

ANALYSIS OF THE SCOPE AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGIES PROMOTED BY LOCAL URBAN AGENDA IN RELATION TO EUROPEAN AND NATIONAL TRENDS. THE CASE OF THE BASQUE COUNTRY

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ABSTRACT

As mentioned by the United Nations in 2016, the population of cities is increasing every year. A recent evaluation suggests that two-thirds of the world's primary energy consumption can be attributed to urban areas. In addition, environmental awareness is increasing at the urban level due to current issues as global warming or the depletion of natural resources. In this regard, different agendas, strategies, plans and regulations have been published to promote climate actions and sustainable development, such as the Agenda 2030 and the New Urban Agenda. In the Basque Country, the Agenda Euskadi Bultzatu 2030 and the RIS3 strategies are published by the Basque Government to develop its sustainable urban transition strategy for the upcoming years. In previous studies, a surveillance process has been carried out in order to detect the trends and to define the topics to develop in the future. As a complement to this research, the present study aims to analyse the scope and implementation level of the strategies defined in the Basque Urban Agenda and to define if they are a trend at a national and European level, in order to determine the lines of action that have the greatest potential to achieve financing. Initiatives, projects, calls for subsidies, UN reports, European awards, networks... at an international and national level have been analysed. As a result of the study, it has been detected that there are aspects that are actively promoted at a theoretical level with low posterior implementation, such as mobility, sustainable urban planning, nature-based solutions and diversity and inclusion. Others are developed on a theoretical as well as a practical level such as digitalisation, R&D, energy and resource efficiency and fighting climate change. In contrast, the strategic priorities 1. Housing and basic facilities and health and 7. Health and wellbeing are globally less promoted.

Keywords: Basque Country, city trends, niches of opportunity, sustainable cities, surveillance past-present-future context, Urban Agenda Bultzatu 2050

1 INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, the global environmental situation has been aggravated. One of the main causes is due to the activity carried out in cities. It has been estimated that 55% of the world's population lives in them, which is expected to increase to 68% by 2050 [1]. Furthermore, a recent evaluation suggests that, despite occupying 3% of the world surface, two-thirds of global primary energy consumption can be attributed to urban areas, generating 70% of greenhouse gas emissions and 60% of resource consumption) [2]. Cities and metropolitan areas are hubs of economic growth, contributing to approximately 60% of global gross domestic product. Besides, according to United Nations (UN) report, since 2016, more than half of the world population was exposed to air pollution levels, at least 2.5 times higher than the safe standard [3]. As a consequence, an increase in environmental awareness is arising in order to prevent climate change and to improve air and life quality in cities.

In this regard, different agendas, strategies, plans and regulations at an international level to promote climate actions and sustainable development have been published, such as the Agenda 2030 and the New Urban Agenda (NUA) from UN [4, 5]. At a national and regional

level, these agendas, strategies and plans have been developed based on those established by the UN and the European Commission [6]. In the case of the Basque Country in Spain, it is highlighted the Urban Agenda of Euskadi - Bultzatu 2050 (Bultzatu) and the RIS3 (Research and Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation) strategies, which are published by the Basque Government to develop its sustainable urban transition strategy for the upcoming years [7-10]. In some cases, these strategies remain in a theoretical context without being implemented in practice. It is therefore, necessary to compare the scope, implementation and concordance of these regional and local strategies to national and international trends. The aim is to identify which strategies have been implemented and to determine the lines of action that have the greatest potential to achieve financing and be successfully developed in the next few decades. The study will be focused on the case of the autonomous community of the Basque Country in Spain.

2 CONTEXT

In the last few years, different strategies and guidelines have been defined in order to find solutions to solve the social, demographic, economic, environmental and health issues that the world is currently facing. In 2015, the UN published the 2030 Agenda, in which 17 sustainable goals (SDGs) are established in order to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development by 2030. In 2016, the NUA is brought out. It guides the development of cities for the next 20 years in order to promote more inclusive, compact and connected cities through urban planning and design, governance, legislation and urban economy [4, 5]. In addition, concerning the current health alert due to COVID-19, UN-Habitat, the UN agency for housing and urban development have worked with the collaboration of national and local governments into the COVID-19 Response Plan. Its aim is to help them to be prepared for, prevent, respond to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic [11].

Based on the above two agendas, other guidelines, plans and strategies have been developed at the European, national and regional level. Notably, 'My agenda for Europe: political guidelines for the next European Commission 2019-2024' [12], published by the European Commission. It defines the six priorities of the European Commission for the period 2019-2024. Between them, it can be highlighted the European Green Deal, settled to provide the EU with a sustainable economy, a Europe adapted to the digital era and an economy at the service of the citizens. A European Union Urban Agenda has been published too.

In Spain, the Action Plan for the implementation of the 2030 Urban Agenda and the Spanish Urban Agenda (AUE) [6] are defined. Their aim is respectively to achieve the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda and the attainment of sustainable urban development policies.

In the case of the Basque Country, the Euskadi Basque Country 2030 Agenda has been published [7]. It is based on the UN 2030 Agenda and it reflects the degree of alignment and commitment of the Government Programme and the sectorial policies that have carried it out, with the goals and targets associated to the 17 SDGs. The Basque Agenda is conceived as integrative, traversal, temporary, specific, clear, participatory, adaptable and international. In addition, it has been elaborated the Bultzatu 2050 and Euskadi RIS3, based on which the Basque Government must develop its sustainable urban transition strategy for the upcoming years. Bultzatu is created on the basis of the UN NUA and is aligned with number 11 of the SDGs of the UN 2030 Agenda [8]. It aims to achieve inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities, where no person and no place are left behind. The Agenda includes eight strategic priorities and five traversal priorities that are articulated in 33 axes of intervention and 104 action lines to be developed over the next 30 years. On the other hand, RIS3 Euskadi

strategies are related to the European RIS: Regional Innovation Smart Specialisation Strategy [10,13]. Its main goal is to focus on the value-added fields that generate growth and employment, the fields of opportunity in which the Basque Country has business and scientific and technological capacity. Specifically, it has been identified three strategic areas (Advanced Manufacturing, Energy and Biosciences/Health) and four opportunity fields (food, urban habitat and ecosystem, cultural and creative industries).

Other programmes, strategies and plans related to the urban sector [6, 7, 8, 9,10, 12, 13], which are directly or indirectly connected to the 2030 Agenda and NAU, have been developed at the European, national or regional level as shown in Fig.1. In Spain, multiples decrees have been also stated in order to promote sustainable development in the country [14].

Regarding to Research and Innovation Programmes, the European Framework Programme for Research and Innovation is established. Its main programme has been Horizon 2020 (H2020) until 2020 and Horizon Europe will be from 2021 onwards. In parallel, Spain has published the Spanish Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation 2021–2027 [15] on which the 2020 Euskadi Science, Technology and Innovation Plan (PCTI) is based and that is also related to RIS3 Euskadi. Due to the current sanitary situation, in 2020 the European Commission has revised the Horizon Europe preliminary report published in 2018. It has been redefined the main pillars on which the framework programme will be based. At the same time, the different instruments that are going to be developed during this new period have been set, indicating to whom they are addressed and who the stakeholders are. The instruments are: European Recovery and Resilience facility, REACT-EU (cohesion policy), Reinforced cohesion and rural development and Reinforce Just transition Mechanism [16]. The European Commission is therefore proposing a budget to promote economic recovery, repair and

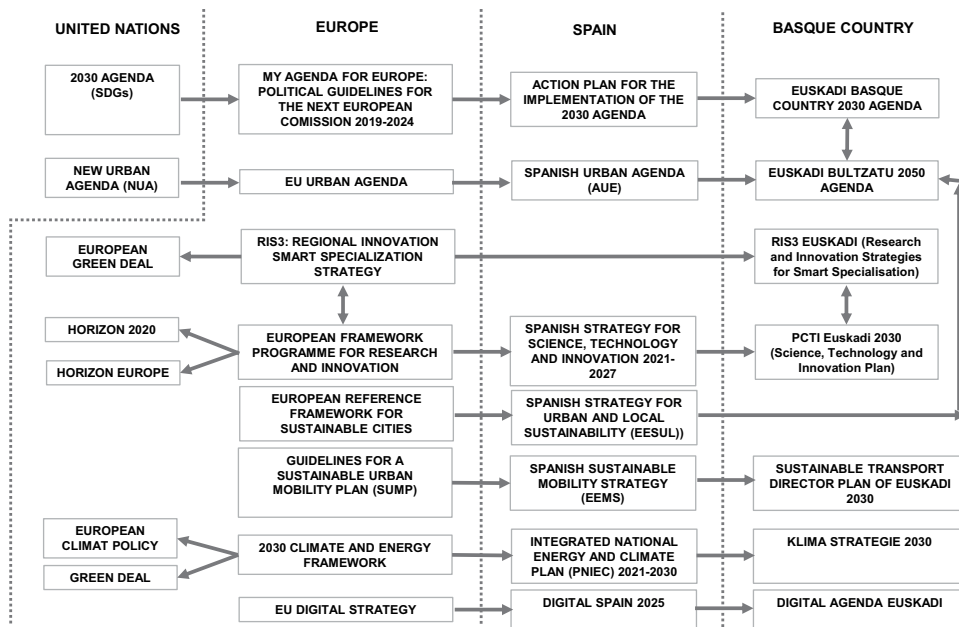


Figure 1: International, national and local strategies, agendas and plans in the field of sustainable cities.

revitalise the market, ensure equality conditions and support urgent investments. It highlights green and digital transitions as key to Europe's future prosperity and resilience. Furthermore, as published in the AGREE project [17], the EU considers the energy renovation of buildings as a priority for economic recovery after COVID-19. In May 2020, a budget was defined for each of these instruments and most of the budget is corresponding to pillar 1 (supporting members states to recover) and, in particular, to the Recovery and Resilience Facility [16].

3 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The study is based on the assessment of the surveillance and foresight process carried out on the project (CISO30). During this process, different actions such as strategies, plans, projects, reports, grants, initiatives and awards have been analysed in order to determine the urban development trends for upcoming years. Then, these actions also have been contrasted to the eight strategic priorities and their corresponding intervention axis proposed by Bultzatu. The contrasting process was based on detecting the main objectives or themes of each action studied and, subsequently, identifying to which of the main axes of intervention of the Bultzatu agenda they are related. In this way, the study has quantified the number of times that each axe of intervention of the Bultzatu is included as part of the main topics or objectives of the actions studied. The results has been presented by percentage.

As shown in Fig. 2, this comparison has been carried out at two levels. Firstly, by relating Bultzatu to the near past and present context analysed by the surveillance process. At the same time, this level has been divided into two subgroups: practical actions (awarded projects that have been executed or are in progress) and theoretical actions that are proposed to be developed but they have not been implemented practically, remaining theoretical ideas and targets (awards, strategies, reports, regulations, agendas, ...). Both groups at national and international level. Secondly, Bultzatu is compared to the so-called near future context (open grants and subsidies during the fourth trimester of 2020).

It should be underlined that the monitoring process has mainly focused on the analysis of the sustainable cities development context. The topics considered are smart cities, energy renovation of buildings, energy, urban resilience, nature-based solutions, the human factor and governance. Consequently, the results and conclusion will be constrained by the topics analysed and their scope.

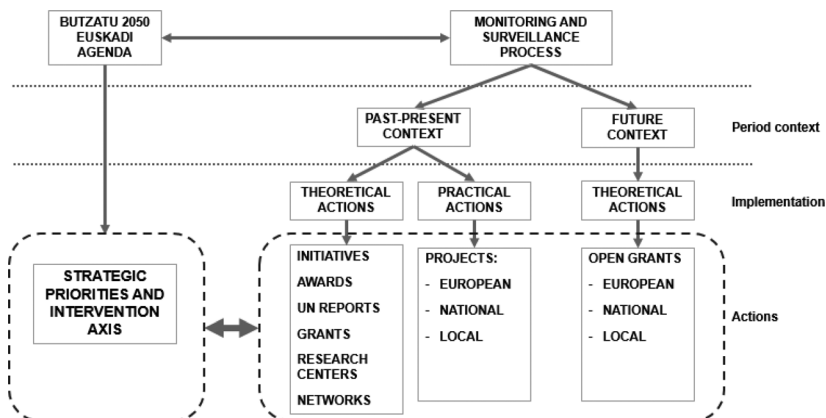


Figure 2: Scheme of monitoring vs Euskadi Bultzatu 2030 Agenda comparison process.

The main objective of the project is to determine if the strategies promoted by Bultzatu are in line with National and European current and future trends. The study also aims to define the main market niche in the field of sustainable cities that should be developed in the Basque Country in the forthcoming years.

4 RESULTS

The results obtained in the past-present context are based on a detailed assessment of 95 cases. Regarding the future context, 76 European and 96 national calls and grants have been thoroughly analysed. Among them, only 35 European, 2 national and 9 regionals are related to the sustainable cities sector and, in consequence, to Bultzatu. The results are presented in Fig. 3 by period and type of action. In it, it is shown the percentage of repetition (number of times that an axe of intervention is considered main topic out of the total of actions assessed). For example, in the case of the projects thoroughly analysed, it has been observed that in 45 out of 69 have smart cities and digitalisation (axe of intervention Smart cities of the Bultzatu 2050) among their main objectives. It is translated as 65% of the projects consider Smart

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES	INTERVENTION AXIS	PAST-PRESENT		FUTURE	
		Projects	Initiatives, awards, networks, reports,...	European open grants	National open grants
1. Housing and basic facilities	Access to housing for all	3%	20%	9%	36%
	Regeneration and rehabilitation of buildings and dwellings	27%	25%	46%	27%
	Basic facilities	7%	10%	0%	9%
	Accessible and high quality environment and public spaces	12%	25%	0%	9%
2. Mobility and transport	Sustainable mobility	17%	45%	6%	9%
	Intra-urban mobility	11%	45%	6%	9%
	Inter-urban mobility	11%	35%	9%	9%
	Multimodal mobility	12%	35%	6%	9%
3. Sustainable urban planning	Protection of cultural and natural heritage	32%	55%	11%	9%
	Resilience of the territory and natural heritage	49%	55%	20%	9%
	Sustainable land use	9%	45%	17%	0%
	Spatial equity	4%	30%	3%	0%
4. Innovative cities	Research, innovation and technology	53%	80%	69%	36%
	Connectivity	64%	60%	49%	9%
	Smart cities	55%	55%	31%	9%
	Non-technological innovation	12%	45%	14%	9%
5. Economic development and employment Dynamic and competitive cities	Sustainable production and consumption	67%	65%	46%	18%
	Quality employment	16%	45%	14%	9%
	Resilient local economy	28%	60%	26%	9%
	Circular economy	5%	20%	11%	9%
6. Sustainable and resilient cities	Pollution and environmental quality monitoring	55%	65%	51%	18%
	Climate action	65%	70%	54%	18%
	Natural resources and waste management	57%	65%	51%	9%
	Biodiversity and ecosystems	29%	65%	29%	9%
7. Health and wellbeing	Accessibility and Universal Coverage to the healthcare system	0%	15%	6%	0%
	Equitable and quality healthcare	0%	15%	3%	0%
	Promoting healthy lifestyle and leisure habits	3%	25%	23%	0%
	Health innovation and research	1%	40%	14%	36%
8. Inclusive and diverse cities	Social cohesion	43%	45%	60%	9%
	Intergenerational equality by functional diversity and origin	19%	40%	20%	0%
	Equitable and inclusive education and trainings	19%	55%	34%	9%
	Cultural and leisure opportunities for all	11%	40%	9%	0%

Figure 3: Monitoring vs Euskadi Bultzatu 2030 Agenda comparison process results by period time and type of action.

cities as major theme. Similarly, regarding the governance axe of intervention, 54 out of 69 of the projects (78%), determine it as one of the fundamental issues to address. Respecting the interpretation of the results, it has been considered a noteworthy intervention axis those with a percentage over 50%.

First of all, due to the very reduced number of open national and local calls for proposals related to sustainable cities development, it is considered that the results of the future context based on national and local grants do not give significant conclusions. Similarly, in the case of international grants, the number of open calls is higher but it is also limited by the studied period. The results could be different if the study includes one or several consecutive full years of analysing. This study has not been carried out because it is not relevant to the main objectives of the project.

Regarding Fig. 3, it is shown that certain intervention axes are promoted both in the past-present and future and at a theoretical and practical level. This is the case of Research, innovation and technology, Connectivity, Pollution and environmental quality monitoring, Climate action, Natural resources and Waste management, Social cohesion and Sustainable production and consumption.

Secondly, other intervention axes are highly developed at a theoretical level in the past-present context. Nevertheless, they have hardly been implemented in a practical way during the same period or have been included as main objective of the new open grants. These intervention axes are Sustainable mobility, Intra-urban mobility, Inter-urban mobility, Multimodal mobility, Protection of cultural and natural heritage, Sustainable land use, Spatial equity, Non-technological innovation, Quality employment, Resilient local economy, Biodiversity and ecosystems, Health innovation and research, Intergenerational equality by functional diversity and origin, Equitable and inclusive education and training and Cultural and leisure opportunities for all.

Thirdly, certain intervention axes have been strongly promoted during the past-present context, both at a theoretical and practical level. Nevertheless, they have lost interest in the current open grants. This is the case of Smart Cities and Resilience of the territory and natural heritage.

Finally, in an overall manner, during the past and present context, the following intervention axes have been more promoted Resilience of the territory and natural heritage, Research, innovation and technology, Connectivity, Smart cities, Sustainable production and consumption, Pollution and environmental quality monitoring, Climate action and Natural resources and waste management.

In the future context, the highlighted intervention axes are Research, Innovation and Technology, Pollution and environmental quality monitoring, Climate action, Natural resources and waste management and Social cohesion. Focusing on local and national calls for proposals, the most promoted intervention axes are Access to housing for all, Regeneration and rehabilitation of buildings and dwellings, Research, innovation and technology and Health innovation and research.

Regarding the strategic priorities' classification, in general, the number 1 (Housing and facilities), 2 (Mobility and transport) and 7 (Health and wellbeing) are least promoted. Number 4 (Innovative cities) and 6 (Sustainable and resilient cities) are the most, following by number 5 (Economic development and employment, Dynamic and competitive cities), 8 (Inclusive and diverse cities) and 3 (Sustainable urban planning) ranked by order of importance.

5 CONCLUSIONS

As commented before, in response to the fight against climate change and the promotion of sustainable development, different agendas and strategies have been published by UN, the European Commission and the State's members administrations. In the case of the Basque Country in Spain, it is worth highlighting the Euskadi Bultzatu Agenda 2050.

The study carried out has been focused on the analysis of the scope and implementation of the strategies promoted by Bultzatu in comparison to European and national trends. As expected by the team, it is concluded that the strategic priorities and intervention axis proposed by Bultzatu are in concordance with these trends and thus, it can be generally confirmed that its scope is aligned with European and national tendencies. Nevertheless, it has been detected there are aspects of Bultzatu which are actively promoted by trends at a theoretical level but with low later implementation, such as mobility, sustainable urban planning, nature-based solutions, health innovation, quality and resilient economy, diversity and inclusion. Others interventions axis are developed at both theoretical and practical level, such as digitalisation, R&D, sustainable production and consumption, social cohesion, climate actions, natural resources and waste management and pollution and environmental quality monitoring. In contrast, the strategic priorities 1. Housing and basic facilities and health and 7. Health and wellbeing are globally less promoted. These results are conditioned by the scope of the study, the type of surveillance carried out, the period of study in the case of funding and the topics considered.

Finally, it is concluded that the main topics to developed in the coming decades should be those in which the European Commission is currently actively promoting through Horizon Europe and, thus, they overlap with the most promoted strategic priorities of Bultzatu (considering all periods, past, present and future, and all type of actions, theoretical and practical). These topics are social and economic recovery, green and digital transition and transition to decarbonisation. They correspond with Bulzatu priorities number 4 (innovative cities), 5 (Economic development and employment, Dynamic and competitive cities) and 6 (Sustainable and resilient cities), respectively.

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