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Global warming, ageing of population, reduction of energy consumption, immigration flows, optimization of land use, technological innovation

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The cover image shows older people climbing Via Raffaele Morghen's stairs in Naples (Source: TeMA Journal Editorial Staff).

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Towards the Spanish local urban agenda. The evolution of urban regeneration in Spain (2014-2022)

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Abstract
The paper provides an analysis of the difference in the tools adopted in the Spanish urban policies between the two last EU programming cycles (2014–2020 and 2021–2027). After an introduction with references to the policy framework and the literature, a methodological section describes the focus of the research, the source of the data and how this information has been used for the comparative purpose of the work. The following section (Results) provides the comparison of the contents of the policy documents delivered by the Spanish cities involved in the urban agenda, with reference to the type of actions selected, the overlapping of thematic and strategic focus through the two periods, the budget allocated, etc. In the conclusive sections the attempt is to highlights analogies and differences between the two policy periods, pointing out the future investigation needed to provide a more comprehensive outlook on the question addressed in the paper.

Keywords
Urban governance; Urban policies; Integrated sustainable urban development strategies; Spanish urban agenda

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1. Introduction

The policies and practices related to urban regeneration have sparked widespread debate regarding their approach, nature, and conceptual evolution over time (Roberts, 2000; Leary & McCarthy, 2013), as well as its impact and inconsistencies in shaping new urban spaces (Couch et al., 2011; Karadimitriou et al., 2013). Although the implementation of urban regeneration has followed similar patterns in Western countries, there are relevant differences at the national level, particularly in the European context (Zimmermann & Fedeli, 2021). Since the mid-1990s, the European Union (EU) has promoted an integrated vision that includes stakeholders in the decision-making process to establish collaborative and sustainable practices (Van Der Zwet et al., 2017; European Commission, 2020). Although the EU lacks competence in land use planning and urban policy, it holds sway over spatially relevant policies based on the EU Treaty's Article 3 commitment to promote economic, social, and territorial cohesion (Madeiros, 2019). As demonstrated by de Gregorio Hurtado (2017; 2018) and Navarro Yáñez (2020; 2023), European approaches and methods have gradually modified the Spanish framework for urban regeneration policies, which is one of the European countries lacking a well-defined state and regional framework to address urban regeneration (Marshall, 2005; Carpenter, 2013). This framework is periodized into three distinct phases that correspond with the programs implemented by the European Commission (Fig.1).

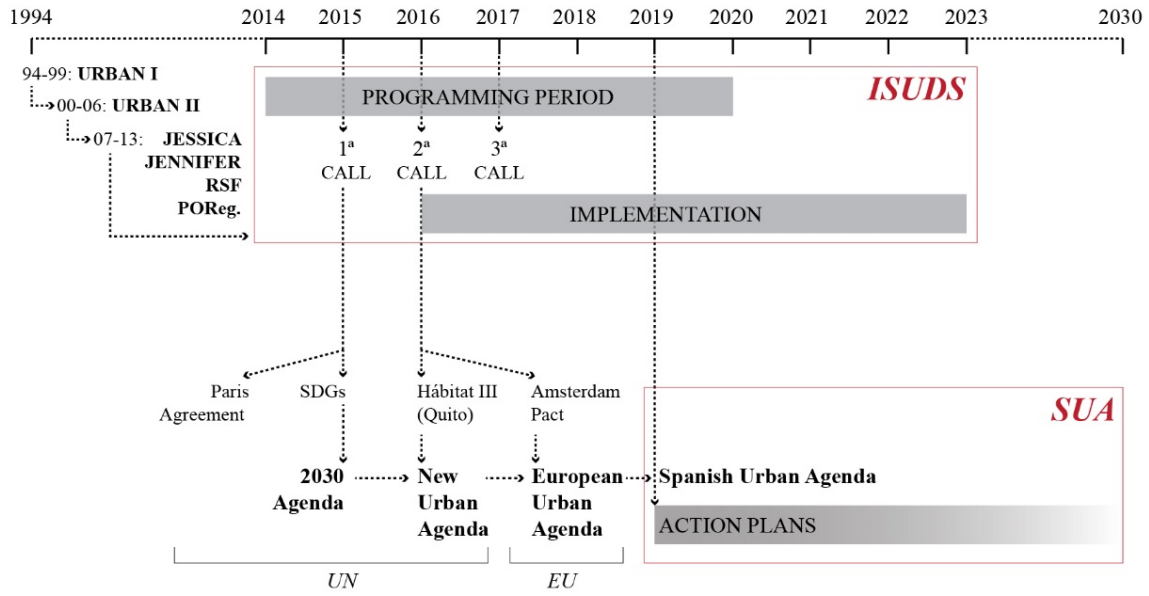

Fig.1 Timeline of Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Strategies (ISUDS) and Spanish Urban Agenda (SUA) and their respective antecedents

During the 1994-2006 programming period, disadvantaged neighborhoods underwent an initial phase of "integral" urban regeneration through the URBAN I and II programs. The approach then shifted to "integral urban development" in the second phase, with the aim of creating new competitive spaces through financial aid that supports sustainable investments in urban regions (Lang & Török, 2017). This includes programs such as JESSICA (Joint European Support for Sustainable Investment in City Areas) axis (Observatorio de la Vivienda Vasco, 2010) under the 2007–2013 URBANA Initiative. Eventually, the third – and current – approach focuses on the "sustainable urban development" of the Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Strategies (ISUDS, *Estrategias de Desarrollo Urbano Sostenible e Integrado* in Spanish). Urban regeneration became a part of the reference framework for broader urban development strategies through three calls for proposals in the 2014–2020 programming period, specifically in 2015, 2016, and 2017. The transition from an area-based approach to addressing urban vulnerability to one that prioritizes enhancing urban competitiveness is noteworthy. This

shift applies to both cities and urban areas, including conurbations and functional areas (Hernández Aja et al., 2021).

Furthermore, international treaties and agreements, such as the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which established 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), have bolstered a more comprehensive approach that encompasses the intricate socioeconomic, environmental, climate, and demographic aspects. Successively, this approach was emphasized by the New Urban Agenda, which arose from the 2016 United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development "Habitat III" to promote sustainable development and address climate change. The EU subsequently put it into practice through its own Urban Agenda in 2016, underscoring its importance for adoption by the State Members (Caprotti et al., 2017; Olejnik, 2017). Spain is among the countries that launched its policy tool in 2019 (the Spanish Urban Agenda, SUA or AUE) to achieve the SDGs by 2030 through Action Plans (Hernández-Partal, 2023). What is noteworthy about the Spanish urban regeneration policy framework is that the ISUDS constituted the basis for the implementation of the SUA and the launch of urban agendas by Iberian municipalities, which represent the new action framework for urban regeneration (de la Cruz-Mera, 2019a: 682-683).

This paper aims to examine the relationship between ISUDS and SUA, deciphering this new framework. ISUDS is approaching its end (2014-2020 programming period with funding until 2023), while SUA is still in its early stages since it started in 2019. The significance of understanding this connection lies in the fact that the approval of SUA adds value to proposals seeking to be included in the European funding of the 2021–2027 programming period. According to a recent national agreement, funding calls will consider positively the "instruments implemented in recent years, such as the Local Action Plans, which are guided by the Spanish Urban Agenda framework. The actions to be financed must be part of a strategy that promotes the transformation of the local reality in which they are located and sets sustainable development objectives to be achieved by the actions to be financed" (Gobierno de España, 2022: 120).

In the field of urban studies, this analysis holds potential relevance to update the current research for the following reasons. Firstly, it can provide novel insights into the interplay between governance, politics, and spatial planning (Purkarthofer, 2019; De Frantz, 2022) by investigating the relationship between the current implementation of the EU urban policies and the upcoming programming phase on a country-specific basis. Secondly, this inquiry can expand the knowledge of ISUDS. Academics have primarily analyzed the early implementation (de la Cruz-Mera, 2019a) and updates of this instrument in specific municipalities (Álvarez del Valle et al., 2022; Suárez-Rodríguez & Tomé-Fernández, 2023; Rodríguez-Escudero et al., 2023) based on two approaches. On the one hand, as operations for Europeanizing Spanish urban policies (de Gregorio Hurtado et al., 2021) and, on the other hand, as a local instrument to promote urban regeneration processes and actions at national and regional levels (Rodríguez-Domenech & Cañizares Ruiz, 2023). Thirdly, understanding the relationship between ISUDS and SUA can provide a new comparative perspective to ISUDS, which has already been linked to urban vulnerability (Rodríguez Suárez et al., 2021) and sustainability indicators (Gómez Jiménez, 2017).

Furthermore, it is important to determine the synergies between ISUDS and SUA. The ISUDS are currently in the last phase of their implementation and are difficult to assess due to the lack of progress reports from involved entities and academics. This study can offer valuable insights for academics and stakeholders engaged in SUA implementation and generate novel perspectives for future programming and development of Urban Agendas elsewhere (Pirlone et al., 2017).

The paper includes the following sections. The Methodology (Section 2) explains the rationale and criteria used to compare ISUDS and SUA through 32 case studies and the synergies table proposed by the Spanish Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda (*Ministerio de Transportes, Movilidad y Agenda Urbana* in Spanish, MITMA). The Case Study Analysis (Section 3) explores the primary features of ISUDS and SUA

(Sections 3.1 and 3.2), while the Results (Section 4) compare their content (Section 4.1) and demonstrate their synergies (Section 4.2). The Discussion (Section 5) highlights the most relevant connections between these instruments with particular emphasis on the 32 case studies and their implication in the intertwining between governance, politics, and spatial planning. Finally, the Conclusion (Section 6) underlines the lessons learned, the limitation of this study, and future research lines.

2. Methodology

The starting point of this analysis was the following: the ISUDS is a concrete place-based tool promoted by the Spanish government for the territorial rebalancing of a city, while the SUA has a more holistic approach, translating broader European objectives at the national level and implementing them at the municipal level through Local Action Plans. In particular, the ISUDS requires local authorities to develop a detailed analysis of their territory. This analysis constitutes the preliminary step to defining local actions to implement in a specific sector of the municipality and has also been designated as the preliminary step to approving the Local Urban Agenda. Additionally, a comparison was made between ISDUS' Specific Objectives and SUA's Strategic Objectives as they are analogous. The former are macro objectives, which means that a municipality can take a series of actions but still fails to implement a social program, whereas the latter provides a rulebook and a wide range of action at the urban level.

The methodology consisted of a desk-based review of official documentation related to ISUDS and SUA programs, strategies, monitoring, and evaluation (if available) from 2019 to 2022 and involved three main steps.

An initial stage of this inquiry involved analyzing the contents of the ISUDS and SUA by reviewing official documents released by public authorities (Ministerio de Fomento, 2019; Red de Iniciativas Urbanas, 2015) and considering scientific studies published on both tools (Section 1). This formed the foundational basis for conducting a comparative analysis with the aim of comprehending the new features these instruments have brought to urban regeneration, with a particular emphasis on their similarities and differences (Sections 3.1 and 3.2).

The second step was to establish the connection between the Objectives of both tools based on the synergies table proposed by the MITMA itself (Hernández-Partal & de Santiago-Rodríguez, 2019: 837). This table connects the ISUDS' six Specific Objectives with the SUA's ten Strategic Objectives (Section 4.1). This choice relies on the fact that the synergies table is the official tool provided by MITMA to monitor ISUDS in the SUA, thereby facilitating the transition from ISUDS to SUA.

The third step entailed demonstrating the interplay between ISUDS and SUA by selecting 32 case studies, i.e. Spanish provincial capitals that implemented a municipal ISUDS and encompassed vulnerable statistical areas based on the 2011 Spanish Catalogue of Vulnerable Neighborhoods (*Catálogo de Barrios Vulnerables* in Spanish; Hernández Aja et al., 2021) (Section 4.2). This selection relies on two reasons. Firstly, the Spanish capital cities can be representative of the main ISUDS, which, in turn, have been mainly aimed to functional areas with a minimum population of 20,000. Secondly, the decision to only include capital cities affected by the presence of vulnerability highlights the shift from a sectoral-based approach in the programming period before 2014 and this study was explicitly commissioned by the MITMA to focus on how cities address social vulnerability. This phase relied on consulting the Implementation Plans of each of the 32 ISUDS to describe their main contents (i.e. Action Lines, Specific Objectives, and budget allocation) and classify the Action Lines, all of which was compared with the SUA's Strategic Objectives. Although each Action Line may be related to multiple SUA Strategic Objectives, it was determined that Action Lines would only be assigned to the Strategic Objective with the strongest connection. This decision influenced the evaluation of the cross-cutting nature of the approaches, considering the variations in the quantity and quality of action lines among the 32 case studies, which range from 5 (Murcia) to 24 (Badajoz).

3. Case study

3.1 Description and contents of ISUDS

The "Guidelines for Defining Integrated Sustainable Strategies for Urban Development during the 2014–2020 programming period" (Red de Iniciativas Urbanas, 2015) provide the foundation for designing ISUDS. The guidelines outline the fundamental principles that should inform the ISUDS, the parties responsible for their development, the mechanisms for their administration and assessment, and the steps involved in drafting the "Strategy Document". It is essential to note that the contents of ISUDS is highly regulated and has the following attributes (Alonso Ibáñez, 2017: 11):

- it is a detailed and organized document designed to plan and guide future actions;
- it serves as a strategic plan that involves prolonged consideration of the entire municipality;
- its focus is on establishing priorities by creating a precise selection and a hierarchy of objectives to accomplish;
- it is territorially-oriented as it targets areas with specific urban projects and actions;
- its takes a comprehensive approach, integrating various sectors including physical, environmental, urban, economic, social, and cultural aspects.

The ISUDS outlines its objectives in a strategic document, which comprises:

- an assessment on the current state of municipalities, including their assets, problems, and challenges. Additionally, a SWOT analysis is conducted to identify Specific Objectives (SO) and Action Lines (LA) that align with one of the four Thematic Objectives (TO) established in "Axis 12[1]: Integrated and Sustainable Urban Development" (see Tab.1);
- the details on the participatory processes occurred for establishing the ISUDS's contents, as well as the administrative resources available or planned to be established for its implementation.

Axis 12: Integrated and Sustainable Urban Development

Thematic Objective (TO)	Specific Objective (SO)
TO2. Enhancing access to, and use and quality of, ICT	SO.2.3.3 Strengthening ICT applications for e-government, elearning, e-inclusion, e-culture and e-health
TO4. Supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors	- SO.4.5.1 Promoting low-carbon strategies for all types of territories (especially urban areas), such as sustainable multimodal urban mobility and climate-change-related mitigation and adaptation measures - SO.4.5.3 Supporting energy efficiency, smart energy management and renewable energy use in public infrastructure, including in public buildings, and in the housing sector
TO6. Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency	- SO.6.3.4 Protecting, promoting and developing cultural and natural heritage in urban areas, particularly those affected by tourism, through: a. Rehabilitation of historic centers and other urban areas endowed with cultural heritage; b. Improvements for the conservation, protection and enhancement of cultural heritage. - SO.6.5.2 Taking action to improve the urban environment, revitalize cities, regenerate and decontaminate brownfield sites (including conversion areas), reduce air pollution and promote noise-reduction measures
TO9. Promoting social inclusion and combating poverty	- SO 9.8.2 Providing support for physical, economic and social regeneration of deprived communities in urban and rural areas

Tab.1 Thematic and specific objectives of Axis 12 - Sustainable and integrated urban development

[1] Spain included Axis 12 to be eligible for ERDF funds in response to the European 2020 Strategy, which considers cities important for contributing to achieve sustainable-oriented objectives.

In addition, the ISUDS must:

- adhere to a set of horizontal and cross-cutting principles outlined in the Spanish Partnership Agreement 2014-2020 (Gobierno de España – Ministerio de Hacienda, 2019). These principles include promoting genders equality and non-discrimination actions, sustainable development, accessibility, addressing demographic changes, and managing the impacts of climate change (European Union, 2013);
- implement a system of 22 indicators to evaluate the attainment level of the goals mentioned in the Sustainable Growth Operative Program 2014–2020 (Gobierno de España – Ministerio de Hacienda y Administraciones Públicas, 2013);
- initiate a communication strategy to apply throughout the phases of development, execution, tracking, and assessment.

Out of the 173 approved proposals (Ministerio de Hacienda y Función Pública, 2018), 32 cities were selected based on the application of the double criteria of having vulnerable areas and being a capital city. The territorial distribution of these cities (Fig.2) shows that 15 out of the 17 Autonomous Communities meet the established conditions (Navarra and Madrid does not). Among the Autonomous Communities that are not uniprovincial, Andalusia has the highest represention with its eight provincial capitals, followed by Castilla la Mancha (4 out of 5), the Valencian Community (3 out of 3), and Galicia (3 out of 4). On the contrary, Castile and Leon (2 out of 9), Catalonia (1 out of 4), and Aragon and the Basque Country (1 out of 3) have the lowest representation.

Fig.2 Localization of Spanish capital cities that adopted ISUDS

3.2 Description and contents of SUA

The SUA, like the EDUSI, is designed to be a non-regulatory strategic document that "is committed to a desirable urban model for the future. It seeks to support a new vision of urban planning" (Ministerio de Fomento, 2019: 15). The creation of this tool involved a wide-ranging participatory process with various working groups. Its aim was to provide a platform for the input of diverse public and private stakeholders invested in promoting sustainable development within Spanish urban areas (Ministerio de Fomento, 2019: 276).

This previous work had a significant impact on the SUA's contents of the SUA, which is divided into five sections. The first section evaluates the current state of the Spanish territory and identifies the main issues that affect the viability of the Spanish spatial planning model. The second section proposes an urban model focused on 10 strategic goals (refer to Fig.3) to achieve through specific objectives and corresponding action plans. The third section presents 72 qualitative and quantitative indicators to assist in conducting the SUA, as well as monitoring and revising its contents. The fourth section contains the Action Plan for the General State Administration, which offers detailed recommendations for state competencies. Three sheets are eventually distributed to all levels of public administration, private entities, civil society, and academia interested in developing their own action plan for their urban agenda "within the framework of their needs, capacities and expectations" (Ministerio de Fomento, 2019: 16). These sheets contain a questionnaire to assist in diagnosing assembly and identifying agents and action lines, a SWOT analysis to identify each of the strategic objective, and a tool that provides potential actions for achieving these objectives.

Fig.3 The SUA's Strategic Objectives

4. Results

4.1 Comparison between ISUDS and SUA

Tab.2 shows similarities and distinctions between ISUDS and SUA. Both tools have a strategic and non-normative character, incorporate diagnoses from a comprehensive standpoint, and organize objectives: ISUDS has 4 thematic objectives, while SUA has 10 strategic objectives). Additionally, both instruments provide an execution plan (ISUDS: Implementation Plan, SUA: Action Plan) and a system of indicators for monitoring and evaluating its implementation.

The main differences between the tools are related to their scope of involvement and the scale of intervention. The ISUDS is mainly intended for municipalities or groups of municipalities, whereas the SUA aims to impact all levels of government, including the General State Administration, Autonomous Communities, municipalities, and any other public or private entities that intend to incorporate the tool into their strategic vision. In comparison to the SUA, ISUDS offers a more far-reaching approach, as it involves identifying priorities and objectives based on diagnosis and defining a scope of action to propose more concrete actions. Moreover, ISUDS implements a communication strategy that enhances the dissemination of actions and fosters synergies between the municipality and citizens, which is not addressed in the SUA.

	ISDUS		**SUA**
Information	Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Strategies		Spanish Urban Agenda
Goal	Aimed at municipalities	≠	Aimed at national authorities, Autonomous Communities, Municipalities, and public and private entities
Scope	**Strategic and non-regulatory**	↔	**Strategic and non-regulatory**
	Comprehensive diagnosis	↔	**Diagnosis of the urban reality**
Objectives	**Thematic Objectives (Four of Axis 12: Sustainable and Integrated Urban Development)**	↔	**Rulebook of strategic objectives (SUA Framework)**
	Identification of priorities and objectives	x	
	Delimitation of the scope of action	x	
Type of plan	**Implementation Plan**	↔	**Action Plan**
Evaluation and monitoring	**System of 22 evaluation and monitoring indicators**	↔	**System of 72 evaluation and monitoring indicators**
	Communication Strategy	x	

Tab.2 Comparison of ISUDS' and SUA's contents

4.2 Analysis of the synergies between ISUDS and SUA

This section analyzes potential synergies between the Action Lines (AL) of ISUDS and the ten Strategic Objectives (SO) that structure the SUA. The analysis is organized according to Thematic and Specific Objectives (Tab.4) and utilizes the synergies table developed by MITMA (Tab.3) to identify areas of alignment and coordination between the two entities.

The analysis considers the variation of AL in different ISUDS, which ranges from 6 to 25 with an average of 14 AL per Strategy. The average budget is approximately 18.5 million euros and the expenditure per LA is around 1.5 million euros.

Table 4 displays the 32 Spanish capitals with ISUDS whose strategies refer to at least 5 of the 10 strategic objectives of the SUA, with an average of 7. Two contrasting situations provide a noteworthy piece of information. On the one hand, among the 5 ISUDS with the fewest objectives (5 out of 10), Teruel and Ciudad Real stand out for their lower transversality and higher number of ALs (16 and 10 respectively), while Murcia, Salamanca, and Castellón promoted 5, 6 and 7 ALs.

		ISUDS's Specific Objectives					
		SO 2.3.3 Local eGovern-ment and Smart Cities	**SO 4.5.1** Sustainable urban mobility	**SO 4.5.3** Improve energy efficiency and renewables	**SO 6.3.4** Protection and development of cultural and natural heritage	**SO 6.5.2** Revitalization of the urban environment	**SO 9.8.2** Social inclusion and the fight against poverty
SUA' s Strategic Objectives	**SO1** Rational use of land				●	●	
	SO2 Revitalize existing city		●	●		●	●
	SO3 Climate change effects			●			
	SO4 Sustainable resource management			●		●	
	SO5 Proximity and sustainable mobility		●				
	SO6 Social cohesion and equity						●
	SO7 Urban economy				●		●
	SO8 Access to housing						
	SO9 Digital innovation	●					
	SO10 Intervention and governance tools	●					

Tab.3 Table of synergies between ISUDS' Specific Objectives and SUA's Strategic Objectives

Region	City	ISUDS	Action Lines (AL)	Budget (€)	Average for LA
Murcia	Murcia	It Murcia: Innovación + Tradición	6	17,588,716	2,931,453
Castile and León	Salamanca	Más Tormes (Tormes+)	7	18,900,000	2,700,000
Valencia	Castelló de la Plana	Transforma Castelló	7	20,200,000	2,885,714
Andalusia	Granada	EDUSI Granda "De Tradición a Innovación"	8	18,750,000	2,343,750
Basque Country	Bilbao	EDUSI en el área de Zorrotzaurre	9	29,648,000	3,294,222
Castilla–La Mancha	Cuenca	Estrategia DUSI Cuenca 2022, La ciudad en red	9	18,750,000	2,083,333
Andalusia	Almería	EDUSI - Almería Ciudad Abierta	9	18,750,000	2,083,333
Castilla–La Mancha	Ciudad Real	Ciudad Real 2022, Eco-Integrador	10	18,750,000	1,875,000
La Rioja	Logroño	EDUSI La Villanueva	11	3,615,918	328,720
Andalusia	Cádiz	Cádiz 2020, Un proyecto de ciudad	11	15,874,000	1,443,091
Andalusia	Jaén	EDUSI Jaén Hábitat 2023	11	18,750,000	1,704,545
Andalusia	Córdoba	EDUSI-Córdoba	11	18,750,000	1,704,545
Canary Islands	Santa Cruz de Tenerife	Anaga en el Corazón	11	17,640,000	1,603,636
Andalusia	Málaga	EDUSI Perchel-Lagunillas	12	18,750,000	1,562,500
Castilla–La Mancha	Toledo	EDUSI Toledo	13	8,519,000	655,308
Valencia	Alicante	EDUSI Alicante Área Las Cigarreras	13	22,107,883	1,700,606
Galicia	Lugo	Muramiñae, De la muralla al Miño	13	18,750,000	1,442,308

Region	City	ISUDS	Action Lines (AL)	Budget (€)	Average for LA
Valencia	Valencia	EDUSI de Cabanyal - Canyamelar - Cap de França	13	30,000,450	2,307,727
Castile and León	León	León Norte – Barrios Entrevías	14	28,137,370	2,009,812
Castilla–La Mancha	Albacete	EDUSI de Albacete	15	18,750,000	1,250,000
Cantabria	Santander	Domus Santander	15	8,028,800	535,253
Catalonia	Barcelona	EDUSI-Eix Besòs	15	30,000,000	2,000,000
Andalusia	Sevilla	Estrategia DUSI Norte de Sevilla	16	18,750,000	1,171,875
Andalusia	Huelva	Huelva: Regeneración del Pulmón Verde y Social	17	16,862,250	991,897
Aragon	Teruel	EDUSI Teruel	17	10,000,000	588,235
Extremadura	Cáceres	CreaCeres	17	12,500,000	735,294
Asturias	Oviedo	Conectando Oviedo	18	12,885,150	715,842
Balearic Islands	Palma de Mallorca	Plan Litoral de Ponent	19	25,420,000	1,337,895
Galicia	Pontevedra	Más Modelo Urbano Pontevedra	21	18,750,000	892,857
Canary Islands	Las Palmas de Gran Canaria	El Cono Sur se renueva	22	17,629,993	801,363
Galicia	A Coruña	EidusCoruña, Unha cidade contigo	22	18,750,000	852,273
Extremadura	Badajoz	Ecosistema DUSI Badajoz	25	18,750,000	750,000
	Average		**14**	**18,415,860**	**1,540,075**

Tab.4 List of the case studies with ISUDS

At the opposite extreme, Cordoba, Valencia, and Seville launched respectively 11, 12, and 16 ALs, respectively, related to up to 9 of the 10 strategic goals of the EUA. These data suggest that the transversality of the strategy is not strictly conditioned by the number of ALs if an ISUDS starts with a minimum number of ALs (at least 9 or 10).

The distribution of the ALs of each ISUDS among the strategic goals of the EUA is well-balanced. In only in a few cases, where strategies have a significant number of ALs, is there a greater concentration in one objective. These cases are as follows: Oviedo has 8 out of 17 ALs (47.1%) and Granada has 3 out of 8 ALs (38.0%) related to "SO2 Avoiding dispersion and revitalize existing city"; Caceres has 5 out of 17 ALs (29.4%) related to "SO5 Proximity and sustainable mobility"; Badajoz has 7 out of 24 ALs (29.1%) linked to "SO6 Social cohesion and equity"; and Teruel has 5 out of 16 ALs (31.3%) related to "SO9 Digital innovation".

Figure 4 illustrates the SUA's Strategic Objectives. It is noticeable that the "SO2: Revitalize the existing city" has the largest presence in most of the ISUDS both in terms of ALs (67, 16.4%) and budget (€108,730,290, 18.9%). The SO2 is linked to several ALs in 28 out of the 32 ISUDS. This objective is present in more than one LAs of 21 ISUDS and it is the objective with the greatest presence in 15 ISUDS (it stands out in Oviedo with 8 out of 17 LAs).

The comparison also reveals two main differences. Firstly, there are variations between the objectives with higher scores in terms of the number of ALs. "SO9 Digital Innovation" has the second-highest number of ALs (64 ALs, corresponding to 15.7%), followed by "SO5 Proximity and sustainable mobility" (59, corresponding to 16.0%). Following closely behind is "SO7 Urban economy" (55, corresponding to 13.5%), and "SO6 Social cohesion and equity" (50, corresponding to 12.3%). The second point concerns the differences between objectives that are associated with a larger budget. SO5 ranks third in the number of AL, but it has the highest

budget score (16.0%), followed by "SO1 Rational Use of Land" (15.5%). "SO6 Social cohesion and equity" and "SO9 Digital Innovation" have slightly lower percentages (11.3% each).

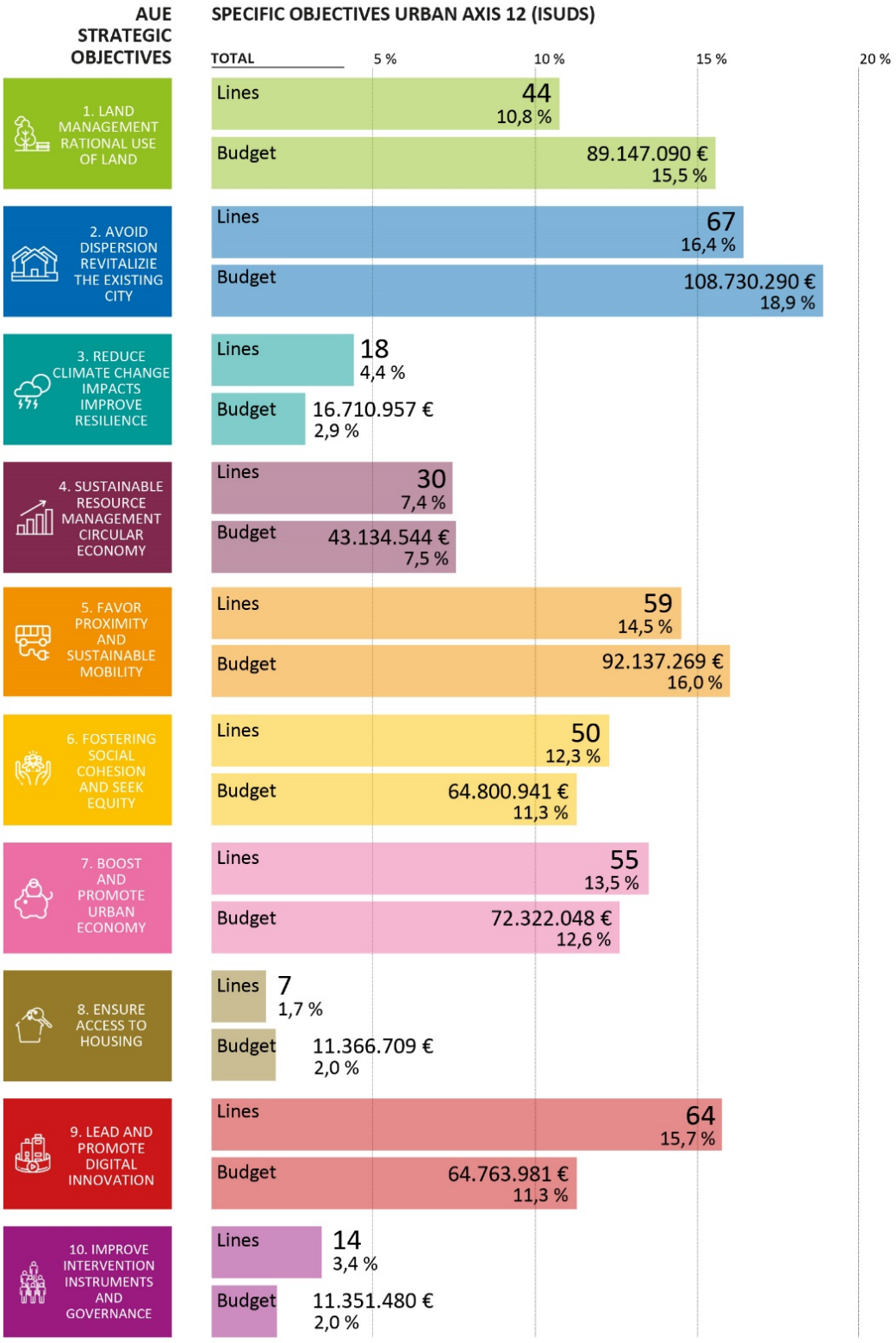

Fig.4 Relationship between the SUA's Strategic Objectives with the ISDUS according to the number of LAs (with data in percent) and budget (with data in percent) of the ISDUS Implementation Plans

Overall, there is a certain diversity in of ALs between the Specific Objectives that focus on physical-spatial and environmental issues and those related to social and economic issues. The relationship between ALs and budget is clear, with the former (SO1, SO2, SO5 and SO4) having a much higher budget, reaching up to 58%

of the total ISUDS budget. Moreover, the Strategic Objectives that have less relevance or connection to the ISUDS (i.e., "SO3 Climate change effects", "SO8 Access to housing", and "SO10 Intervention and governance instruments") exhibit no significant differences between the budget analysis and the number of ALs. SO3 is a broad objective and is therefore closely associated with other Strategic Objectives, making it is more linked to the outcomes of the actions rather than to the Strategic Objectives themselves. This characteristic has led to a significant number of ALs related to SO3 that may be associated with other objectives, such as SO5 or SO2. SO8 is strictly linked to fundable actions within the ISUDS. Consequently, physical rehabilitation of housing and access programs may not be considered eligible for funding in many cases. Eventually, SO10, along with SO9, is related to TO2. The actions aimed at improving access to, use and quality of information and communication technologies have almost no weight. The Thematic Objective's ALs have been focused on innovation aimed at innovation applied to social, economic and environmental dimensions, rather than governance.

5. Discussion

5.1 Correlation between ISUDS and SUA

The analysis of the synergies between ISDUS and SUA reveals that SUA's Strategic Objectives are closely tied to city revitalization, public spaces and facilities, and improvement of urban mobility ("SO1 Rational use of land", "SO2 Revitalize existing city", and "SO5 Proximity and sustainable mobility"), since they received the most funding, accounting for 50.4% of the budget. In contrast, the Strategic Objectives concerning the regeneration of the building stock ("SO3 Effects of climate change", "SO4 Sustainable management of resources", and "SO8 Access to housing") have received the least amount of funding, totaling only 12.4%. Meanwhile, the ALs related to social and economic recovery ("SO6 Social cohesion and equity" and "SO7 Urban economy") are in an intermediate position with 23.9% of the total budget. Integrating digital innovation accounts for only 11.3% of the total budget, despite its numerous ALs.

The analysis shows that ISDUS is effective in achieving some of the EUA's Strategic Objectives but not as much as in others. While the model used is for integral diagnosis of urban problems, the European funding frameworks prioritize certain themes for direct investment (as seen in the Thematic Objectives of Axis 12 in Table 2), resulting in an imbalance in the fulfillment of the EUA's strategic objectives by ISUDS. This element allows for the municipal initiative to address the less targeted objectives, thereby achieving a balance in the content of the ISUDS, with the possibility for a future Municipal Action Plan to implement the SUA.

This analysis contributes to the understanding of the dynamics of rescaling of local and urban policies and governance which have received considerably less attention than regional levels (Mendez et al., 2021). It demonstrates that the EU's soft policy approach on discourse, knowledge and networking has gradually encouraged strategic planning and the development of thorough strategies based on different time horizons (2030 and 2050). This progress would not have been possible without the specific incipit by ISUDS and SUA and a distinguishing factor between the 2014–2020 and 2021–2027 periods is rescaling. Comprehensive city diagnoses are mandatory for the approval of ISUDS during the 2021–2027 period. The diagnosis is a strategic document that outlines a clear vision of the desired city. In the past, these diagnoses were only required for ISUDS approval. This modification enables municipalities to develop a more comprehensive action plan geared for effective planning, which is a direct result of implementing the SUA as the primary framework for creating local urban policies.

The synergies and discontinuities between the two programming periods depend on the relationship between national and local agendas. This relationship is intimately related to changes taking place in the Spanish context from political, administrative, and socio-economic standpoints. The 2014–2020 period was still suffering from the state-led austerity measures and was marked by a political shift from a right-wing to left-wing central

government in 2019. This change was also reflected in the regional elections. During this phase, urban social movements regained their importance as political actors and drivers of change and the New Municipalist platforms entered City Hall in 18 cities with more than 20,000 residents in 2015. However, they failed to revert the status quo and have been criticized for enabling a "reloaded" urban neoliberalization (Janoschka & Mota, 2021). The year 2020 was marked by the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2021, Spain's recovery and resilience plan aimed to promote a green transition, which has strongly influenced the contents of the 2021–2027 national urban policy. This plan has a stronger focus on urban development than in the past because it is closely linked to urban agendas and sustainable development goals (Pérez de las Heras, 2023). However, it has not been adequately addressed in terms of competitive performance, allocated resources (Sgambati, 2023), or the new frontiers of urban development and sustainability through the lenses of the European program NextGenerationEU (Franco, 2022; Gargiulo & Sgambati, 2023). Moreover, the significance of the SUA in the 2021–2027 programming period has increased in society due to the increasingly apparent consequences of climate change (Ministerio para la Transicción Ecológica y el Reto Demográfico, 2020). Notwithstanding this, even after the 2023 Spanish national elections, local politics, usually tied to right-wing parties, have shown resistance to the implementation of SUA. In some cities that changed from left- to right-wing parties, controversial decisions have been made, such as removing bike lanes (Tena, 2023).

5.2 The SUA in the 32 case studies

This analysis also aimed to determine whether an ISUDS was supported by its own Urban Agenda or Local Action Plan. Due to the SUA being in its early stages at the time of this research (December 2022), the majority of the analyzed cities analyzed had not yet started drafting an Urban Agenda (20 out the 32 cases, 62.5% of the sample). Eight cities (Almería, Málaga, Alicante, Valencia, Salamanca, A Coruña, Pontevedra, and Murcia) had already adopted a Local Urban Agenda, but had not yet approved it, while 4 cities (12.50%), Barcelona, Castelló, Logroño and Seville were in the process of formalizing their Local Urban Agendas. Barcelona was the only city among those without an approved tool that was developing its own Urban Agenda. The other cases were following the guidelines of the Local Action Plans tied to the Spanish Urban Agenda promoted by the MITMA. Cities with most of the work done towards the formalization of the tool have well-established urban strategies, as showed in the cases of Malaga (Marín-Cots, 2019) and A Coruña (Ayuntamiento de A Coruña, 2022) and, in some cases, had already formulated their 2030 strategies by the mid-2010s, as was the case of Seville (Ayuntamiento de Sevilla, 2022) and Murcia (Ayuntamiento de Murcia, 2022). Additionally, Valencia has already been working on "València 2030 Urban Strategy" since 2021 (Ajuntament de Vàlencia, 2023). This project was recognized by the Ministry as one of the pilot projects when the SUA was launched, along with A Coruña. However, Salamanca and Logroño lacked a consolidated urban strategy, resulting in a delayed process for drafting their Action Plans, whose approval occurred respectively in September 2022 and January 2023 (Ayuntamiento de Salamanca, 2022; Ayuntamiento de Logroño, 2023).

This analysis demonstrated that at the Spanish level, the SUA seems to be the Spanish translation of the EU Urban Agenda's intention to exert soft influence on the hard legal and funding instruments, as a confirmation of the international discourse on the implementation of the European Urban Agenda at the broader European level (e.g., Atkinson and Zimmermann, 2016; Potjer et al., 2018; Vinci & Cutaia, 2019). Given the current and future challenges for resilience and sustainability, and the growing debate on degrowth (Schmelzer et al., 2022), the SUA has benefited from the experience of the ISDUS. It may serve as a pilot for the wider implementation of the UN-SDGs. However, as Marín-Cots pointed out (2019: 797-798), there is a real risk that the SUA may not be followed as a model by public and private leaders due to its a non-normative character.

Thematic Objectives (TO)	Action Lines	Projects	Budget
OT 2 Improving access, use and quality of ICT	AL9 Development and improvement of ICT for sustainable mobility	Upgrading and virtualization of the Millennium card	€199,581
		Urban Mobility Portal	€163,000
		ICT equipment for assisted mobility	€596,996
	AL10 Development ICT tools for tourist mobility	On-line ticket reservation and capacity control system	€105,270
		Digital platform for tourist information	€218,337
	AL20 ICT-based energy monitoring of city neighborhoods	ICT-based energy monitoring of city neighborhoods	€432,000
	AL21 Development ICT tools for citizen participation-awareness	Multi-platform citizen app	€160,415
		Environmental Quality Information System	€221,947
		LED Displays for the Environmental Information System	€34,700
TO 4 – Promoting a low-emission economy	AL11 Program for the promotion of walking mobility	Redevelopment of Nuestra Señora del Rosario Street	€669,254
		Pedestrian access to the Pocomaco industrial park from Birloque	€352,557
		Urbanization of Cortaduría Street	€249,350
		Redevelopment of Victoria Fernández Street	€215,063
		Redevelopment of the final section of Ramón Cabanillas Street	€132,430
	AL13 Promoting and expanding school routes	Promoting and expanding school routes	€179,256
	AL14 Program to promote bicycle mobility	Mariscal Pardo de Cela bike lane	€141,665
		Supply and installation of readers, modules, stations and bicycles	€1,792,030
		bike lane between Elviña traffic circle and Pablo Picasso Avenue	€239,380
	AL15 New bus shelter models for urban bus transportation	Interactive bus shelter for urban bus transportation	€240,000
	AL17 Substitution of polluting luminaires, regulation and lighting sunlight	Modernization of lighting in different roads of the city	€320,254
TO 6 – Protecting the environment and resource efficiency	AL1 Naturalizing, humanizing and equipping socially key urban spaces	Restoration of the San Carlos Garden	€310,516
	AL2 Memory of the coastal and fluvial border: recovery of enclaves and watercourses	Improving accessibility and use of the beaches	€145,176
		Bird observatory at O Portiño	€43,345
		Atlantic slow-mobility path	€25,000
	AL3 Restoration of sites of tourist, cultural and environmental interest	Various improvements at the San Amaro Cemetery	€296,611
		Improvement of the third department of the San Amaro Cemetery	€292,300
		Recovery of traditional roads	€159,584
		Creation of the Breogán Forest	€195,682
		Improvement of the second department of the San Amaro Cemetery	€125,423
	AL4 Creation of urban gardens within the city	Urban vegetable gardens in the Adolfo Suarez Park	€293,728
	AL5 Improving industrial park's surroundings	Redevelopment of Severo Ochoa Street	€791,900
TO 9 – Social inclusion and the fight against poverty	AL22 Boosting employability and reducing gender digital divide through ICT tools	Complete renovation of building for municipal civic center in O Birloque (still ongoing in late January 2024)	€797,919
	AL26 Map of the city's fairgrounds and their equipment	Provision of equipment for the realization of fairs and markets	€334,956
	AL27 Refurbishment and commercial activation of urban markets	Renovation of the Adormideras market	€1,507,241
		Redevelopment of the outdoor area of the San Agustín market	€619,520

Thematic Objectives (TO)	Action Lines	Projects	Budget
	AL30 Social and labor inclusion and employability measures for sectors at risk of social exclusion	Refurbishment of the Garcia Sabell association center	€622,669
	AL33 Recovery and management of disused public parks for the young	Renovation of the Plaza José Toubes pavilion to create the new youth space "O Remanso"	€359,140

Tab.5 List of the completed projects planned within ISUDS in A Coruña

The extent to which planning strategies in Spanish urban areas address real issues beyond labels such as 'Urban economy', 'Sustainable mobility', 'Smart city', and others has not been adequately addressed at the national level. However, there is limited research on a single case-study basis that demonstrates how the funding was implemented through the provision of new public equipment or its amelioration and retrofitting. These improvements were devoted to a range of scopes, from social aggregation to sport, and included enhancements to mobility systems such as the installation of efficient lighting, green spaces, and urban furniture. This was demonstrated in the case study of A Coruña. As of late January 2024, 36 projects had been completed and one is currently ongoing (Tab.5).

However, not all projects funded under ISUDS have been successfully implemented. For instance, Obeso Muñiz (2023) demonstrated that Oviedo lost almost half of the European co-financing due to the lack of human resources, the rigidity of the call for proposals, the bureaucratic burden and the complexity of ISUDS management, which can be related to the political change from a left-wing to a right-wing party in the 2019 municipal election.

6. Conclusion

The current approach to sustainable urban development, driven by the EU Urban Agenda in the frame of SDGs, targets not only vulnerable urban sectors but also cities and/or metropolitan areas to enable wider urban development strategies that address multi-scale urban issues. As a result, two new approaches have emerged for channeling and developing urban regeneration actions and processes: the Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Strategies and the Spanish Urban Agenda. This research examines the relationship between SUA and ISUDS and elaborate a proposal for providing an up-to-date overview and monitoring of national urban regeneration policies. ISUDS encouraged a more comprehensive analysis at the municipal level and suggested an intervention area based on the need to address urban disparities, while SUA used the diagnosis developed by ISUDS to establish guidelines for sustainable urban development interventions.

This analysis adds the comparative dimension of these two instruments to the existing literature. It sheds light on the transition from ISUDS to SUA during the 2014–2020 and 2021–2027 programming periods and clarifies the differences from the pre-2014 programming approach. Previously, a precise urban area affected by vulnerability was the target, whereas now the delimitation is entrusted to the municipalities. ISUDS provides a comprehensive diagnosis at the municipal level, focusing on a neighborhood or a group of neighborhoods as the intervention area. In contrast, SUA does not specify any kind of delimitation for the intervention area but instead utilized the diagnostic component of ISUDS to develop a roadmap for sustainable urban development interventions. Therefore, ISUDS can be claimed as the tool originating SUA.

Future research should focus on the following elements. Firstly, in terms of governance, monitoring the results of forums for debate and exchange of good practices – including peer review workshops – performed by networks and observatories to better comprehend the decision-making process and improvements in shared learning and networking (Barreiro, 2017; Lacilla Larrodé et al., 2022). Secondly, regarding urban policies and politics, this paper suggests conducting a comparative analysis within and between the two tools approved on the targeting city, as suggested by recent insights provided at the Spanish regional level (Rodríguez-García &

Navarro Yáñez, 2023). Thirdly, and consequently, detecting the factors that influence the successful and failed implementation (such as proved in section 5.2 for the cases of A Coruña and Oviedo) to understand the missed opportunities and achieved targets for integrated territorial investment and to reduce cities and regional disparities within the European context (Tosics, 2017; Vinci, 2021). Eventually, in terms of spatial planning, it is necessary to determine whether ISUDS and/or SUA have resulted in changes to the municipal general master plans.

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Authors' contributions

Roles played by contributors according to CRediT taxonomy: Federico Camerin (FC): 25%; Lucas Álvarez del Valle LAV: 25%; Ana Díez Bermejo ADB: 25%; Iván Rodríguez Suárez IRS: 25% to research outputs: Conceptualization: FC; Data curation: IRS; Formal Analysis: LAV; Funding acquisition: ADB; Investigation: LAV; Methodology: ADB; Project administration: ADB; Resources: IRS; Software: IRS; Supervision: FC; Validation: LAV; Visualisation: FC; Writing – original draft: FC & LAV; Writing – review & editing: ADB and IRS.

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Image Sources

Fig.1: Authors' elaboration based on Ministerio de Fomento (2019) and Red de Iniciativas Urbanas (2015).

Fig.2: Authors' elaboration (2023).

Fig.3: Authors' elaboration starting from Ministerio de Fomento (2019: 81).

Fig.4: Authors' elaboration according to assignation of values based on the ISDUS Implementation Plan and synergies with the SUA defined by MITMA.

Table Sources

Tab.1: Authors' elaboration (2024) based on the "Guidelines for the definition of EDUSI" (Red de Iniciativas Urbanas, 2015).

Tab.2: Authors' elaboration (2024) based on Ministerio de Fomento (2019) and Red de Iniciativas Urbanas (2015).

Tab.3: Authors' elaboration (2024) based on the "Synergies between the Spanish Urban Agenda and other agendas and strategies" (Hernández-Partal & de Santiago-Rodríguez, 2019).

Tab.4: Source: Authors' elaboration (2024) based on the ISUDS proposed by capital cities.

Tab.5: Source: Authors' elaboration (2024) based on the state of implementation of A Coruña's ISUDS.

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