been equipped with strategic planning tools that are helping to define transformative projects that point towards the [Green Transition](#) that our cities must necessarily face.

In the case of the **SUID Strategies**, although the focus is more limited as it is centred on four thematic objectives (technology, climate change, environment, social inclusion), the budget allocated to each city has made it possible to directly implement projects from the grant itself, a **procedure that will foreseeably be replicated in the call for proposals for the ITs**. A different case is that of the **Urban Agenda pilot cities**, whose grant received, which is more limited and aimed at financing the process of drawing up the **Urban Agenda Action Plan** itself, has not been directly allocated to the implementation of projects. Even so, the cities that implemented the Urban Agenda have been favoured when it comes to accessing other grants related to [one of the ten strategic objectives to be included in their Action Plan](#), as this aspect scores them favourably or, sometimes, it is even a mandatory requirement to have a planning tool of this nature.

Although the SUID Strategy route seems to be more direct when it comes to implementing urban projects, it does not seem to be ultimately more agile than the Urban Agenda mechanism, as there are still cities that have not fully implemented the allocated ERDF funds. It is true that the PRTR has articulated simpler mechanisms for allocating and executing funds, which contrasts with the administrative complexity that cities with SUID Strategies have had to face. We will see if the call for ITs improves this aspect.

However, [beyond the European funds and the characteristics and complexities of each call for proposals](#), both the SUID Strategies and the Urban Agenda are managing to strengthen the strategic planning processes being carried out by local councils. In this line, **it is expected that the Integrated Territorial Strategies will come to establish this relatively new planning culture** since, let us remember, before the SUID Strategies, and apart from the General Urban Development Plans, in general, cities before 2015 lacked comprehensive strategic planning tools.

Cities, and their City Councils as managing bodies, must continue to commit to a **long-term vision** that goes beyond the timeframes set by each legislature; they must update and maintain an active **portfolio of projects** that are defined in advance in alignment with the major sustainability

objectives established by European policies; They must establish within the municipal organisation, both from a technical and political point of view, **dynamics of strategic reflection** that are also shared by the citizens; the preparation of the SUID Strategies and the Local Action Plans of the Urban Agenda have forced the municipal entities to set up **multidisciplinary and multi-departmental working teams** that should be consolidated and standardised in the operational management of the city councils. All these aspects must continue to be worked on in the municipal corporations in order to maximise the use of the different European funding opportunities, not only those that will soon come through the **Integrated Territorial Strategies**, but also those that are currently being articulated through the **PRTR**. Several local councils have already set up European funding offices, an essential tool for attracting funding. Although they are still in their infancy, it is possible to imagine an evolution of these municipal structures towards models such as those represented by the investment attraction offices already in place in large cities. These offices, in addition to anticipating the different calls for European funding, would also be directed towards the private sector, towards companies and economic activities that can see an opportunity for sustainable investment in these cities immersed in the green transition. Linking with the ITSs, **offices with a territorial focus and a focus on public-private collaboration.**

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