

Integrated planning and local development in Europe: a territorial model

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Abstract: This report produced, under the auspices of the Standing Conference of Local and Regional authorities of the Council of Europe, by the presidential Department for Planning and Territorial Development of the Xunta de Galicia, focuses on the analysis of the problems raised by the presence of intra-regional disparities in the member states of the Council of Europe, and the reception that integrated district development policies similar to the Galician model might receive in the European frame.

Key Words: comarca, district, integrated planning, local development.

1. Introduction

The socio-economic transformations which have taken place recently in Europe highlight the difficulties facing traditional development policies in the achievement of territorial balance. Despite long experience with national and Community regional policies, Community policies have been unable to impede the growing spacial concentration of the control of the means of production in central areas. Very few peripheral regions have succeeded in achieving the development and economic growth objectives sought by traditional policies. Furthermore, a tendency towards spacial dislocation, characterized by an ever increasing concentration of wealth and economic activity in the principle regional nuclei to the disadvantage of the neighbouring areas, has been observed in the less developed areas. The principle consequence of this whole process is a weakening of the development potential of the region as a whole.

From our point of view, the limited success of regional policies undertaken to date is due in large measure to their inability to stimulate intra-regional balance or to increase economic and social cohesion, in particular in peripheral regions. Consequently, in order to improve the efficiency of existing regional development policies and to stimulate intra-regional balance, it is becoming necessary to resort to the design of complementary integrated development policies at the heart of each region.

2. Objectives

According to our experience, districts -taken as voluntary associations of town councils- could constitute the territorial base for the implementation of strategic models for decentralized development (plans for district development) which, through the active participation of the social agents, voluntary cooperation and flexible planning, may permit -without unnecessary impositions- the attainment of common local development objectives. To this end, the Autonomous Community of Galicia has put

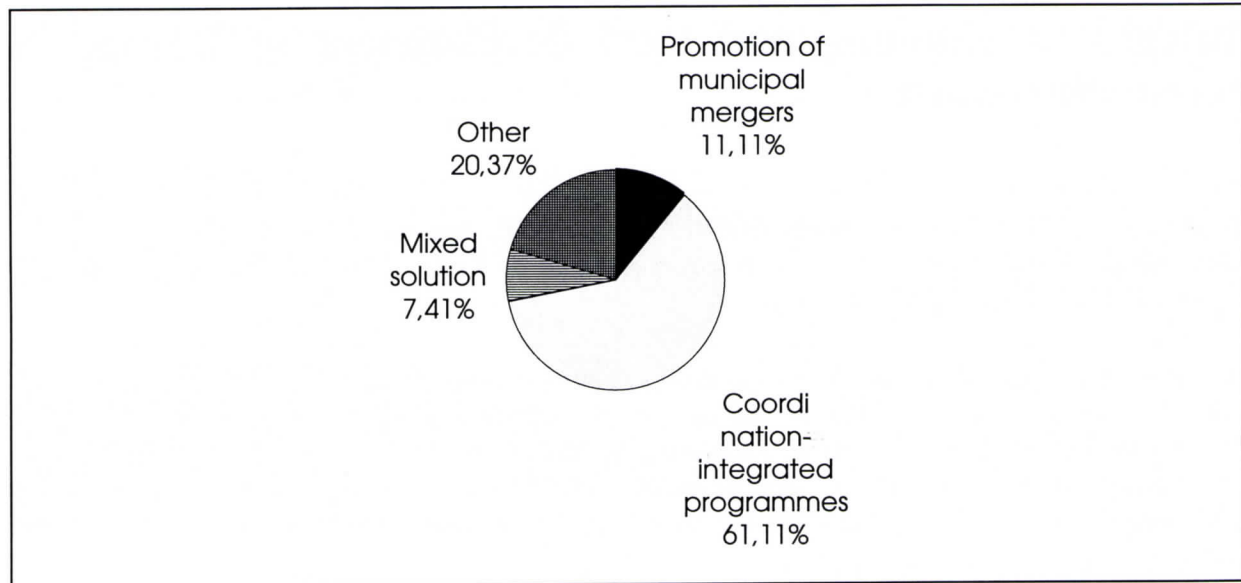


Figure 1: Possible solutions to the development problems of small towns.

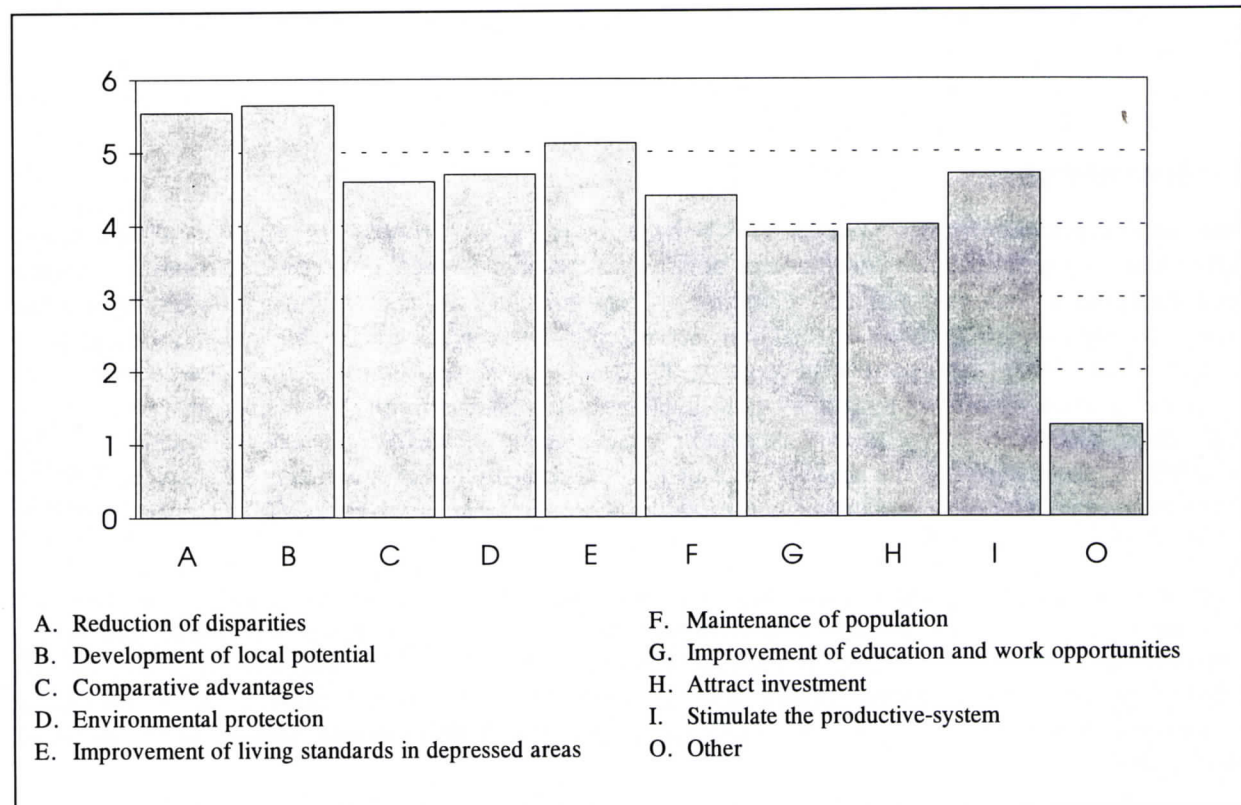


Figure 2: Objectives which must be followed by district development programmes (Mean of questionnaires returned).

into motion a District Development Plan, envisioned as a strategic instrument for the coordination and engagement of territorial intervention as a voluntary model of integrated and participatory planning.

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Development of the Xunta de Galicia, focuses on the analysis of the problems raised by the presence of intra-regional disparities in the member states of the Council of Europe, and the reception that integrated district development policies similar to the Galician model might receive in the European frame.

To this end, a questionnaire was sent from the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities to 423 regional and provincial governments and to 42 federations, associations or unions of European municipalities or provinces with the objective of gathering information about how the different European local authorities are trying to promote balanced development and to find out if similar models of integrated planning for local development exist in other countries.

The questionnaire was centred around 12 questions which tried to summarize the essential aspects of the model which we are applying in the Autonomous Community of Galicia, but giving them a more general sense and setting them in the context of theoretical principles of territorial planning and local development, in order to give them a broader significance and to rise above the peculiarities of any regional reality.

3. Distribution of the survey

The questionnaire was sent to 423 regional governments and provincial authorities belonging to the 24 member-states of the Council of Europe, as well as to 42 federations, associations or unions of municipalities and provinces.

Principal among the problems which a study of this kind should face in this kind of reports are the differences between the territorial systems of the member states of the Council of Europe; their vast variation makes the task of comparison difficult. From federal entities like Austria, Belgium, Germany or Switzerland to the purely administrative division of territory in centralized states like Denmark, Eire, Greece, or the Netherlands via the various types of regionalization in France, Italy, Portugal and Spain, the authority and competences of the bodies entrusted with responding to the questionnaires vary enormously. Thus replies from territorial units with sufficient autonomy to implement integrated development programmes at a district level are combined with others from those which lack the necessary power to take any action of this kind.

The second problem is the low level of response. Fifty seven regions and provinces and six federations or associations of municipalities responded to our request for information which gives response levels of 13,48% and 14,29% respectively. In 8 cases the answer was limited to supplying information about existing integrated development plans in their respective spheres without having completed the questionnaire. Consequently this report is based on the analysis of the responses from 11,82% of the entities to which the questionnaire was sent.

The response rate varied significantly from country to country. While the only organization in Luxembourg to which a questionnaire was sent did respond to our questions, and the response rates in Germany and Austria were in excess of 40%, regions in 7 member-states of the Council of Europe did not give any information (table 1).

The low response rate to the questionnaire is directly related to the territorial model prevailing in each country. The States with federal structures (Austria, Germany or Switzerland) or those with various levels of regional autonomy (Italy, Portugal, Spain or France) replied with greater regularity than those with a more centralized territorial structures. In this sense the low response rate from countries such as Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Poland or Turkey is significant. Belgium is an exception to the rule: despite its federal status, only 5,55% of the entities contacted responded to the survey. One must bear in mind, however, that the questionnaire was sent not only to the regions and communities of Belgium, but also to the provinces whose autonomy is very limited.

Table 1: Level of the responses from bodies to whom the questionnaire was sent.

Country	Level of response %
Luxembourg	100
Germany	45,45
Austria	41,66
Italy	36
Finland	25
Portugal	25
Spain	22,22
Switzerland	21,42
France	20
United Kingdom	16,69
Hungary	12,5
Sweden	11,53
Greece	7,84
Ireland (Eire)	7,4
Denmark	5,88
Belgium	5,55
Norway	5,26
Cyprus	0
Slovakia	0
Island	0
The Netherlands	0
Poland	0
Czech Republic	0
Turkey	0

Source: Internal.

A second element determining the level of response is related to the degree of internal organization in the territorial entities contacted. Western European and Scandinavian countries with centralized structures responded -with the exception of the Netherlands- in greater measure than those of Southern or Eastern Europe which had a similar territorial structure (with the exception of Greece and Hungary).

Finally, one should not disregard, as one of the reasons for the low level of response to the survey, the distrust awoken by the word planning in the majority of European countries throughout most of the 1980s, and especially after the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe. The scant return from, or indeed the total failure of, certain past planning experiences has done nothing except increase the distrust of any model which, be it because of the way it was drawn up or because of its semantics, recalls previous experiences.

4. Results

Despite the fact the low level of response obliges caution when drawing conclusions and suggests that there is a certain distrust towards integrated planning models, the principal conclusion, which was extracted from the analysis carried out, is that there is a significant demand in the majority of European territories for integrated development plans which go beyond the dirigisme and the economics which have dominated the majority of traditional development plans.

The bodies consulted emphasized the need to horizontally coordinate municipal policies and favour the creation of voluntary districts in order to promote the development of infra-regional areas.

District development plans, created with the aim of reducing disparities, developing local potential and improving living standards in depressed areas while protecting the environment, are considered suitable vehicles for the achievement of balanced socio-economic growth. This aim would be achieved not by the active voluntary participation of the town councils involved in the design of plans alone, but also through the vertical coordination of the territorial authorities and the adjustment of objectives to match those of regional and national development policies, without, thereby, erasing the idiosyncrasies of each district.

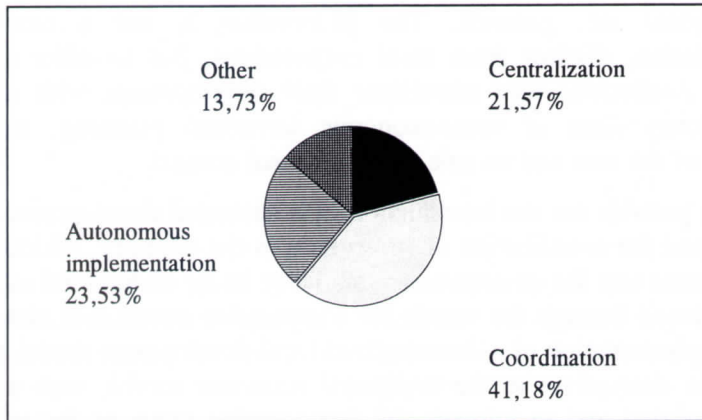


Figure 3: Mean of implementation of district planning.

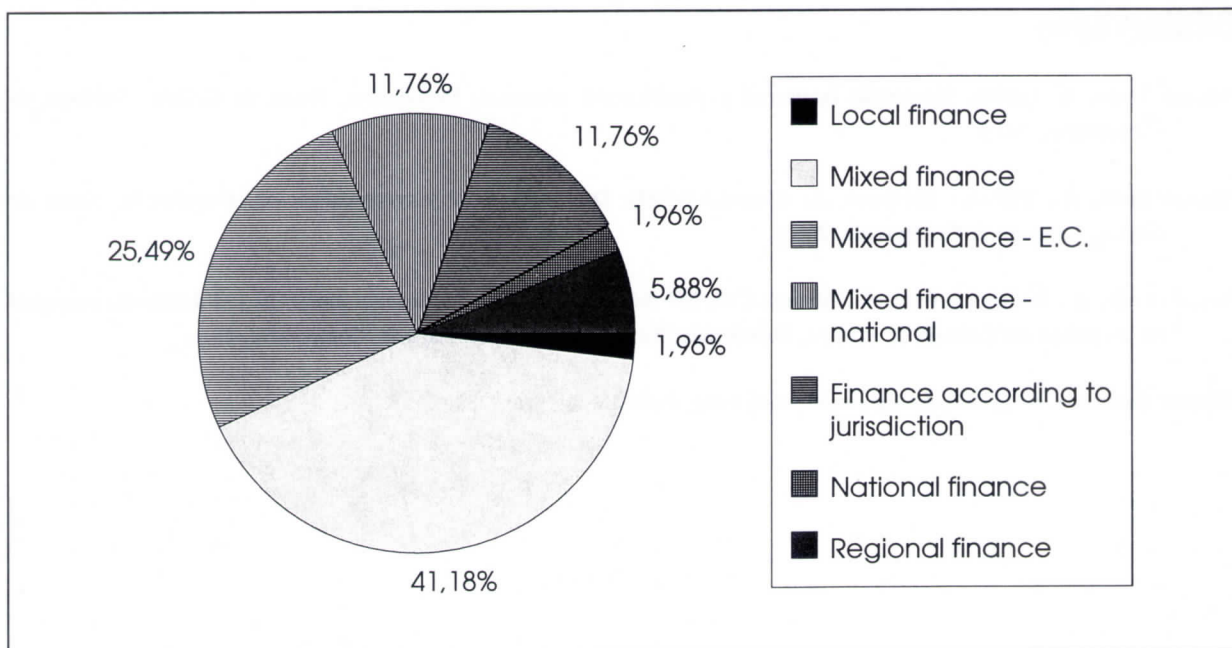


Figure 4: Financing of integrated programmes.

In this sense, the majority of the planners contacted opted for the updating of district or supra-municipal developments similar to those being carried out in Galicia. These types of plans are based on the conception of territorial development planning as an operative system, which incorporates socio-economic planning, land-use planning and the environment in one co-ordinating tool. Surpassing, in this way, the concept of land-use planning as an element of spatial development

destined exclusively towards the promotion of economic growth, it is possible to achieve more balanced development by policies of corrective intervention for local disparities.

In short, we may state in conclusion that the tendencies or aspirations detected in the European entities analysed, coincide fully with the nature of the objectives, of the Galician District Development Plan, which are explained below.

In the Galician District Development Plan the district is conceived as an intermediate territorial environment, formed by a group of neighbouring town councils with internal ties, based on geographical, historical, economic, functional etc. grounds. The proposition is not a new legal-territorial entity, with its own jurisdiction, distinct from local corporations, but to offer a territorial frame in which the intervening Authorities may coordinate their developments with a consensual strategy, attending to the priority aims of socio-economic territorial planning, in accordance with the comparative advantages of the area and its role in the regional context.

This territorial frame is considered the most suitable for the introduction of a sustained development model, through administrative coordination and the coordination of investment in the territory, which strikes a balance between the productive process and the environment, this latter being understood as basic to development. This aim may be achieved through the search for comparative advantages and the promotion of innovative potential, the implementation of a decentralized local development model, capable of detecting and stimulating possible alternatives to the traditional economic model, with a view to offset the present model of concentration and to mitigate the demographic crisis as far as possible.

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