

TARGETED ANALYSIS //

IMAGINE

Developing a metropolitan-regional imaginary in
Milano-Bologna urban region

Scientific annex 5 // Imagine your ITI

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The final version of the report will be published as soon as approved.

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Introduction

This document is complementary to the study realised by the ESPON team Politecnico di Milano, SciencesPo Paris, Globus et Locus on the emergent corridor between Milan and Bologna.

It explores the characteristics of the Integrated Territorial Investment mechanism as implemented during the 2014-2020 Cohesion Policy programming period. This research looked for a few possible comparative examples for constructing an ITI in the Milan-Bologna urban corridor.

To this end, we started from a review of the literature and an exploration of the data at disposal from the European Commission. We then used the knowledge gathered by the ESPON research to extract the main elements of ITI application in the subject area. Finally, we extended our findings on the case studies to propose three possible scenarios of application of ITI in the emerging Milan-Bologna urban corridor.

Milan-Bologna corridor presents specificities related to territorial, governance and strategic peculiarities.

Key features of the ITI, related to collaboration potential, experimental attitude, and local capacity-building, can be decisive in dealing with a possible project for the corridor.

The concluding remarks also comprise a step into the next programming period and its implications for further developing ITI mechanism application.

1 ITI in the 2014-2020 programming period

1.1 Territorial policies in the EU

Regional economic divergence has become a threat to economic progress in the EU (Iammarino et al., 2017) when globalisation poses new challenges to the economic and territorial cohesion (EC, 2017). While the evidence suggests that the EU economy has benefited and continues to benefit from globalisation, these benefits are not automatically and evenly transmitted to all European regions.

Cohesion Policy has invested heavily in reducing economic disparities across EU regions. It has co-financed investment in innovation, education and digital and transport networks, helping to create a single market that boosts growth, productivity and specialisation in areas of comparative advantage in all regions. At the same time, spatial spill-overs between regions are identified as of major importance. Around half of the growth in a region over the period 2000-2014 is explained by growth occurring in neighbouring ones (EC, 2017). The same analysis confirms agglomeration economies as development drivers. Agglomeration means economies of scale, higher probability of innovation and concentration of high-level services, and a direct and an indirect effect on growth due to more significant interaction between firms and people. For these reasons, bodies like the European Committee of the Regions support territorial cooperation across the EU to perform a new approach to urban development.

Today's development challenges, in fact, can no longer be mastered by actors in charge of individual territories, be it local areas, municipalities, regions or countries. The interdependencies and interactions imply that territorial impacts extend beyond local areas and administrative borders, and decisions at different levels need to play together for almost every development issue. Therefore, territorial cooperation is relevant at a cross-border scale and national and regional programmes and within the programme areas and beyond (Mehlbye, Böhme, 2018).

1.1.1 Cohesion Policy in 2014-2020: framework, aims and funds

EU Regional policy, also known as Cohesion policy, is the European Union's strategy to promote and support regions' member States and regions' "overall" harmonious development". It aims at strengthening economic and social cohesion by reducing disparities in the level of development between regions, introducing territorial cohesion (Lisbon Treaty, 2007). It targets all regions and cities in the European Union, supporting job creation, business competitiveness, economic growth, sustainable development, and improving citizens' quality of life. To reach these goals and address the diverse development needs in all EU regions, €355.1 billion – almost a third of the total EU budget – have been set aside for Cohesion Policy for 2014-2020¹ and distributed mainly using European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF). Italy, in particular, is the second country in terms of the total amount of programmed resources for cohesion policy, more than €75 billion, of which 59.5% comes from ESIF. Poland is the first, with over €104 billion² (IFEL, 2019). Moreover, Italy binds a higher percentage of its domestic budget than any other members' state.

ESIF is the EU's main instrument to foster integrated territorial development in the EU Member States and regions (EC, 2019). Their distribution differs from other EU economic funding initiatives because it is managed together by European Commission and the Member States, increasing their adaptation to each national context. Among the ESI funds, the European Regional Development Fund is directly dedicated to enhancing regional development and creating a direct dialogue between the EU and its regions.

With the European Social Fund (ESF), and the minor support of three other thematic funds (CF - Cohesion Fund, the EAFRD - European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, the EMFF - European Maritime and Fisheries Fund), ERDF also constitutes the essential contribution of the EU to foster the elaboration of local

¹ European Commission website. URL: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index.cfm/en/policy/what/investment-policy/

² Poland has at disposal also Cohesion Fund resources, which do not apply to Italy. For what concerns the other EU countries, it is interesting to show some more figures: Spain programmed €56,2 billions, Germany €44,7 billions, and France €45,9 billions (IFEL, 2019)

development strategies. More than 1600 territorial urban strategies received EU funding in the 2014-2020 programming period (PP)³; of the €81 billion invested in urban areas at the end of 2018, projects included in integrated development strategies amount to around €10.8 billion (EC, 2019).

1.1.2 EU territorial and urban policy: integrated strategies, governance and networks

This interest in local development strategies is not a novelty of the 2014-2020 PP EU's effort (both economic and strategic) on local development has increased in parallel with the acquisition of the so-called "place-based approach". With the so-called Barca report (Barca, 2009), development policies have been further linked to territories, pointing at the objective of "sustainable development". This approach has been implemented on the ground since becoming an essential part of the Cohesion Policy. In parallel, since the '90s, EU countries and institutions have constructed an EU perspective on the urban question ("urban acquis") (Fioretti et al. 2020).

However, with the 2007-2013 programming period, sustainable urban development policies entered explicitly into the EU funding scheme, thanks to the contemporary signing of the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable Cities in 2007. The "mainstreaming" of the urban dimension meant that urban actions would no longer be considered community initiatives but fully integrated into national and regional Operational Programmes (González Medina, Fedeli, 2015). The stronger focus on urban matters under 2014-2020 PP was then coupled with the unique political momentum triggered by, first, the publication in 2011 of the European Territorial Agenda 2020, aiming at an "an Inclusive, Smart and Sustainable Europe of Diverse Regions" and then, by the definition of the Urban Agenda for the EU in 2016.

Three main actions enhanced, in practical terms, this passage: **the introduction of the integrated sustainable urban development approach, the empowerment of urban governance, and the fostering of benchmarking and urban networking**, materialising an "urban method" directed to all EU cities (González Medina, Fedeli, 2015).

1.2 Tools and mechanisms for integration in cohesion policy (SUD, CLLD, ITI)

During 2014-2020 Cohesion Policy PP, the stream of funding coming from Cohesion Policy has been structured around 11 pillars, the Thematic Objectives (TO), defining EU's priority areas of action – and characterising the focus of each Fund⁴. On top of this, funding is distributed regarding the so-called "thematic concentration", which links percentages of economic support to regions rank (in terms of more or less developed regions) to balance development opportunities and resources. Utilising Operational Programs (OP), national and regional authorities define priorities and objectives for specific territories, fitting the overall framework of each country's Partnership Agreement with the EU Urban and territorial issues, though, demand for an integrated approach to policies that can overcome a strict sectoral and administrative division. In this sense, integration has multiple meanings: multi-sectoral policy, multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance, and multi-territorial and community-led strategy (Fioretti et al. 2020).

To these ends, ESIF regulation for the 2014-2020 programming period has made Sustainable Urban Development (SUD) strategies compulsory for a thorough use of ERDF. In particular, at least 5% of ERDF in each member state had to be dedicated to SUD (Art.7 of CPR). Under Art 7, SUD strategies can link local actions up with EU programming objectives and financial opportunities; they can have a narrower focus than overall city development frameworks but must set integrated actions. SUD can be financed directly with a specific OP or Priority Axis inside one OP. In addition, two "territorial instruments" were presented as a crucial innovation⁵. These instruments are Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) (Article 36 of the Common Provisions

³ From STRAT-board data (2021).

⁴ TOs from 1 to 4 are the main focus of ERDF, and a significant part of the investment focus on these areas (between 50% and 80%, depending on the region's level of development). TOs from 8 to 11 are the key priorities of ESF. Both, anyway, can support all TOs. Cohesion Fund supports only TO 4-5-6-7 and 11.

⁵ Both existed in the previous PP, but with different and less scope.

Regulation) and Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) (Article 32-35 of the Common Provisions Regulation).

Territorial instruments embed procedures for the distribution of EU funds in a place-based way. However, there are substantial differences in the function of these tools. ITI is a “delivery mechanism”, meaning that its introduction consented to the local authority to bundle multiple funds for thematic or local projects. In doing so, it does not have any procedural or normative content in itself; local authorities are subjected to the conditions and resources set by Managing Authorities (MA) in the OP frameworks under which funds are aggregated. The *territorial* characterisation implies that there cannot be an ITI without an area of application.

CLLD is a set of procedures that aim to encourage an integrated bottom-up approach to territorial development through the strong representation of local actors and significant financial support for strategy implementation and the related participatory process (Servillo & de Bruijn, 2018; Fioretti et al. 2020). The CLLD initiative is based on the success of the LEADER programme and borrows some of its fundamental principles. However, two critical financial innovations characterise CLLD in comparison to LEADER. First, it offers a broader use of funds, including ERDF and ESF (whereas LEADER was limited to EAFRD and EMFF). Second, it provides the possibility of integrating funds supporting a local development strategy, as the ITI. For this reason, it is possible to use all the three instruments (Art. 7, CLLD and ITI) together in the same area; for instance: an ITI can support a SUD strategy and embed a CLLD process for a sub-area/district in need of a specific action plan.

EC legislature also underlines the importance of networking and monitoring in the context of the territorial approach: Article 9 of the ERDF regulation it is envisioned the creation of an urban development network (UDN) to promote capacity-building, networking and exchange of experiences at the EU level, between urban authorities and authorities responsible for innovative actions in the area of sustainable urban development; in Articles 52.2.e and 111.4 of CPR, EC introduced monitoring and reporting activities for the integrated approach to territorial development (EC, 2015).

1.2.1 Territorial development instruments in Italy

According to the Strategic Report 2019 (EC, 2019), there has been an overall enthusiasm for these instruments, mainly because of their capacity to implement measures (projects) across sectors and better address territorial needs.

In the 2014-2020 programming period, Italy shows a relatively heterogeneous and composite situation, with 185 territorial development strategies implemented through multiple tools. Italian Partnership Agreement for 2014-2020 PP has adopted two separated lines of investments dedicated to territorial development: Strategia Nazionale Aree Interne (SNAI - National Strategy for inner areas) and Agenda Urbana per l'Italia, characterised by their distance from the main service centres (education, health and mobility), scarce accessibility, economic stagnation and demographic decline. It covers a vast part of Italian territory⁶ and aims to promote local development by activating new territorial capital. All European Structural and Investment Funds are combined with national finance to support strategies in 72 pilot areas located in every region and macro-area in Italy. SNAI is managed through the OPs and activated using CLLD, ITI for internal areas and dedicated Priority Axes. In particular, 10 regions used ITI to implement SNAI funding.

The Urban Agenda funding stream is channelled through a multi-fund national programme dedicated to Metropolitan Cities (known as PON Metro)⁷ and through 16 ERDF Regional Operational Programmes. It is implemented using dedicated PAs or the ITI.

Regarding the use of Article 7 resources (SUD dedicated funding), SUD strategies in the country are 140 out of the total 185; of these, 111 used dedicated Priority Axis as a delivery mechanism, while 15 used ITI

⁶ Inner Areas make up 53% of Italian municipalities (4.261 in absolute number), are home to 23% of the Italian population (meaning 13.540.000 inhabitants) and cover 60% of the national territory. Source: European network for rural development. Available at: https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/tg_smart-villages_case-study_it.pdf.

⁷ Interestingly, because of mismatches between their national institutionalisation and Cohesion Policy programme, Italian Metropolitan Cities are not responsible for the management of the SUD strategies in the context of PON Metro, which lies onto the respective capital cities.

and 14 used OP. The large majority (85) have their territorial focus on local administrative tiers (cities, towns and neighbourhoods), and 75% of total strategies cover areas with a population lower than 250.000. None of the SUD strategies used CLLD, whereas of the 45 non-SUD strategies⁸ located in the country, including several SNAI pilot areas, half-used ITI and half CLLD as delivery mechanisms⁹. Urban PA was used in more developed regions (Friuli Venezia Giulia, Piedmont, Lombardy, Veneto, Liguria, Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany and Umbria), but also in Abruzzo, Campania and Puglia. ITI, on the contrary, was mainly used in transition (Sardinia and Molise) and less developed regions (Basilicata, Calabria and Sicily), except for the Marche region.

1.3 Integrated Territorial investment

1.3.1 Definition and uses

ITI is a mechanism for integration that increases the number of resources for urban and territorial development, integrating domestic and private funds with EU funding from multiple sources¹⁰. Nonetheless, when introduced in the 2014-2020 programming period, "ITI was considered to have the potential to handle territorial mismatch (the discrepancy between administrative and functional urban areas) and make planning more strategic" (Tosics, 2017). More in general, the compulsory urban dimension (Article 7) was ideally meant to be a multi-level governance structure. A national/regional level policy framework would stimulate and regulate integrated interventions at the local level (ivi). This intention marked a step forward regarding the previous EU urban initiative (the URBAN Community Initiative).

The focus of ITI, in this sense, can be multiple and not necessarily focused on deprived areas. As explained in ITI EC guidance¹¹, key elements of the ITI are:

1. A designated territory and integrated development strategy – The territory of an ITI can be any geographical area (a region, a functional area, an urban or a rural municipality, a neighbourhood or any other sub-national territory) or a cross-administrative or cross-border area¹². One ITI can also cover more than one category of region (less developed, transition and more developed) because it ensures separated financial flows according to the typology.
2. A package of actions to be implemented – which contribute to the local strategy's development objectives and the thematic priorities of the relevant Priority axes.
3. Governance arrangements to manage ITI – in which OP managing authorities bear the responsibility for managing and implementing the ITI and can establish intermediate bodies (local authorities, regional development bodies, other) to carry out delegated tasks¹³.

Concerning funding, ITI can also finance a part of the underlying integrated strategy. The strategy can rely on budgets from national, regional, local and even private funds¹⁴ and be implemented in different phases and with varying implementation conditions, eligibility rules for projects, etc. Usually, arrangements are taken at the level of each OP, including the territorial focus of ITIs, the delegated tasks (end eventual coordination between managing authorities), the indicative financial allocations. In Italy, in particular, ITI programmed resources coming from ESIF in 2014-2020 PP, for both urban and inner areas strategies (ERDF, ESF,

⁸ Meaning those integrated strategies dedicated to territorial development but not using Article 7 resources.

⁹ From STRAT-board data (2021).

¹⁰ ITI can combine investments from more than one priority axis of one or more programmes. at least two different priority axes of one or more OPs.

¹¹ Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/guidelines/2014/guidance-fiche-integrated-territorial-investment-iti

¹² An ITI can also be used in the context of European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) programmes. See the case of Italy and Slovenia cross-border ITI, examined in the following pages.

¹³ If the ITI implements an SUD strategy, at least the delegation of project selection responsibilities is obligatory.

¹⁴ See Fioretti et al. 2020, chapter 5: "Funding and finance".

EAFRD), amount to around €1 billion; domestic co-financing, then, provides for the 50% of the total (therefore, doubles ESIF contribution). If we consider only urban ITI strategies (ERDF and ESF funds) the amount, is around €550 million.

These conditions suggest that ITIs were introduced to stimulate an integrated approach at different levels and spheres, with a functional territorial perspective, potentially more delegation of management tasks to the local level and, again potentially, a thematic and financial mix from different funds and operational programmes (Ferry, 2019).

1.3.2 Literature and expectations

Literature and reports on ITI have tried to capitalise on the 2014-2020 PP experiences. This knowledge shows clear opportunities laying in ITI use, only partially overlapping with tool (and European Commission) expectations, as well as shared criticisms, based on relevant case studies.

ITI is considered a versatile and flexible instrument (van der Zwet, 2015; van der Zwet et al., 2017). The few and short EU normative articles that describe its application left many degrees of autonomy to Managing and Local Authorities - according to some observers, even too much (Tosics, 2017). A document issued by the European Commission in 2015 (EC, 2015) explained opportunities and conditions for the use of ITI, defining four possible scenarios in respect to different combinations of territorial, economic and administrative conditions: metropolitan areas, urban-rural areas, deprived urban areas, cross-border ITI (twin cities). The focus leaned towards the territorial dimension and highlighted the instrument's openness to "other territories". This flexibility is reflected in the multiple definitions of "priority areas" to invest in Cohesion policy funds. The overall integrated sustainable development approach, in fact¹⁵:

- demonstrates the role of cities, urban and rural areas, fisheries and coastal areas, and areas facing specific geographical or demographic handicaps;
- takes into account the particular challenges of the outermost regions, the northernmost regions with a very low population density and of island, cross border or mountain regions;
- addresses urban-rural linkages in terms of access to affordable, high-quality infrastructure and services and problems in regions with a high concentration of socially marginalised communities.

Böhme and Toptsidou (2019) highlighted that ITIs had particular success in smaller functional areas (see also van der Zwet et al., 2017; van der Zwet, Miller, & Gross, 2014), and they should be implemented and tested also in more significant geographical areas. Macro-regional strategies in functional areas can use ITIs to overcome the hurdles deriving from a lack of own funding and develop a more solid governance structure. These applications, though, require strong cooperation and commitment by the key implementers of the macro-regional strategies. More substantial political commitment is also necessary to convince managing authorities to dedicate part of their resources to a macro-regional-ITI, providing an adequate policy framework in related operational programmes (Böhme and Toptsidou, 2019).

Then, the versatility of ITI is also recognised in terms of policy areas of application (Geppert and Affaticati 2020). ITI was indeed chosen to act in several realms of policymaking. The only constrictions for its use were linked to "thematic concentration" rules. Although the majority of ITI has gathered funds around TO 4 (Low-carbon economy), TO 6 (Environment Protection) and TO 9 (Social Inclusion), its capacity to match funds and OPs (at least two funds in two Ops)¹⁶ attracted administrations' interest.

A result of ITI definition is, according to the observers, its ability to enhance innovation. Ferry et al. (2018) evaluate ITI in this regard, considering two dimensions of innovation, governance and integration, as indicators of success for a set of case studies. The results, based on the perceptions of practitioners directly involved in ITI application, show interesting differences. For what concerns governance, in particular, ITI (as well as other ESIF territorial instruments) could have a relevant role in developing innovative approaches, in terms of capacity building (see also Region Île-de-France, 2020); participation of sub-national authorities in the management and implementation of development initiatives – also denoting an enhanced autonomy,

¹⁵ Section 6.5 of Common Strategic Framework (CPR).

¹⁶ Analysis of STRAT-board data (2021).

according to other studies (Tosics, 2017); in overcoming fragmentation of local authorities and other stakeholders during the design and implementation of strategies and projects – an innovation in cooperation terms (Krukowska and Lackowska, 2016); in building trust and reduce rivalry, competition and duplication in ESIF applications. In specific contexts, the appreciation to ITI led experts to praise its positive effects in accompanying decentralisation mobilising public actors' interests (Kaczmarek and Kociuba, 2017) and political commitment (Région Île-de-France, 2020), and even in reconfiguring local power structures (Lamenie, 2019). In other terms, it was noted, ITI has helped in several situations to overcome mismatches between administrative and functional areas, silos thinking and hierarchical rigidities.

Existing conditions (regulatory contexts, obduracy of traditional methods, experience with EC funding and conditions related to national frameworks¹⁷) have a major role in facilitating or hindering ITI success. They contributed to very different results and produced several challenges for involved administrations. The embeddedness of integrated territorial approaches in local policy making needed new instruments, governance and management systems (EC, 2015). However, like all novelties, ITI brought a high level of complexity: funds management, with the need for multiple MAs to cooperate, and implementation and monitoring in terms of procedures and indicators. Although ITI monitoring was inscribed in ESIF procedures, the need to adjust and overlap indicators was considered an additional burden for administrations (EC, 2015); the result-orientation methodology of ESIFs, together with the need to respect multiple steps of screening (especially for local authorities), is considered among the most challenging sides of ITI application (Tosics, 2017). As Ferry & McMaster (2018) highlighted, managing and local authorities struggle to produce monitoring and evaluation data, which requires incorporating sectoral and territorial dimensions, capturing different geographies, disaggregating the strategy results from other interventions, and including soft values.

While in some situations the ITI helped in bringing new expertise inside administration – a sort of “community” of ITI experts that moves between offices, tiers and territories¹⁸ – in others, the lack of skilled practitioners was critical (Tosics, 2017). Only if well managed, simplifying the process (for instance, using fewer TOs) and providing the necessary training (Région Île-de-France, 2020), the cascade of complementary deadlines and requirements did not affect the strategy-making process. Incidentally, the TO11 for technical assistance was the least used¹⁹ during the last programming period.

Difficulties in administrative capacity involved, especially the lack of experience in cooperation (van der Zwet et al., 2017). In general, the use of ITI for SUD implied a major degree of delegation, incentivising the idea that ITI can shift part of the management and implementation to a more appropriate level of government of urban or territorial strategies. However, the delegation of more than the minimum tasks was rare, and managing authorities tended to keep their power (Tosics, 2017). The aim of an improved collaboration among leaders was restrained in several cases by the competition for funding. Limited allocations (van der Zwet 2015), and even “wrong” allocations (Tosics, 2017), risked granting more money to less experienced authorities or looking at categories that felt abandoned by higher tiers of governance. This is the case of second-tier cities (Krukowska and Lackowska, 2016) and non-metropolitan areas (Kaczmarek and Kociuba, 2017), including rural and inner functional areas struggled to obtain recognition and responsibilities.

Finally, as in many innovative approaches, a major issue with ITI is the measurement of its legacy, meaning the possibility to embed in existing structures the benefits and innovation produced (Ferry et al., 2018). If ITI improvements are not made to last, the approach will not result in a real “game-change”²⁰ and fail strategic expectations. The literature on ITI still lacks consistency due to the ongoing implementation of the majority of ITIs. At the same time, several authorities started publishing reports that will help to go further in this direction. In turn, another gap refers to the instrument operationalisation. It may be ascribed to the scarce autonomy of ITI from the general mechanism of strategy implementation, in which several tools participate. These circumstances probably discouraged identifying indicators for comparative analysis, made more difficult by the diversity of ITI approaches in different countries and even in the same national context.

¹⁷ Although the EC is quite flexible on its regulation on ITI, the so-called phenomena of “gold-plating” can increase the number of conditionalities for its use.

¹⁸ Interview with Anna Geppert, 22-01-2021.

¹⁹ From STRAT-board data (2021).

²⁰ Interview with Anna Geppert, 22-01-2021.

1.3.3 ITI diffusion in EU

Within the time of the last programming period, ITI was used by over 200 urban strategies and over 100 territorial strategies²¹ as a delivery mechanism, mobilising around €15.9 billion of ESI funds, in addition to domestic and private sources (EC, 2019).

| Country | ITI number (total) | Non SUD | SUD |
|----------------|--------------------|---------|-----|
| France | 98 | 20 | 78 |
| Greece | 48 | 13 | 35 |
| Italy | 36 | 21 | 15 |
| Poland | 24 | | 24 |
| Portugal | 22 | 22 | 0 |
| Slovakia | 16 | 8 | 8 |
| Lithuania | 15 | 10 | 5 |
| Slovenia | 11 | 0 | 11 |
| United Kingdom | 11 | 2 | 9 |
| Latvia | 9 | 0 | 9 |
| Germany | 8 | 8 | 0 |
| Croatia | 7 | 0 | 7 |
| Czech Republic | 7 | 0 | 7 |
| Spain | 5 | 5 | 0 |
| Netherlands | 4 | 0 | 4 |
| Belgium | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| Finland | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Italy/Slovenia | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Luxembourg | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Romania | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Sweden | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 329 | 114 | 215 |

Table 1-1 - ITIs in EU countries, 2014-2020 (source: own elaboration on STRAT-board data)

Although ITI is not the most used delivery mechanism (van der Zwet et al., 2017)²², we can consider it a success mainly due to its novelty. A success only partially linked to its financial outreach. In percentage, the “rich” strategies (having more than €25 mln) are 36% of the total ITIs and only 21% of all the PA strategies. This means that, on average, ITIs collected more money than PA. In absolute terms, though, the number of “rich” strategies using ITI is lower than those using the Priority axis (120 rich strategies with ITI, versus 160 rich strategies using PA). Looking at the complementary figures of programmed funds, in the relative majority of cases (38%), ITIs collected less than €25 mln of ESIF for each strategy. 24% were able to gather between

²¹ Analysis of STRAT-board data (May 2021).

²² Also: STRAT-board data (2021).

€25 and €100 mln, while only in 39 cases (11%) the ITI earmarked the use of more than €100 mln; these cases are concentrated in Poland, Czech Republic, and Slovakia; with few cases in Croatia, Portugal, Lithuania and Romania. In less developed regions, where the ITI was most adopted as a delivery mechanism, the amount of funding is higher on average because of regional conditionalities²³ and crucial for the realisation of the strategy. However, “in transition” and more developed regions in France and Italy and the UK, Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Finland and Sweden used the ITI for implementing their territorial strategies. This suggests a diffuse attempt to enhance the integration of programmed funding.

A clearer tendency is visible when considering the territorial focus of the ITI. The relative majority of ITIs is used for functional areas (87, or 26%), followed by the use in areas within a city, town or district/neighbourhood (58, or 17%). Around 22% of ITIs is then equally divided in cities and “other specific territory”²⁴. Fewer are used for regions²⁵ (24, or 7%) and city networks²⁶ (21, or 6%)²⁷. The ITI is mostly utilised in functional areas in Poland (where it was chosen at the national level as a unique delivery mechanism), France, Croatia and Portugal²⁸, but there are examples also in other regions. The main experiences linked to city-networks are in Lithuania, UK and few cases in Italy, while Belgium, Spain and, extensively, Slovakia, experimented with regional or sub-regional applications of ITI. Though, a broader territorial focus does not necessarily match with high numbers in terms of the population interested in the ITI strategy. The ITI was also used in wide, non-administrative territories²⁹, scarcely populated. Only five ITIs cover areas with more than 2.5 mln of people. Those are in Spain (the Azul multi-regional ITI), in Poland (Central Subregion of the Silesian Voivodeship), in Portugal (Lisbon metropolitan area) and the UK (Greater Manchester and London). Except for the Azul Strategy (an out-of-range national strategy applied to all coastal regions of Spain), the rest of these cases regard established metropolitan areas around one core city. Instead, a high percentage of ITIs cover areas with a population between 50.000 and 250.000 people (102, or 30%), while 16% of ITIs (53) cover areas with a population below 50.000 inhabitants³⁰.

With few exceptions, these figures point to a tendency to use ITI in urban/metropolitan contexts, partly confirmed by the literature (Nosek, 2017; Kaczmarek and Kociuba, 2017). This is due to the possibility of applying ITI to Article 7 urban integrated strategies funds and the existence, within more established and limited administrative tiers, of enabling or favourable conditions, often crucial both in knowing the tools opportunity in managing the strategic process. Matching these streams of analysis, it emerges that functional areas ITI are those collecting more funds – meaning that the majority of functional areas ITI received more than €25 mln (and, of these, around the 25% more than 100 mil euro) –, confirming this administrative advantage.

Some exceptions, though, show how the ITI was also used in a metropolis *in fieri* (for what concerns Eastern EU countries), newly formed, experimental and non-institutionalised territories, with a mix of medium-sized cities and rural areas, often within regionalisation attempts aimed at fostering cultural, environmental and

²³ Less developed and in transition regions can access a higher share of ERDF and ESF resources, adding also CF funding.

²⁴ Indicating that the strategy focuses on a portion of territory identified on the basis of its specific features (e.g. coastal area, natural park, economic development zone, etc.).

²⁵ For Regions, is intended: “regional, multi-regional and sub-regional strategies that cover administrative units corresponding to NUTS2 or NUTS3”

²⁶ Means that the strategy targets multiple cities/towns, not necessarily geographically or functionally connected, on the basis of cooperation purposes.

²⁷ The rest of the ITI is registered in STRAT-board as “no data”, meaning that the information is not available in the database. It accounts for the 21% of the total sample available.

²⁸ Portuguese ITIs are listed in STRAT-board as “regional” ITI, but they actually regard specific Inter-municipal Communities.

²⁹ According to the STRAT-board definition, the indication “other specific territory” as focus of the strategy indicates “that the strategy focuses on a portion of territory identified on the basis of its specific features (e.g. coastal area, natural park, economic development zone, etc.)” (<https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/strat-board/#/glossary>).

³⁰ Excluding the “no-data” ITI cases registered in STRAT-board, the 62,5% of ITIs cover a population below 250.000 inhabitants.

social development. Some examples are the Danube Delta in Romania, the Mar Menor in Spain (Murcia-Cartagena rural and coastal area), the Wadden Sea world natural heritage in Germany, the Egnatia Odos Cultural Route in Greece, several “Partnership Programs” in France (pacts among neighbouring cities, often linked to renovation and socio-spatial projects), some Inner Areas in Italy.

With the data at our disposal, it is difficult to link these more experimental cases to specific thematic objectives in terms of territory and governance. STRAT-board data on the use of Thematic Objective confirms how the predominance of ERDF and ESF contributions, together with the intense focus on urban development, steered strategies and projects towards urban-related investment priorities (according to EC conditions): TO4-low carbon (used in 63% of cases), TO6-environmental protection (54%), and TO9-social inclusion (51%). To further support this panorama, only 33 ITIs have included rural EARDF funds (for a total amount of €519 mil). In contrast, CF supported 65 ITIs only in less developed regions, contributing with more than €1400 mil. However, the majority of cases of ITI (66%) used between four and seven different TOs in the same ITI; on average, each ITI used 4,8 other TOs (against the average three different TOs used with priority axes), confirming its role in integration.

Using the Strat-board “keywords” proxy, it is also possible to highlight the main policy issues included in ITI strategies³¹; the main topics selected are: *jobs and skills*, *entrepreneurship and SMEs*, *social inclusion*, *mobility and cultural heritage*, which have been the focus of more than 100 cases. Besides the attention on ERDF directly related issues, it is interesting to notice that only in 21 instances authorities have highlighted the focus on *spatial planning* and only in 20 the focus on *housing* – while many strategies included *public spaces* (100), *abandoned spaces* (65) and *disadvantaged neighbourhoods* (49); as well, considering governance-related issues, the focus is relatively weak: only 19 cases cited *city management*, only 24 *governance* (8 of which located in Italy), only 16 *participation*. Also, urban-rural linkages are quite disregarded, with only 26 cases – all located in Eastern countries.

The attention on certain areas and topics is linked to EC priorities. Still, the variety of keywords and their territorial distribution suggest the emergency of “bottom-up” clusters of “problems” in need of integrated intervention, as well as, even in the case of heterogeneous applications in the same country, patterns of local use. In Italy, for instance, ITI was not regulated at the national level, and its applications (36 cases in total) fall into four main categories:

- I. ITIs in low-density rural areas: within the National Programme “inner areas” mentioned above, ITI was used at sub-regional level, in remote areas of the Italian territory; those cases represent 50% of the total ITIs (18 cases) – however, not all inner areas have used ITI to design and implement their strategies.
- II. ITIs in urban areas of medium-sized cities: in particular, two regions encouraged twin cities strategies (Marche Region and Sicily Region). The rest of the ITIs regard core towns with their surrounding hinterland.
- III. only two ITIs regard sub-regional areas related to specific natural environments: Lake Trasimeno in Umbria and Madonie Regional Park in Sicily.
- IV. a cross-border ITI between Gorizia (IT) and Nova Gorica (SI): unique not only in Italy but within all EU member states.

This digression on the use of ITI in Italy shows how the general diffusion trends of this tool (functional areas, urban contexts, existing governance structures) can be upset when observed to national and regional priorities. Its features must be further explored.

1.4 ITI and regionalisation: cases and criteria to build the rationale of ITI use in the Milan-Bologna corridor

From the analysis of the ITI cases, it is possible to draw some considerations. Milan-Bologna corridor does not easily fit in case records characterisation. There are no similar cases in Italy, but also at EU scale, there

³¹ The “keywords” information is based on the voluntary statements of managing and local authorities and therefore reflects only partially the variety of applications.

is no comparable case in terms of territorial asset, governance and strategic aim. Milan-Bologna corridor territory presents several specificities: from the administrative point of view, it includes two metropolitan cities, several different urban poles and related functional areas, a multitude of small and medium-sized towns, a fragmented distribution of the population (dense urban areas, and low-populated inner areas), and a polarisation of wealth and services in few cities.

From the point of view of governance, the complex structure (an inter-regional area, with no recognized administrative tier) is governed by a high number of public authorities (regions, metropolitan cities, municipalities and other intermediate aggregations like “zone omogenee” and “unioni di comuni”) or semi-public and private actors, moving between multiple decision-making levels, and in competition for financial resources. In this context, there are several possibilities of governance and funds integration and several conditionalities, not only coming from structural funds regulations (both regions are considered “more developed”), but also from diverse localised interests. It is not surprising that, in the last programming period, wealthier regions have been more reluctant to suggest ITIs; in particular, neither Lombardia nor Emilia Romagna has introduced ITIs in their operational programmes.

The infrastructural nature of Milan-Bologna regionalisation brings forward the high-speed railway as a unifying territorial element and a central issue in strategy design. Mobility infrastructures have traditionally linked independent urban systems along Via Emilia. However, as IMAGINE research underlines, high-speed railway network has spoiled the existing balance between nodal cities and periurban areas (rural, mountainous, flatlands), exacerbating the difference in the region between two distinct systems: a line of hyper-connected urban nodes, and the rest of the area, still bound to second-tier transport infrastructure, insufficient when confronting the overall development expectations. The centrality of the infrastructure brings forward several topics thus related. The presence of multiple interdependent natural ecosystems (fluvial and mountainous), historical assets and rural areas which overcome administrative borders, especially in light of the climate change challenge, claims for shared policies and for the reinvestment of urbanisation gains to face its negative externalities (pollution, erosion of natural areas, etc.). The existence of logistics, R&I, knowledge and industrial clusters, working at the interregional level and partly rooted to the existence of the HSR, raises the issue of how to integrate interventions spatially (defining strategic areas of intervention) and thematically (selecting common priorities) to foster the development of the area towards a shared trajectory.

Despite this uniqueness, Milan-Bologna regionalisation objectives are fully compatible with ITI main functions and the elements of success highlighted by the literature. The same identity compares the Milan-Bologna corridor with existent cases less straightforward and pushes us to consider more experimental approaches.

1.4.1 Presentation of the case studies

To define the challenges and the opportunities for ITI in the MILANO-BOLOGNA urban region, the research looks for crucial success factors for implementing such a tool. The knowledge gathered here is at the base of case studies selection.

First, we transformed the characteristics of the Milan-Bologna corridor into criteria for comparison with other cases in the EU. We used the STRAT-board database to single out possible terms of reference. As mentioned in the analysis of STRAT-board data, in terms of basic demographic features, the five ITIs that cover areas with more than 2.5 mln of people can be exceedingly broad, like the Spanish case, or narrowly focused on established metropolitan regions. Moreover, no ITI explicitly devoted to corridors or emergent regional infrastructures in terms of strategic background.

To select pertinent cases, we individuated the following criteria:

- ITIs in areas characterised by urban-metropolitan patterns, with a population above 100.000 inhabitants³²;
- ITIs with a focus on a higher than urban scale - either metropolitan, sub-regional and inter-regional contexts (including the cross-border case);

³² We considered the exception of the Gorizia-Nova Gorica case, which has 69.000 inhabitants, because of its uniqueness.

- ITIs involving either innovative forms of cooperation focus on “infrastructures”, intended as a natural, cultural or socio-economic pillar for the strategy.

Out of these criteria, we selected a group of possible cases. We then proceeded with an in-depth screening realised at the level of regions. Using existing literature, we identified patterns in the use of the ITI and selected cases with overall representativeness even beyond our target area. As we have seen in the previous paragraphs, several regions, and even countries, introduced ITI limiting its use within certain conditions - for instance in Poland, where the scale of ITI application (metropolitan areas) was decided at national level; or in Île-de-France, where the MA selected the *agglomération urbaine* as a unique scale for the realisation of ITIs. This is not the case in other countries, like Italy, France, Spain or Greece, where the variability can be controlled according to our indicators.

Considering this “controlled” variability, we proceeded to the final selection. It considered not only the initial condition of ITI use but also the availability of data on results. Led by experts’ knowledge, collected with several interviews with academic and EC practitioners, we singled out seven cases showing distinct approaches and results regarding territorial focus, governance structure, design and implementation of strategy and projects. Those are:

- Danube Delta strategy (RO)
- Egnatia Odos Cultural Route strategy (GR)
- EGTC Gorizia-Nova Gorica strategy (IT-SI)
- Limburg Salk strategy (BE)
- Melun Val de Seine Agglomeration strategy (FR)
- Six Cities strategy (FI)
- Warsaw functional area strategy (PL)

Based on the challenges highlighted in the analysis of the Milan-Bologna corridor in respect of ITI application, the cases have been interrogated as follows:

- how did the ITI help in overcoming territorial differences and enhanced complementarity in the distribution of funds?
- how did the ITI help integrate multiple stakeholders and foster collaboration at different governance levels?
- how did the ITI help connect local issues and tools to EU expectations within a shared long-term trajectory?

2 ITI at work

2.1 Case studies overview

| Case study | MS | SUD/non-SUD | Territorial focus | Pop | Type of region (before) ³³ | Multi-fund | CLLD |
|--------------------------|-------|-------------|----------------------|-----------|---------------------------------------|------------|------|
| Danube Delta | RO | Non-SUD | Other | 184.000 | LD | yes | yes |
| Egnatia Odos | GR | Non-SUD | Other | 400.000 | LD | yes | no |
| EGTC Gorizia-Nova Gorica | IT-SI | Non-SUD | Urban (Cross-border) | 68.845 | MD | yes | no |
| Limburg Salk | BE. | Non SUD | Region | 850.000 | MD (T) | yes | no |
| Melun-Val de Seine | FR | SUD | Urban | 130.000 | MD | Yes | no |
| Six cities | FI | SUD | Region - Urban | 1.600.000 | MD (T) | yes | no |
| Warsaw FUA | PL | SUD | Functional Area | 2.700.000 | MD | yes | no |

Table 2-1 - Overview of cases

Danube Delta (RO)

Danube Delta is the only ITI strategy in Romania. It covers one of the economically poorest geographical regions of the country, the Danube river rural area in Tulcea county, in the Northern Dobruja region. The area includes several small/medium-sized municipalities and rural centres, although it is scarcely populated and natural. The strategy is focused on economic development and public services improvement, envisioning environmental protection actions and infrastructural interventions. The ITI was considered the occasion to set the Danube Delta region's borders and affect its development.

The budget dedicated to the ITI amounts to €1.3 billion from structural (all the structural funds are involved, it is the only case in the 2014-2020 programming period) and government funds, making ITI Danube Delta Romania's most prominent investment project. However, the majority of these resources (around one third) was invested in the realisation of infrastructure, a bridge over the Danube river connecting the Danube Delta area, in Tulcea county, with Brăila, a major city in the east of Romania, situated in Muntenia Region and part of the emerging Galați-Brăila metropolitan area. In practice, the Danube Delta area is only marginally benefiting from the bridge construction. The environmental and economic objectives addressed in the strategy are not entirely fitting the local needs, ending up in minor interventions.

The national and international relevance of the infrastructure justified a top-down approach: the strategy was prepared by the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration with the help of the World Bank, without the participation of local authorities. An Intercommunity development association, including representatives of all the administrative units of the region, was set up to implement the Danube Delta ITI strategy. The Intercommunity is in charge of project prioritisation (projects had been already selected in the strategy) and providing support to the beneficiaries. At the same time, the monitoring and evaluation of the ITI are split between the Intercommunity development association and the Ministry of Regional Development and

³³ LD: less developed; MD: more developed; T: in transition.

Public Administration. All the procedures related to projects selection, funding and implementation were defined autonomously by each MA – different according to the Fund involved. This meant that each project included in the strategy needed to apply to specific ITI calls of the related MA. The difficulties in dealing with separate calls and procedures have challenged the capacity of local administrations, limiting on one side the integration, producing monothematic projects, and, on the other side, delivering previously nonexistent expertise. Multi-institutional cooperation in Danube Delta ITI was also limited due to difficulties in interacting with the local authorities. The top-down strategic approach meant a scarce affection of the local authorities on the overall strategy and problem to accept the general interest despite single places' expectations. Significantly, the perspective of the high amount of funding at disposal produced many project proposals, which were not entirely coherent with the strategy. A slow planning phase resulted in several adjustments to the strategy's priorities and the project portfolio and had as an outcome a low absorption of the financial means (only 23% at 2020, less than 10% of ERDF earmarked resources).

Egnatia Odos Cultural Route (GR)

ITI Egnatia Odos covers an urban-rural area in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace. The area of the ITI retraces a part of the old Roman Via Egnatia (the ancient road also crosses other regions in Greece, North Macedonia and Albania). It includes interventions in all five regional units of the Region. The tourism sector struggles due to a lack of a regional brand identity, unequal distribution of equipment, inadequate vocational training in tourism professions and the absence of a dedicated management body. Furthermore, institutional capacities in the region are limited, and the recovery from the aftermath of the economic crisis is still ongoing. The development strategy of the Region, into which the ITI is embedded, sets as the primary objective to create a spatially defined identity while protecting the region's cultural and natural heritage. The region's recognition as a tourist destination is considered crucial, and its qualitative evaluation is included in the ITI monitoring system. Spatially, the ITI finances interventions on the main related poles (i.e. monuments and cultural or tourist infrastructures), hubs and axes.

The ITI integrates multiple funds, mostly coming from the regional operational programme (€54 million from ERDF and €1.2 million from ESF). The regional managing authority is responsible for managing, monitoring, implementing, and controlling the ITI. At the beginning of the process, it organised exploratory meetings. It contacted the local actors and possible beneficiaries, including sub-regional authorities, municipalities and public agencies involved in managing cultural and natural resources. The engagement of other actors, though, was not very successful (e.g. universities and the Egnatia Odos SA, the public-private company managing the motorway, did not participate in the process) as well as the effort to set up a cooperation between the three regions through which the Via Egnatia passes, which stayed merely on paper.

The prioritisation of actions was discussed in terms of project maturity, eligibility and capacity of LAs, the relative weight of funding, and relation with, and capitalisation on, past interventions on which the strategy was partly based. An essential aspect of the strategy was the integration with other national plans, i.e. the National tourism framework, with the region's Smart Specialisation Strategy and the strategic Operational Plan for Touristic Development for the whole region. Through the regional tourism strategy, a Destination Management Body was established as a new regional governance instrument. The MA is assisted by a unique support structure that provides additional competencies on policy direction and technical capacity, the Special Management Service. The support structure is also responsible for promoting the ITI and communicating the results of its implementation.

By now, only infrastructure projects in the main touristic fields were implemented, facilitated by the fact that beneficiaries were all public entities. In the next programming period, the aim is to continue and upgrade the ITI to fill the gap and implement actions that have not been activated yet, like the entrepreneurship pillar and the digital action pillar.

EGTC Gorizia-Nova Gorica (IT-SI)

The EGTC Gorizia-Nova Gorica ITI acts as a delivery mechanism for the cross-border local development plan - the EGTC GO Area Strategy. The three municipalities of Gorizia (Italy), Nova Gorica (Slovenia), and Šempeter-Vrtojba (Slovenia), with other local agencies, formed in 2011 an EGTC (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation), named EGTC GO, to fund cross-border initiatives and create a "programming laboratory" for jointly work on sustainable development of the area. Thanks to its legal personality, this independent body can directly interact with European institutions and third parties. The strategic plan comprises

three pillars: (i) promotion of the tourism heritage and cross-border natural resources, (ii) sharing of health services, (iii) the Gorizia-Nova Gorica-Šempeter Vrtojba railway line. Although the ITI was supposed to be unique, joining multiple OP from the Cross-border programme ended up being split into two separated ITIs (for reasons related to evaluation). The ITIs focus on two distinct policy themes: natural resources valorisation (linked to the Isonzo river) and health services, recognised by all the involved actors as crucial for the development of the territory and in need, for the related interventions to be effective of coordinated management. The integration continues at project level, including, in the first project, initiatives related to accessibility and sustainable mobility connections and infrastructural, spatial and tourist services interventions; in the second project, to health and social assistance, also including administrative simplification projects.

The Project Management Office of the EGTC embeds the Office for Intermediate Body (IB). As a functional unit of the EGTC GO, it was appointed with management functions by the MAs, which is Friuli-Venezia Giulia Region for the Italian side and Slovenia National Government for the Slovenian side, i.e. it is responsible for both ITI projects in the region. It has the authority of acting in both states to be able to implement shared initiatives. The EGTC is moreover the sole beneficiary of the ITIs, being the first case in Europe. The IB and the beneficiary offices are separated, with two command lines, and the IB does not have direct authority on funding but acts on monitoring and other operational duties.

From an implementation and coordination point of view, the EGTC has proved to be an effective agent, demonstrating its structural role in the 2025 European Capital of Culture organisation. At the same time, the ITI was useful to focus on common, selected issues and leverage further investments from private actors, who decided to invest in complementary projects.

Limburg Salk Strategy (BE)

Limburg ITI covers the whole Limburg province, a territory characterised by rural-urban settlements with a majority of medium-sized cities. The Flemish government set the initiative and established a council of experts to draft a strategic action plan for the region, the SALK strategy. Presented in 2013 to the Flemish parliament, the project received a robust political backing at the regional level, followed by using the ITI tool to channel additional EU funding. The ITI was therefore conceived as one tool in the overall, broader SALK implementation plan. The strong identity of the area provided the basis for cross-party cooperation and a unified position towards the Flemish government from the more than 40 municipalities involved.

The triggering event for the strategic process was the closure, in 2012, of the Ford plant in Genk, one of the largest cities of the province. The plant was the region's most significant employer, and its closure caused a considerable impact on Limburg's economic and social fabric. The emergency and strategic importance of the area explain the high amount of funding dedicated to the ITI: ITI Limburg is financed with 71 mil euros coming from ERDF and ESF, itself absorbing more than 25% of ERDF of Flanders OP funding for the entire region (plus other 71 mil euros from domestic funds). The strategy underlying the ITI is more integrated and cross-sectoral, for previous strategies elaborated for the province, and acts on the very economic base of the territory. It focuses on the thematic objectives related to research and innovation, social innovation, and entrepreneurship and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

The strategy and the ITI have two different governance and management structures. However, the Taskforce Limburg, in charge of preparing, implementing and monitoring the strategic projects (in cooperation with the technical committee), has the same members as the ITI Steering Group, which gathers representatives by national, provincial and local authorities. The ITI steering group does not have any direct management responsibility but assesses the projects applications with respect to their coherence with ITI quality and financial plan. The overlapping of these two public bodies consented, on one side, the integration of operations at the strategy level and a constant dialogue between the Regional, Provincial and local level, but made more complex the management of projects funding. ERDF and ESF funds, both included in the ITI, operated at two different levels and complementarity was assured only through annual meetings forum with all partners. Despite some criticisms, the Limburg ITI was considered a best practice in the last programming period (van der Zwet et al. 2017), thanks to the adherence to EU expectations on the instrument

Melun - Val de Seine (FR)

The ITI for Melun-Val de Seine Agglomeration is the response to an ad hoc policy conducted by Ile de France Region. The Region pursued the idea to establish agglomerations (*Intercommunalités*) as a second-tier

administrative reference in respect to Cohesion Policy. To this end, it helped to enhance the funding management in the whole territory, providing support and capacity-building resources. This initiative helped in creating a pool of experts in the region, giving more chances to local authorities in the participation of future calls for EU funds and projects.

The ITI was used in Melun agglomeration (which includes 20 communes) as a delivery mechanism for a SUD strategy focused on restructuring community services. The agglomeration did not have a proper strategy at the beginning of the process but ended up demonstrating a clear identity and political project, which helped the recognition of the territory by the regional authorities and the recognition of the European institutions by the population.

The governance put in place by the ITI is broad, including in the Committee political and administrative members of the Agglomeration and external representatives (of national and local institutions and agencies). The involved institutional actors followed all the projects until their realisation. The policymakers pursued cross-sectoral attuning between the selected projects and a balanced interaction of the policy areas concerned. This transversal synergy also exists (although with more selective coordination) with the other projects set for the areas included in the ITI (specifically the *politique de la ville* priority areas).

Six Cities- 6Aika (FI)

The Six City Strategy is a unique ITI because of its territorial and governance structure. The six participating cities do not form a coherent geographical area, and all their relevant actors cooperate in a formalised way, also at the implementation level. The ITI instrument was decided top-down from the national government through a competitive ministerial tender for ITI strategies, pursuing cooperation through agreements at the level of cities, corridors or thematic city networks. The ITI was the first trial of collaboration among the six cities, although meeting stages and agreements among mayors already existed. It originated in direct relation with the idea to join forces and renovate the administrative and economic model of development of the cities, characterised by a similar economic base and facing similar challenges.

Thus, the idea aims to test innovative ideas related to administrative and economic innovation and spread the results to the rest of the country. Collaboration was crucial at all levels of the strategy process. All the selected projects are carried out in partnership (at least two cities must be involved in a project), involving city organisations and other public or third sector actors (universities, hospitals, research institutes, public utilities, etc.). The focus on smart city, open data and open participation was coupled with the idea of fostering and financing research on issues common to the six cities, having as beneficiaries only public institutions. Each municipality was then free to develop its own implementation process and partner with private companies in the following step. THUS, the ITI strategy works as a testbed for future cooperation, highlighting possibilities for sharing management of public services.

The governance of the ITI is organised on a three levels structure, which establishes a cross-sectoral and cross-administrative collaboration transversal to the territorial tiers and involving more than one thousand actors in the process. At the city level, the local representatives (of the management group, the steering group, and the Six City office) coordinate the activities related to each project. Regarding the traditional governance arrangements in Finland, the six involved cities have been thus empowered with more responsibilities at the level of economic development (normally resting at the regional level). Moreover, the six cities were all at the same level and had the same decisional weight, especially in terms of resources distribution. This condition proved to leverage smaller cities, especially for the two cities orbiting in the Helsinki metropolitan area. Then, at the project level, business actors can cooperate in the so-called 'business forums' organised for the key projects. A distinction of projects between key projects and further supporting pilot and testing projects is crucial to define different implementation steps and funding distribution.

Warsaw functional urban area (PL)

The national, top-down choice to use the ITI in Warsaw has the objective, as in the rest of Poland, to enhance the decentralisation of funds management and to foster territorial cooperation at the level of functional areas. Functional areas in Poland are a relatively new administrative tier. Cooperation between municipalities in the same area is still very weak, as well as funds management coordination. For this reason, EU funds often ended up in the hands of larger administrations, better organised in terms of human resources, with skills in reporting and monitoring activities. In this context, the ITI aimed at building trust between the Greater

Warsaw core city and the other communes (40 municipalities in total) through an agreement between local actors. The City of Warsaw was appointed IB by the regional MA and, at the same time, was entrusted by the communes of the area to manage the distribution of funds to the beneficiary administrations. The selection of projects, in particular, felt voluntarily on the poorest, but also more dynamic, local bodies.

This agreement helped building connections that are also used in parallel projects while showing the will of the core city to coordinate a territorial development based on complementarity, cohesion, and dialogue. Warsaw's growth depends mainly on the city sprawling process into the surrounding municipalities, following the increasing population commuting to the core from the hinterland. This situation challenges the development and maintenance of infrastructure, which concerns both the city and the surrounding municipalities and demands for interventions on mobility and spatial policies, and the complement of policies to reduce wealth polarisation.

The ITI fuelled the elaboration and implementation of strategic solutions to these problems using a triple level of coordination embedded in existing administrative structures. In thematic events and a trimestral forum, frequent meetings of local coordinators, under the framework of political committee agreements, added up to informal dialogues among practitioners, giving shape to a new adequate decision-making level.

| Case | Strategic focus | Territorial focus | Governance structure |
|----------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|---|
| Danube Delta (RO) | Environmental protection | Regional, rural-urban areas | The ADI ITI-DD is an Intercommunity association with legal personality under private law and with public utility status; the ADI-ITI DD is tasked to organise, finance and monitor interventions, jointly with the ATU Working Group, whose secretariat is the Ministry of European Funds (MFE), acting as the coordinator of participating ministries. |
| Egnatia Odos Cultural Route (GR) | Cultural heritage | Regional, infrastructure-related | The regional Managing Authority is the one in charge of the lead OP; the Special Management Service is the office in charge of the management and implementation. The support structure is also responsible for ITI promotion and communication. |
| EGTC Gorizia-Nova Gorica (IT-SI) | Sustainable mobility infrastructures; health and social services provision | Cross-border, inter-municipal | Interreg framework for cross-border regions; an EGTC (including three municipalities in two countries) is appointed as "intermediate body" and is also in charge of projects implementation (individual beneficiary). |
| Limburg Salk Strategy (BE) | Innovation, spatial development | Sub-regional (province) | ITI steering group has the same members as the framework strategy SALK Taskforce (in charge of strategy design and implementation); it has an advisory role in ITI implementation; it is also responsible for selecting the projects. A technical working group provides support on projects applications. |

| Case | Strategic focus | Territorial focus | Governance structure |
|-----------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|---|
| Melun - Val de Seine (FR) | Socio-spatial policies, labour and education | Urban agglomeration | Strong leadership from the Region; Intercommunalités are the designated local authorities; representatives from the Region and the Intercommunalités participate in the <i>comités régionaux de programmation</i> , in charge of project selection; delegation to IBs (public organisms' experts in specific policy domains). |
| Six Cities strategy – 6AIKA (FI) | Innovation, R&I | Inter-regional, a network of cities | On purpose hierarchical structure formed of interinstitutional members: the Management Group, which processed both ERDF and ESF activities; the Steering Group, responsible for implementing the strategy; the Six City Strategy Office, in charge of coordination among offices. |
| Warsaw functional urban area (PL) | Public services, accessibility, public space | Functional area | The city of Warsaw is IB. Cooperation among municipalities is guaranteed at three levels: steering committee (representatives of 40 municipalities); coordination forum; ITI coordinator for each municipality. |

Table 2-2 - Case analyses according to main ITI characteristics

2.2 Elements of success

The selected case studies allow to broaden the usability of ITI beyond its basic function, thus linking its success to some more detailed characteristics:

Collaboration potential: funds integration is the starting point for a more disrupting appeal of ITI, able to break experienced schemes of policymaking and the inertia of administrative structures. In particular, the most promising integration comes from territorial collaboration. ITI could work on the complementarity between central and peripheral areas, between more and less developed zones, between urban and rural territories. As well, ITI has the potential to act on existing administrative structures, building (and re-building) trust among governments and administrators and giving a “reliable” framework (European funds regulations) for a target-oriented and open collaboration.

Experimental attitude: ITI novelty pushed many local actors to put into play new expectations, try new approaches to funds management, and use it as a complement (and support) to more structural policies. Even in the case of limited funding and pre-existing projects, the use of ITI added new actors' interactions, new instruments (either for decision-making, management and implementation of actions), and additional know-how (personnel training on funds and global objectives, new expert figures, new stages for mutual learning). In this sense, the challenge for local actors was to anchor ITI improvements in governance and management methods in existing procedures. Although the evaluation of the instrument is at an initial step, we can already presume, based on our findings, that the potential for a gradual institutionalisation of ITI innovations is high.

Local capacity-building: the occasion of ITI implementation highlighted diffused shortcomings in territorial development approaches and put the accent on essential issues, like an endemic mismatch between local needs and top-down decisions“ ITI helped to shift “cognitive” barriers of stakeholders involved in the construction of new imaginaries, both broadening, as said before, the knowledge (and resources) at their disposal; both opening windows of opportunity to steer public action towards complex problems, in need of

integrated solutions. ITI has worked “silently” (in its delivery mechanism form) to stimulate existent local capabilities beyond their outreach, enlarging the territorial actors’ toolbox in sight of the next programming period funds.

| Case | Collaboration potential | Experimental attitude | Local capacity-building |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Danube Delta (RO.) | * | ** | * |
| Egnatia Odos Cultural Route (GR) | ** | * | ** |
| EGTC Gorizia - Nova Gorica (IT-SI) | *** | *** | *** |
| Limburg Salk Strategy (BE.) | ** | * | *** |
| Melun - Île de France (FR) | ** | * | *** |
| Six Cities strategy – 6AIKA (FI.) | *** | *** | ** |
| Warsaw functional urban area (PL.) | *** | ** | ** |

Table 2-3 - Cases discussion table

2.3 ITI at work in Milan-Bologna region: tools, recommendations, and possible scenarios

2.3.1 ITI potential and recommendations

Discussion on a possible ITI in the Milan-Bologna corridor can make use of some considerations. As seen, a first concern in using ITI in the Milan-Bologna region regards the capacity to put together a shared territorial project. The capacity to identify strategic issues in a participative way is a determinant factor, including all actors upstream. ITI mechanism, although explicitly dedicated to inter-administrative cooperation, has not been used in the context of multi-regional strategies often. The EU has proposed ITI as a crucial tool in case of cross-border collaboration, an even more complicated situation; but, even in theory (in practice it was used only in Gorizia-Nova Gorica ITI), the scenario of application was that of twinning cities. Administrative complexity, competing interests and scarce proactivity are issues both in twinning cities and in twinning regions, but the difference lies in the number of actors involved, in the scale and in the character of the area. Gorizia-Nova Gorica example shows how their ITI process was rooted in collaborations already in place and benefitted from specific complementary projects. The complementarity of ITI and non-ITI initiatives is crucial for the overall strategic project, for instance, embedding projects in existing plans and overall frameworks, like in the case of Limburg, and using local funds to complement ITI-funded activities: in Gorizia-Nova Gorica case, the ITI leveraged complementary private investment, while in the case of Egnatia Odos ITI, the ITI itself was co-financed by the private sector by 60%; in Finland, the ITI resources were just the starting point for a campaign of research projects financing involving public and private actors.

ITI structure, rooted in EU funding rules, helped in overcoming problems of trust between managing and local authorities. Once complemented with capacity-building activities and Technical Assistance, coming from the dedicated TO11 or involving external partners, like the EIB³⁴, LAs can acquire autonomy and motivation to pursue parallel initiatives. Though, this kind of effort is usually subordinated to clear aims, usually a substantial economic reward. Milan-Bologna area is entitled to a lower percentage of EU funds in respect to less developed regions. Indeed, the opportunity of further funds and responsibilities in this context may be not enough appealing to big cities like Milano and Bologna; on the opposite, it can attract medium-sized and small municipalities, seeking additional economic resources and for a seat at a bigger decision table.

³⁴ EIB developed a supporting programme for local authorities, aimed at enhancing the use of financial instruments to mobilise multiple economic resources. See the EIB website: <https://www.eib.org/en/products/mandates-partnerships/esif/index.htm>

The necessary enhancement of the economic resources with regional domestic funds should be subordinated to a defined territorial project of regional cohesion.

Moreover, the possibility to include smaller cities and rural areas in the ITI project, and even enhance their responsibility in the process, coupled with the opportunity to have funds also coming from the EAFRD fund and apply second-tier, collaborative instruments dedicated to improving bottom-up participation at micro-scale (CLLD), capitalising the experiences with LAG (Local Action Groups). Warsaw ITI is interesting in this sense, with the Polish capital city as a core management actor but having worked in second-tier cities and fostering the development capacity of lacking behind municipalities in the area. On the other hand, a straight-forward territorial project is at the base of Île de France and Finland ITI applications: Melun-Val de Seine ITI was instrumental in defining further the intermediate role of the inter-municipal agglomeration, while in Finland, the central government proposed ITI to explore the potential of urban networks.

Moreover, the methodology of projects and beneficiaries' selection can help to steer the strategy outcomes, valuing positive spillover effects outside the project areas. For instance, in Melun-Val de Seine, the selection of projects with a spillover effect on neighbouring areas was one of the winning points. In Warsaw, the distinction of different sub-areas designing different ITI was crucial for the next programming period to overcome problems of funds distribution.

The variable geometry of the network at the base of the process will present further challenges. Not entirely successful cases of ITI, like the Danube Delta, suggest that local authorities should always be included since the design of the strategy, in different ways according to the structure chosen for the process: the MA can decide to have upstream the LAs, beneficiaries of the funds, or conduct step-by-step selections, but OP and ITI objectives should always be attuned to the local problems and needs. This is crucial, especially when the ITI initiative starts at the national level, like Romania, where the Ministry itself designed the ITI strategy. The national importance of the infrastructural project overshadowed the territorial needs and the difficulties in local management. In the case of the Milan-Bologna corridor, the possibility of a national/inter-regional project for the region is thus subordinated to the bottom-up and shared identification of priorities, as it happened in Limburg for the Salk Strategy. Flexibility in decision-making procedures (allowing to easily enlarge the group of stakeholders) and creating consultation moments with all stakeholders will also help foster the affinity with the regional project, taking the Six Cities and Egnatia Odos ITIs as examples.

Similar processes of macro-regionalisation in the context of EU will be further funded through the Interreg programme in the next programming period, and several examples of past experiences can become the framework where to establish a possible reference in terms of organisation: as well as existing interregional cooperation initiatives between Italian regions (like Agenzia Po).

ITI effectiveness cannot leave a clear strategic focus out of consideration. Implementing an integrated strategy for a multi-actor and interregional area must combine long term visions (at least the six years of programming period) and medium/short-time policies, action plans and projects, to be realised at different scales. This claims for the existence of a "boundary object", raising general attention and overcoming political alternation at three different levels (region, metropolitan areas, city). The IMAGINE research process has already stimulated the discussion on the possible challenges and objectives that will benefit or overlook the collaboration between the actors of the area.

ITI has the potential to stimulate a discussion that links Cohesion policy objectives, UN Agenda, Next Generation EU, to local resources and possibilities, without the claim to be the only implementing instrument. In many cases, administrations have successfully used ITI to carry on specific and more complex sides of the broader strategy. This is the case of Limburg ITI, embedded within the broader Salk strategy and EGTC Gorizia-Nova Gorica, where the ITI was used in the specific realms of mobility infrastructures and health services. In the context of Egnatia Odos Cultural Route and Six Cities ITIs, a more focused strategy, in the first case dedicated to tourism and infrastructural development, in the second case to smart innovation and business improvement, was conceived in the context of a broader rethinking of the economic base of the territory involved.

Moreover, ITI can constitute a platform to identify and gather a portfolio of projects. In the Danube Delta ITI, projects were chosen to accompany the strategy objectives, leaving significant autonomy at the level of implementation. In Finland, the ITI served itself as an incubator for administrative and business models of innovations. In the EGTC Gorizia-Nova Gorica, the projects' definition was crucial in determining domains where to implement coordination among the area's institutions. Due to its nature of the delivery mechanism, the ITI leaves many degrees of freedom to decision-makers, which can decide which complementary

implementation instruments to use. The participative experiments (in Egnatia Odos and Limburg ITIs), or the partnerships with city organisations, public service and third sector actors, like in the Six Cities ITI, raised interest in the strategy and political commitment. A dedicated selection of the criteria for project selection helped in assuring smooth implementation, like in Melun-Val de Seine with the “dynamism” indicator for beneficiaries’ eligibility, or in Egnatia Odos, where the selection of projects was based on: project maturity, eligibility and capacity of LAs, the relative weight of funding, and relation with, and capitalisation on, past interventions.

The strategic effort is not always sufficient and effective, and we have analysed some of the circumstances that interfere with its success - for instance, the balance between national/regional and local perspective, like in the Danube case, where the emphasis was put on national aspirations and on infrastructural interventions, against a background of critical shortages in local resources; or the risk to emphasise collaboration over contents, like in Finland, where the strong political effort will not be renovated in the next programming period, and the collaborative innovations, at the end of projects implementation, will be probably steered again towards “business as usual” piecemeal agreements.

However, the improvements on the three components of collaboration, experimentation, and local capacity are fruits of an effective ITI and the three directions towards which regional governance should steer its efforts in building a scale economy, pushing on the synergies and opportunities offered by EU cohesion funds.

2.4 Three scenarios for Milan-Bologna urban region ITI

The ITI could be an effective instrument in more than a phase of the strategic process and multiple ways.

On the base of the analysis realised by the ESPON IMAGINE working group, we propose a non-univocal approach based on three scenarios of ITI use:

- 1) **A unique interregional ITI:** the realisation of a unique ITI can be facilitated by the delegation of operative functions to a single ad hoc agency/structure with legal personality, relieving the pressure on involved administrations and enhancing the efficiency of the process. The existence of a super-partes body will help obtain the trust of all stakeholders and concentrate the efforts on common interests. The compresence of such an intermediary actor, of a common imaginary and a strategy focused on few central issues, could be the cornerstone of this ITI. In an initial phase of the regionalisation process, the interregional ITI could have an explicit experimental attitude. The scope could enhance the relationship between public bodies and generate a collaborative strategy on selected relevant themes, with both a global and local importance. Looking at the UN and EU agendas, issues characterise the region that need collaborative efforts, such as the climate change challenge, the pollution in urban and rural areas, the maintenance and protection of natural resources, or instance in the Po ecosystem. A macro-regional strategy can also work as a framework for different programmes, support the coherence of different funding resources and help to establish synergies between macro-regional actors (Böhme, Toptsidou, 2019).

This approach needs a strong effort at the level of funds coordination but can help to gather a significant amount of resources, drawing funding from multiple OPs in both regions.

- 2) **Two regional ITIs:** the possibility of two separated regional ITIs has an advantage in terms of initial organisation but implies a substantial political and administrative complementarity. Creating an ITI office for inter-regional cooperation inside the current administrations for managing multiple funds could be a strong advantage. At the same time, the creation of forums and appointments for exchanging information appears crucial. The management infrastructure would also benefit from identifying intermediate bodies to have a closer relationship with the local authorities. The office could be located in the two metropolitan cities involved. The central aim of this ITI is the harmonisation and complementarity between the two regions on specific topics and projects. In this case, the strategy should be designed upstream through regional agreement, rooted in the common priorities listed in the related operational programmes. The advantage of two separated ITIs is selecting indicators and organising project competitions more tailored to each local context. A portfolio of joint projects financed in separate tranches by the two ITIs could give continuity to the funding flux to guarantee a seamless project.

Finally, bilateral acts in the framework of the ITI could allow (or even foster, using selection criteria) groups of public and private actors from both regions to apply as beneficiaries and propose joint projects, having a unique representative. This approach will help to reduce the competition among actors and help an equal distribution of funds according to each regional budget allocations. At the same time, it tackles the problem of territorial interdependence (cross-regional issues and territories), whose circumstances are often excluded from programmes (Mehlbye and Böhme, 2018). Further attention should then be given to indicators: each strategy will consider spillovers and complementarity with the policies and plans in areas outside the ITI limits. Even the two operational programmes could recommend a budget for territorial cooperation and ask to specify how each ITI contributes to this aim as a mandatory selection criterion.

- 3) Multiple ITIs at the local scale:** the common element among the ITIs presented in the two regions could not be a specific issue but a scale of planning to entrust ITI design. For instance, the Unions of municipalities, of the Zone Omogenee (Homogenous Zones, as identified by the metropolitan cities reform) or on purpose agglomerations of cities, borrowing the system in place for Internal Areas of Italian SNAI).

In this case, the urban region strategy could give funding and decisional power to the territories that were less advantaged from the presence of the high-speed railway, redistributing the regional resources for development in a similar way. These ITIs would need a strict complementarity between policies in urban and non-urban territories, between more and less accessible areas, enhancing cohesion among any other attributes.

This approach implies an introductory phase of dialogue between management bodies and stronger technical assistance to build the capacity of the involved municipalities. In this way, the ITI would have a collaborative aim, fundamental to stimulate bottom-up proposals, and an operative dimension, fostering the autonomy of second-tier administrations to realise their projects. In this sense, the ITI could be linked with the use of the CLLD and the creation of local action plans.

A more fragmented panorama of ITI does not mean a less focused commitment: every ITI application could be subordinated to the conformity with specific indicators, for instance, the existence of more than one beneficiary, or the inclusion of actors from the other region, or the inclusion of particular topics of inter-regional interest. Finally, although more traditional, the design of the governance infrastructure will benefit from the existence of formal agreements between regions and the existence of specially dedicated axes in each ERDF OPs to set clear expectations for each local strategy.

The choice to proceed with one or more of these scenarios simultaneously depends on the actors' will and existing organisational capabilities. Regarding what said, the ITI is a complementary instrument, necessarily rooted in political will, both because embedded in a complex bureaucratic framework both because lacking a thorough definition of its contents and finalities. For these reasons, the ITI appears at the same time as a flexible and destabilising tool. ITI's economic, innovative and strategic potential is thus subordinated to the actors' capacity to enter the discussion on new forms of territorial management and commit considerable resources to the effort.

Notwithstanding these demands, the ITI still results in an appropriate tool among the EU territorial instruments to accompany a regionalisation, able to align needs and expectations from European regions to the global challenges raised by the EU cohesion policies.

3 Conclusions and perspectives in the next programming period

The upcoming framework for Cohesion policy, drafted for the post-2020 period, will change the organisation of thematic objectives, introducing Policy Objective 5, directly related to the formulation of local integrated strategies³⁵. “Policy Objective 5, “a Europe closer to citizens, by supporting locally-led development strategies and sustainable urban development across the EU”, integrates the three dimensions of sustainable development and the different typologies of territories (urban, rural and coastal areas). In the Commission’s CPR proposal for 2021-2027, the territorial focus is more explicitly on available territories to overcome administrative silos, including river basins, coastal areas, mountain ranges (EC, 2019, p.9).

On these premises, the support for inter-regional cooperation should also be confirmed. It will also be expanded by allowing regions to use parts of their allocations for cross-regional collaborative projects anywhere in Europe, consistent with the five Policy Objectives mentioned earlier. This novelty consolidates the transnational, collaborative approach at the basis of the mainstream territorial cooperation programme (Interreg) and the more recent macro-regional strategies confirmed as “platforms” for the convergence of policy tools. The traditional Interreg programmes will not be displaced by this new opportunity and will continue, especially in support of institutional cooperation and the development of joint services of public interest. New to the next programming period is the Interregional Innovation Investments tool, aimed at allowing regions with compatible smart specialisation strategies (S3) and assets to cooperate and build pan-European clusters, to scale up regional renewal possibilities in priority sectors linked to current technological transformations (big data, circular economy, advanced manufacturing or cybersecurity)³⁶. This confirms the investment of the EU in the new geography of actions, able to follow socio-economic spatial trends beyond traditional administrative boundaries.

The European Parliament proposals to strengthen the non-urban dimension goes in this direction, proposing to earmark a minimum amount of ERDF funds (the bid is 5%) for the territorial integrated development of areas characterised by demographic decline, accessibility issues and progressive impoverishment (material and immaterial), those areas already targeted by the Italian Strategy for Inner Areas. Of those funds, 17,5% is proposed for rural areas and smart communities (proposal on ERDF Regulation of European Parliament, 11-14 February 2019) (IFEL, 2019).

However, the new Cohesion Policy will also strengthen the investment in urban interventions by raising to 6% the percentage of ERDF earmarked for sustainable urban development and launching the so-called European Urban Initiative (proposal on ERDF Regulation). The Initiative will gather all instruments dedicated to the urban theme (particularly UIA and URBACT initiatives), fostering networking, capacity building and exchanges of innovative solutions. The decision to extend the ring-fencing of ERDF comes with the idea that a more profound territorial dimension is needed to address specific local needs better. Cities and metropolitan areas are viewed as essential nodes for tackling some big challenges selected for the next programming period, such as fighting exclusion, climate change and migrants’ integration. This is why this leads to the association of this 6% with the demand for local development partnership.

³⁵ The 11 Thematic Objectives are consolidated in five Policy Objectives that will drive EU investments in 2021-2027: 1. Smarter Europe, through innovation, digitisation, economic transformation and support to small and medium-sized businesses; 2. a Greener, carbon free Europe, implementing the Paris Agreement and investing in energy transition, renewables and the fight against climate change; 3. a more Connected Europe, with strategic transport and digital networks; 4. a more Social Europe, delivering on the European Pillar of Social Rights and supporting quality employment, education, skills, social inclusion and equal access to healthcare; 5. a Europe closer to citizens, by supporting locally-led development strategies and sustainable urban development across the EU.

³⁶ Already in 2014-2020 programming period, the existence of a S3 was proposed as an ex-ante conditionality for EU Members States and regions to approve their Operational Programmes supporting research and innovation (https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/smart_specialisation_en.pdf).

Next Cohesion Policy further supports locally-led development strategies and empowers local authorities to manage the funds in multiple ways. SUD strategies can now include a list of operations, decided in collaboration between MAs and LAs, avoiding selecting and guaranteeing more effectiveness of the strategy and major integration in implementation. Not only the inclusion of LAs should happen at the level of Programme preparation, but it should also guarantee a minimum delegation on the selection of operations. This responsibility could also be enlarged, appointing LAs as Implementing Body.

In terms of tools for intervention and methodology for action, the new CPR confirms and reinforces the use of the most important tools introduced in the 2014–2020 period, meaning Integrated Territorial Investments and Community Led Local Development.

Territorial and local development strategies could be implemented under an ITI when financed by one or more Funds, more OP or more Priority Axes, with the integration of rural-related funds (EAFRD) when suitable. CLLD can be used to implement integrated strategies in sub-regional areas. Its capacity is reinforced, introducing a simplified approach (including the possibility of naming a lead fund, reducing the administrative burden for beneficiaries), and harmonised to other territorial tools, including the existing ITIs. CLLD is also suggested to promote the “innovative actions” foreseen by FSE+ Regulation, including bottom-up social initiatives supported by the Member States.

In terms of thematic concentration, regional development investments will intensely focus on objectives 1 and 2, with 65% to 85% of ERDF and Cohesion Fund resources allocated to these priorities (depending on Member States' relative wealth).

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Interviews

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- Charles Affaticati, Referent for Integrated Territorial Investment, ESF and ERDF funds manager, Office for European Affairs, Région Île-de-France (29-01-2021)
- Carlotta Fioretti, Researcher, Territorial Development Unit, European Commission Joint Research Center, Sevilla (22-01-2021)
- Martina Pertoldi, Policy Officer, Territorial Development Unit, European Commission Joint Research Center, Sevilla (22-01-2021)
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- Seppo Haataja, Director, Smart City Development Business Tampere, Six City Strategy Management Board (24-02-2021)
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- Sandra Sodini, Director of International Relations and EU between Programming of Friuli Venezia Giulia Region, EGTC GO, Intermediate Body (23-02-2021)
- Luminita Mihailov, General Director, South-East RDA, Intermediate Body for Regional Operational Program for South-East Development Region, Romania (03-03-2021)
- Panagiotis Koudoumakis, Head of Programme Planning and Evaluation Unit, Managing Authority of Operational Programme Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace (02-03-2021)
- Marco Magrassi, Paola Casavola, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri (06_04_2021)



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