Unpacking the Area-Based Approach for Sustainable Urban Development in Europe: Policies and Challenges for Migrants Inclusion in the Metropolitan Area of Venice

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Abstract

The paper aims at disentangling the area-based approach as promoted by the EU to bring about integrated sustainable development in European urban areas. In particular, the paper looks at how this approach has evolved over time and to what extent it has been used to foster the inclusion of migrants through a territorialised or spatial perspective.

This paper draws on the experience of the metropolitan area of Venice and the two Sustainable Urban Development strategies implemented there within the framework of the EU cohesion policy 2014-2020. It presents general reflections that shed light on the meaning and scope of the area-based approach in contemporary European cities, as well as the challenges that policy-makers encounter when putting it into practice.

In particular, the paper acknowledges the attention to broader scales 'beyond the neighbourhood' that frames current EU policies for urban areas, but considers it insufficient. Instead, attention should also be given to a more granular scale that in certain cases, may involve single streets, part of streets, or even single buildings.

Introduction

Since the late 1960s, area-based approaches in urban policy have been used to target specific urban areas suffering from physical, environmental and socio-economic decay, characterised for example by the presence of rundown housing estates, industrial decline, very high localised rates of unemployment, social deprivation, persistent poverty and growing racial disquiet (Sorensen, 1987; Robson, 1988; Cochrane, 2007; Briata, Raco 2022).

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[1] Neither the European Commission nor any person acting on behalf of the Commission is responsible for the use which might made of the following information. The views expressed in this publication are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission.

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On the one hand, debates on area-based initiatives have given a lot of attention to the criteria to define target areas, namely to the spatial dimension of socio-economic dynamics - e.g. in the French banlieues, in the Anglo-Saxon inner cities, in the 'peripheral areas' of Southern European countries[2] (Briata, Bricocoli, Tedesco, 2009).

On the other hand, although these debates do not focus specifically on the integration of migrants and ethnic minorities, they intersect issues related to race (mainly in the US), ethnicity and migration.

This essay questions the forms and meanings of an area-based approach in contemporary European cities, reflecting on how this approach may be helpful to cope with old and new forms of exclusion of migrants and natives, as well as on the need to review the spatial conceptualisation of urban questions underlying this approach.

These topics are unpacked by referring to a series of transformations that occurred in EU-supported policies for urban areas and through a case study showing how these new EU approaches have been translated into policies and practices in the Metropolitan area of Venice in Italy.

The area-based approach as framed in the first experiences of EU urban initiatives had a series of strengths. The convergence of material and immaterial resources in the target area identified through indicators of multiple deprivation made it very effective for coping with social issues, benefitting groups in disadvantaged conditions, including migrants.

At the same time, also a series of limits have been identified (Tosics, 2015; Colini et al., 2013). First of all, tackling problematic issues only at the neighbourhood level risks isolating them from broader dynamics (problems and opportunities) occurring at the city, or upper scales levels.

The evolution of area-based approaches as promoted by the EU in particular in the last generation of Sustainable Urban Development (SUD) strategies has thus been characterised by an outward-looking perspective opened up through the dialogue with upscaled processes and policies (Fioretti et al, 2020). The paper analyses the uptake of this approach in the case of the SUD strategies for the metropolitan area of, looking in particular if and how it could contribute to the integration of migrants.

Venice was chosen as a case study for several reasons. First because, compared to other Italian cities, has a quite long-term and 'welcoming' tradition in terms of policy-making for migrants integration. This could in fact be dated back to the late 1990s. Second, because in Venice two different SUD strategies have been implemented during the 2014-2020 programming period, one led by the Metropolitan city, the other one by the Regional Authority. Both of them concern the larger metropolitan area but have a specific target on deprived neighbourhoods. In other terms, they seem to have adopted this new outward-

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[2] The paper has been conceived and discussed by the two authors jointly. Anyway, Section 1-2 and conclusions should be attributed to Carlotta Fioretti, Introduction and Section 3-5 to Paola Briata.

looking perspective to the area-based approach that characterises last generation of SUD strategies. The two strategies also show some differences in how the policies and their objectives were framed.

Deriving from the analysis of the Venice case, the paper argues that the attention to broader scales 'beyond the neighbourhood' that frames current EU policies for urban areas is not enough and should be coupled with attention to a more granular scale that in some cases could be related to single streets, part of streets and or even single buildings.

The methodology to develop the case study involved the analysis of the documents related to EU policies carried out at the local level (not necessarily Cohesion Policy); readings of grey literature; literature review on migration and policies to deal with migration in Venice and its metropolitan area, as well as literature on the governance system of this territory; analysis of census data in the different municipalities and at the metropolitan level; press review; analysis of the articulated web ecosystem developed to disseminate the Cohesion Policy 2014-2020 projects' implementation and results; interviews with relevant actors and stakeholders[3].The analysis of SUD strategies in 2014-2020 at the EU level is based on STRAT-Board[4], an online tool and database developed by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) and DG REGIO under the umbrella of the Knowledge Centre for Territorial Policies, which collects data on the EU funding support to integrated urban and territorial development.

The paper is organised as follows: after this introduction, sections 1 and 2 outline the evolution of the area-based approach in EU policies, highlighting its impact on issues related to migrant integration, with a focus on SUD strategies in the 2014-2020 programming period. The third and fourth sections introduce the metropolitan area of Venice, as well as its dynamic and policy style as an arrival city. The fifth section is focused on the implementation of two SUD strategies (2014-2020) in Venice giving particular attention to the ways in which the area-based approach was framed where the migrant presence was significant. Finally, some conclusions are drawn.

1. Area-based – The origin of the approach in EU policies and its use for migrant inclusion

The European Union (EU) does not have a specific mandate for urban policy. At the same time, it is since the early Urban Communications of the '90s that an urban policy discourse permeates EU policies and agendas. Especially during those first years, the discourse focused on reversing the internal decay of cities, and in particular on the issue of deprived

[4] STRAT-Board is available at: https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/strat-board/

neighbourhoods, defined as those neighbourhoods suffering from multidimensional problems, attaining to the social, economic, environmental, spatial and cultural spheres. The concentration of people in disadvantaged conditions in such areas increases as the better off, who have the opportunity to choose, elect to leave and the empty flats are subsequently likely to be occupied by those who have less choice in the housing system, such as migrants. Typically, the multiple factors of deprivation reinforce each other driving to spirals of decline that can be breached through approaches that combine the localisation of the action with strong outside support (Power, A, 1996).

This type of area-based approach characterised by the concentration of cross-sectoral integrated actions and funding in selected target areas has been at the heart of the first EU urban initiatives. In particular, it was promoted by the Urban Pilot Projects (1989-99) and the initiatives URBAN I (1994-1999) and URBAN II (2001-2006) supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), one of the EU structural funds pillars of the EU cohesion policy. This same approach has been defined as a common European 'Aquis Urbain' (European Commission, 2009), it became mainstreamed into the cohesion policy in the 2007-2013 programming period, and lead to the compulsory investment in integrated and sustainable urban development strategies in 2014-2020 and in 2021-2027 periods. According to URBACT (2015) the influential Barca report published in 2009: "paved the way to the return of the EU framework for multi-level governance with the inclusion of area-based interventions as the way to horizontally integrate different sectoral policies".

The area-based approach targeting neighbourhoods has some advantages (Fioretti, C, at al. 2020), as it allows authorities to:

• engage local partners (the local community, and the voluntary and private sectors) and empower them to contribute and bring value to the collective development of programs (bottom-up approach);

• more easily organise integration among projects and sectors ;

• create a critical mass and momentum, to hold stakeholders' attention and ensure a lasting legacy.

Ex-post evaluation of the URBAN II initiative (EC, Ecotec, 2010) found that the focus on neighbourhoods has proven particularly successful when addressing specific local challenges, especially through initiatives with direct impact on local communities, and to address clearly identified priority groups such as migrants and ethnic minorities. According to a report of the European Commission (EC, DG Regio and Ecotec,2010), ethnic minorities accounted for 15% of the population of URBAN II areas – around four times higher than the European average and more than double the figure for cities covered by the Urban Audit (6%). Among the cities interested in the programme, Brussels (BE), for example, had a particularly high migrant

population, comprising 59% of the target area's total population[5], but the presence of high percentages/number of migrants also characterises the neighbourhoods targeted in other programmes, such as the one of Arthus (DK), Dortmund (DE) and Rotterdam (ND).

Typically, the area-based approach of these programmes consisted in integrating actions pertaining to the physical, economic and social dimensions, and it was the latter one that targeted in particular migrants through training, community projects to increase safety, and community capacity building. The projects targeting migrants revealed to have a strong soft impact, for example in the improvements to the social cohesiveness of the neighbourhoods, and the strengthening of local organisations.

At the same time, the area-based approach has also some possible disadvantages (Tosics, 2015; Colini et al., 2013). In particular, it seems to be less effective when the actions promoted are inward-looking, and do not consider the issues but also the opportunities occurring outside the boundaries of the targeted area. There are in particular some themes, which need to be tackled at wider scales, especially in case of problems that although manifest in the targeted area are sourced elsewhere such as accessibility, which is linked to wider transport systems, or unemployment, which is linked to the wider labour market. Moreover, when the action is limited within the neighbourhood's boundaries, there is the risk that problems are not solved but displaced to other areas.

When looking more specifically at the inclusion of migrants, a rigid target on a neighbourhood can have some downsides. Although living in a deprived neighbourhood, migrants´ daily lives transcend neighbourhood boundaries, involving wide, interconnected, multi-scalar, circular territories (Tarrius, 2010).

This is particularly true in the case of Southern European countries where the concentration and segregation of migrants in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are not so strong as compared to Northern and Western Europe (Arbaci and Malheiros, 2010; Arbaci, 2019). In Italy, the low percentage of public housing, the fragmentation of the urban fabric, the systematic regeneration of old towns during the '80s and '90s, and the characteristics themselves of the phenomenon of international migration, led to patterns of suburbanisation and low segregation of migrants. The spatial concentration of migrants is not absent, but it is more relevant at the micro-scale: a street, a school, or a building (Briata, 2014; Boterman, Musterd, Pacchi, Ranci, 2018). Furthermore, centrifugal forces such as gentrification have increasingly pushed migrants into small towns, peri-urban and rural areas (Barberis and Pavolini, 2015; Fioretti, 2016; De Vidovich and Bovo, 2021).

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[5] Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – An Initial Assessment of the URBAN Initiative (2002).

2. Scales – Overcoming the drawbacks of the area-based approach in EU-supported urban strategies

The limitations of the area-based approach especially when dealing with some specific issues have been acknowledged within the framework of the EU urban policy discourse. The evaluation of the URBAN II programme revealed that the target on the neighbourhood was not apt to solve deep-rooted and wider physical, economic and social problems, but that it could contribute to tackling them especially when linked to the wider city and regional strategies and plans (EC, Ecotec, 2010 p. 131)

Similarly, the URBACT NODUS project introduced the principle of 'external integration' meaning that area-based actions must be integral parts of larger-scale, broader territory development strategies (URBACT, 2010).

More recently the New Leipzig Charter (2020) underlines how the neighbourhood level is the apt scale for certain types of policies, especially the ones that encourage local commitment to community building and inclusiveness. At the same time, it also encourages harmonised coordination of measures implemented at the scale of the neighbourhood, the city and the functional area to ensure coherence and avoid inefficiency (pp.2-3).

In line with these considerations, the approach promoted by the EU cohesion policy has broadened its spatial focus, considering besides the neighbourhood level, the city and beyond that, the functional urban area (Fioretti and Pertoldi, 2020). This becomes evident when looking at STRAT-Board data as in the analysis that follows.

During the 2014-2020 programming period, the cohesion policy, in particular through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) supported 1047 strategies of Sustainable Urban Development, implemented with the involvement of the local authorities.

When looking at their territorial focus[6] (figure 1), it is possible to see that a large percentage of them targeted 'areas within city (district/neighbourhood)' (30%), but the majority in fact targeted 'cities' (40%), and a large number 'functional urban areas' –including metropolitan areas - (20%), followed by a 'network of cities' (9%), and 'other functional territories' (1%).

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[6] The territorial focus refers to the specific area targeted by a strategy. Six different types of territorial focus are considered: 1) Area within city/town (district/neighbourhood): the strategy focuses on single or multiple district/neighbourhood of single or multiple cities or towns. 2) City, town or suburb: the strategy addresses the entire administrative unit of a city, town, village, or suburb. 3) Functional urban area: the strategy addresses multiple cities/towns, including Functional Urban Areas and metropolitan areas. 4) City network: the strategy targets multiple cities/towns, not necessarily geographically or functionally connected, on the basis of cooperation purposes. 5) Region: the strategy focuses on regional, multi-regional and sub-regional administrative units, corresponding to NUTS2 or NUTS3. 6) Other functional territory: the strategy targets a portion of territory identified on the basis of its specific features (e.g. aggregation of multiple administrative units in rural areas, coastal area, natural park, economic development zone, etc.).
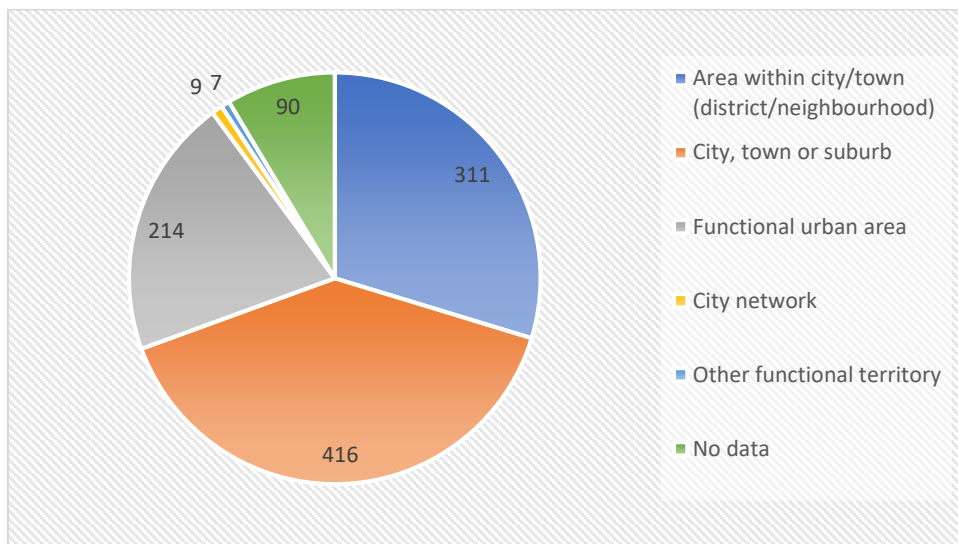
Figure 1. - Number of SUD strategies per territorial focus. Source: STRAT-Board

The choice of the type of territory and scale of intervention for the strategy depends upon multiple factors. First, it should be pertinent to address the development needs, potential and objectives set in the strategy. At the same time, it can be influenced by existing national or regional guidelines and trends. When looking at data, in fact, some trends emerge at the national level. Strategies tackling neighbourhoods (figure 2) prevail in countries such as: Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Luxemburg, the Netherlands and Portugal. It seems that the focus on neighbourhoods is more common in EU-15 Member States, that is to say, countries that have had the experience of the URBAN programme, and probably they mainstreamed the area-based approach for neighbourhoods as a way of working in their national context.

The focus on neighbourhoods is not present exclusively in strategies that targeted areas within city. In fact, there are 583 strategies that have among their investment priorities the '9b - Providing support for physical, economic and social regeneration of deprived communities (…)', which is typically used to finance area-based projects, and the majority of them (44%) targets the 'entire city', while 14% targets a 'functional urban area'. Similarly, when looking at the keywords[7] that define the themes of the strategies, it is possible to see that 394 strategies are characterised by the keyword 'disadvantaged neighbourhood' and 35% of them are in fact targeting 'cities', while 11% 'functional urban areas'.

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[7] STRAT-Board gives the possibility to filter strategies according to their keywords which can be: Social inclusion; Air quality; Housing; Circular economy; Digital transition; Mobility; Jobs and skills; Energy; Climate adaptation; Urban-rural linkages; Nature-based solutions; Governance; Entrepreneurship and SMEs; Health; Ageing; integration of migrants and refugees; Research and innovation; Abandoned spaces; Culture and heritage; Youth; Low carbon; Education; Social innovation; Disadvantaged neighbourhoods; Gender equality; Participation; Public spaces; City management; Spatial planning, Sustainable Tourism; Smart Specialisation; Rural development; Coastal development; Diversity.
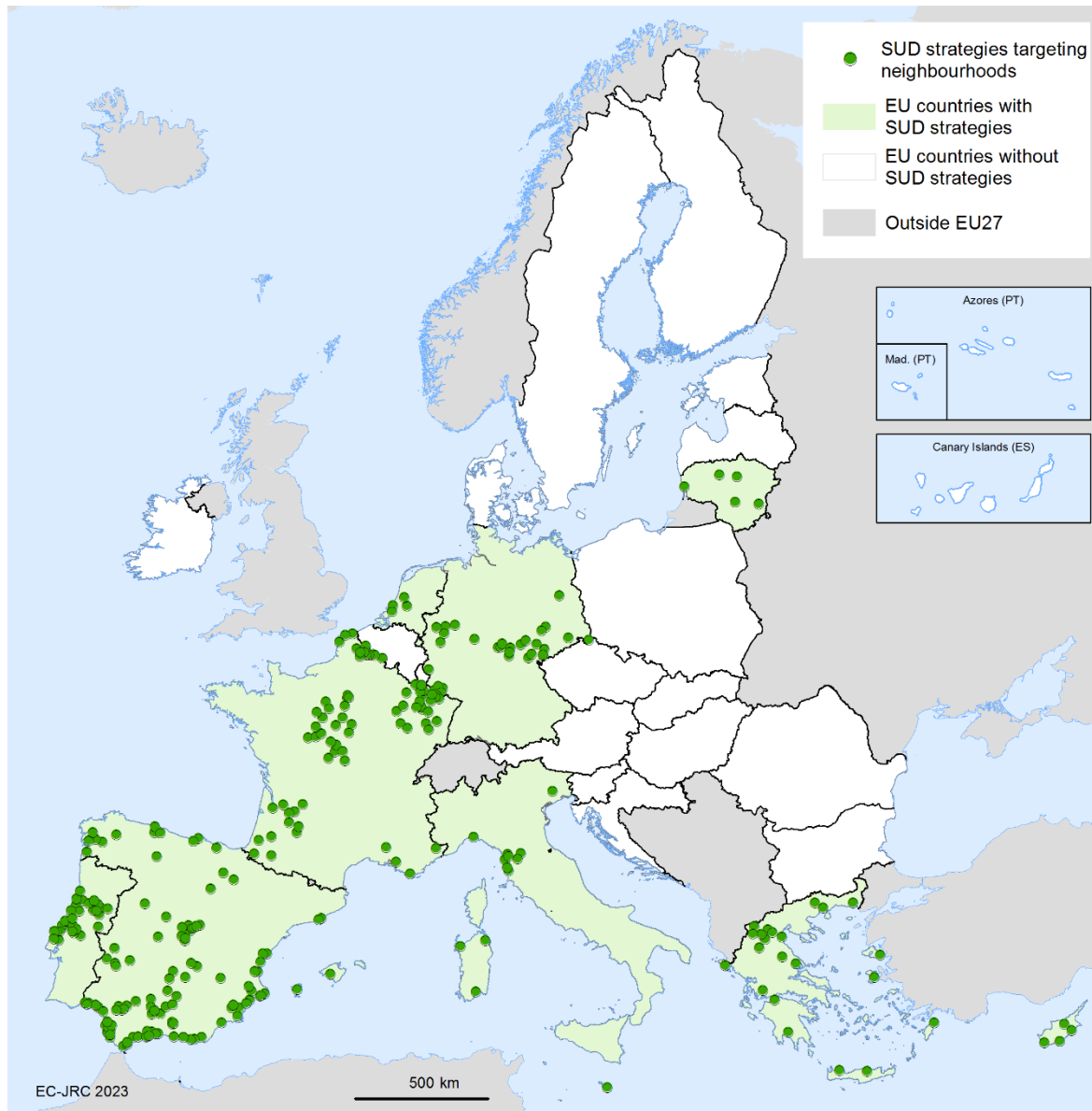
Figure 2. Map of strategies having as territorial focus ´Area within city/town´. Source: own elaboration based on STRAT-Board

Summing up, this means not only that the issue of deprived neighbourhoods is central to EU-funded sustainable urban development strategies. It also suggests that a considerable number of strategies are able to place actions on disadvantaged neighbourhoods within a wider strategic framework. In these cases, the territorial scope of the strategy is multi-faceted (Van der Zwet et al., 2017), and combining multiple scales can favour an outward-looking perspective to the area-based approach (Fioretti et al. 2020).

Examples of this approach can be found in Hungary, Bulgaria, Spain, Portugal, France, Germany, Belgium, Sweden and Italy.

In particular, there are 146 strategies of sustainable urban development in Italy and the majority of them targets 'cities' (68%), followed by 'functional urban areas' (19%) and only a smaller percentage 'areas within cities' (8%).
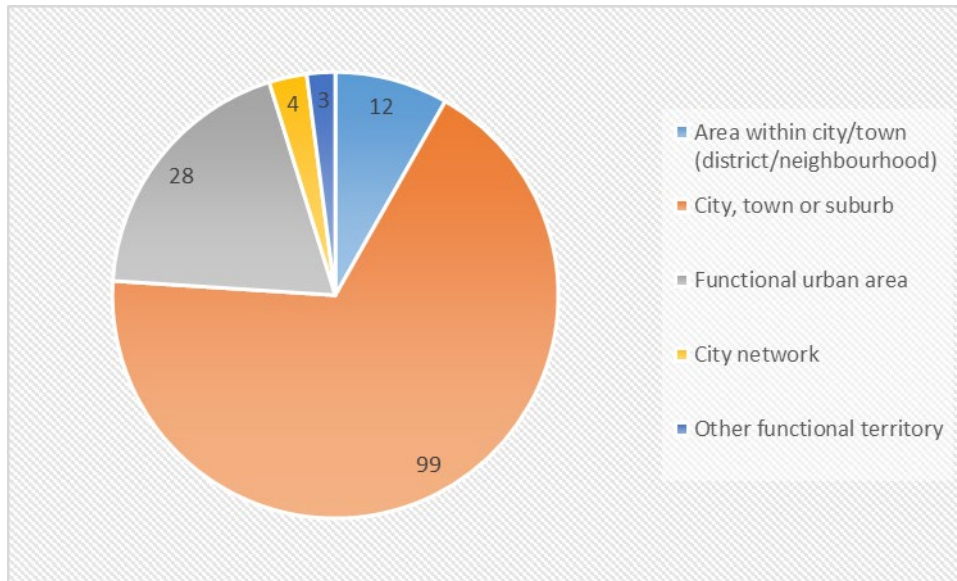
Figure 3. Number of SUD strategies per territorial focus in Italy. Source: STRAT-Board

At the same time, 64% of them uses the investment priority '9b - Providing support for physical, economic and social regeneration of deprived communities (…)' suggesting a large uptake of the multi-faceted territorial scope.

The case of Veneto Operational Programme seems interesting because it financed six strategies, all of them targeting 'functional urban areas', and all of them using the priority 9b and having as keyword 'disadvantaged neighbourhoods'.

The analysis of data at the EU level, doesn't allow us to understand how the multi-faceted territorial focus worked in practice, and if it helped overcome the limitations of the area-based approach in particular as related to migrants inclusion. To do that the case of the metropolitan area of Venice will be presented.

3. Places – Introducing the metropolitan area of Venice

The metropolitan area of Venice is characterised by the dominant presence of the city of Venice comprising its historical centre with the lagoon, and the two main settlements on the mainland, Porto Marghera and Mestre. The historical centre of Venice is an epicentre not only for tourism and all the related services but also for the presence of very important institutions in the field of education, for regional and municipal offices.

Since the end of the 18th Century, tourism has been at the heart of the local economy and, before the Covid pandemic, around 14 million tourists visited Venice each year. Most of the workers in the city – migrant and native – are employed in tourism and related industries. Mass tourism has also created problems for local residents, particularly in terms of affordable housing and the depopulation of the historical city. Also for this reason, Porto Marghera, Mestre and other small municipalities in the first belt around Venice are the most attractive areas in terms of residential choices for families of any origin including migrants, and for many

students who attend Venice's universities. Here housing costs are lower, and connections with the historical city, including by public transport, work quite well.

Porto Marghera is a commercial and industrial port and is the main industrial pole in the whole lagoon area. Since the 1920s Porto Marghera has been dominated by the presence of a huge oil-refining and petrochemical complex, a key resource in terms of employment. However, its presence is also problematic as it has caused severe long-term consequences in terms of pollution (Cerasi, 2007). The complex has been progressively decommissioned, but the area remains one of the most relevant industrial poles around the lagoon, given the presence of mechanical, chemical and glass factories, the shipyard Fincantieri, as well as the establishment, in 1993, of the scientific and technological pole VEGA (Venice gateway for science and technology). In 1970, people working in Marghera numbered 40 000, while the latest data from the Municipality of Venice (Osservatorio Porto Marghera, 2019) reveal that today this figure is around 12 000, working in 915 factories.

Mestre is a relevant transport hub, and a tertiary pole, where other municipal and metropolitan offices are also located. It plays a key role within the larger economic system of the Veneto Region, based upon the production of export-oriented high-quality goods by small and family-owned businesses in the manufacturing sector.

Enlarging the sight, Venice is, together with Padua and Treviso, one of the cities forming a 'polycentric city-region', the result of an urban sprawl generated by a diffuse industrialisation process. For many years, this area has been one of Italy's best-performing regions in terms of economic growth (OECD, 2015). This '*città diffusa*' – diffuse city – (Indovina, 1990) is characterised by low-density urban areas, where residential settlements mixed with small and medium enterprises are intertwined with agricultural land.

From the demographical point of view, the population in Venice is decreasing, while increasing especially in the first and second belt of municipalities. From 2004 to 2014, the ageing population appeared as a relevant issue, resulting in a demand for support. Another significant demographic trend during the same time slot is related to migration, as foreign residents in the urban area have increased from 7000 to 31 540. The increasing number of older people and migrants coupled with the persisting economic crisis are the main challenges for social cohesion in this area: new forms of poverty, new needs, and new challenges for the local welfare and for the mobility system (Comune di Venezia, 2020).

4. Migrants and natives – Coexistence in the diffused city

Strategically positioned in North East Italy, Venice is the first port in the Adriatic Sea and an epicentre of maritime trade with the Middle East and Asia. Thanks also to the opening of the international airport in 1960, both the sea and air connections have played a core role in making the city a port of entry into Italy and Europe for migrants arriving from Eastern European and Asian countries.

Significant numbers of migrants started to arrive there before arriving in other Italian cities and territories, leading Venice to develop its own 'policy style' as an arrival city. Since the 1990s migrants from the Balkans have had a lot of support from the local authorities, and the Council also set up participatory approaches for dealing with the related sanitary, social, economic and cultural issues. Strategies to address the presence of migrants and refugees were intended in the long term, and the goal was to support them in finding employment and housing and integrating into the local society. Given this context, the current situation is characterised by new arrivals, but also by the significant presence of migrant families who are long-term residents within the metropolitan area, as well as by the presence of second generations (Cancellieri et al, 2014).

After 2010, the effects of the economic crisis led to a shrinking capacity for activity from the public sector, which was also reflected in integration policies. Moreover, after 2015 major changes in the political orientation of the municipality of Venice led to a more controversial public debate on the migrants' presence, coupled with local initiatives to support them that are still carried out, but should be as 'invisible' as possible (Caponio, 2006; Briata, 2014). The current policy narrative follows this style and is thus dominated by the idea that policies should support migrant and native inhabitants in need in the same way.

Looking at data from EUROSTAT 2018 and focusing on the Municipalities involved in SUD strategies, it is evident that the distribution of foreigners in the *città diffusa* is itself 'diffuse', and in most of the municipalities, in terms of migrant presence, this ranges from 5% to 10% over the total population. At the same time, in some areas of Venice on the mainland such as Mestre and Marghera the presence is quite high in an Italian context (Tab. 1).

Municipality involved in SUD strategies	Migrants' share
Venice (historical city)	13.3%
Venice (Porto Marghera)	28.5%
Venice (Mestre)	18.9%
Quarto d'Altino	10.5%
Spinea	9.5%
Marcon	6.6%
Mirano	6%
Salzano	5.1%

Tab. 1. - *Migrants' presence in areas and Municipalities included in SUD strategies 2014-20 (Comune di Venezia, 2018)*

Most of the migrants living in the metropolitan area are employed in the hospitality sector and are commuters: jobs include waiters, accounting for 21% of the new employment relationships, followed by non-qualified personnel in restaurant services, 12.8%, and cooks in

hotels and restaurants (6.6%). Women in particular constitute a core job force as caregivers (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, 2018). Some of these jobs were significantly affected by Covid-2019: at the metropolitan level Venice lost 20 000 jobs between 2019 and 2020, and most of them were in the hospitality sector (Veneto Lavoro, 2020). The virus was also a significant indicator showing that a decent home is a key point for survival, and this means that housing for the most deprived groups, including migrants, was and remains a core challenge for the city. Also for this reason, the local agencies for Social Cohesion located in the historical city, in Marghera and in Mestre, have been working for a long time as facilitators and mediators in seeking access to affordable housing. A key task of these agencies is to overcome the lack of trust of Italian landlords when renting a flat to a migrant and his/her family (AMIF, 2022).

In terms of services, a report dated 2018 related to an AMIF (Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund) project (then published in Marconi and Cancellieri, 2022), mapped a constellation of 270 public/private/third sector actors and bodies, offering services to foreigners in the context of the metropolitan city, covering both first aid and more structural issues. A quarter of these services are located in Venice and in other middle-sized Municipalities, but a significant presence in the small municipalities should be underlined (FAMI CapaCityMetro, 2018). This results in a capillary distribution in the local territory that could be interpreted as another side of the diffuse city. The municipalities have invested greatly in dialogue and integration, especially with local associations, including those run by migrants and for migrants.

When looking at the spatial distribution of migrants in specific neighbourhoods, it is possible to see that the metropolitan area of Venice is not characterised by significant phenomena of concentration, with some exceptions in Mestre and Porto Marghera. The industrial area of Porto Marghera has always been an area of migration: from Southern Italy after the Second World War, from many different countries of the world, especially since the beginning of the current century (Marzadro, 2011; Magatte, 2019; Marconi, Shkopi, 2022). In 2018-2019, the filmmaker and ethnographer Andrea Segre made a documentary about Marghera cooperating with the local politician and activist Gianfranco Bettin. *Il pianeta in mare* (The planet in the sea) is an insightful ethnography on life and work in contemporary Marghera. It follows the life of the older residents, young people working in VEGA[8], as well as the 'newcomers' – some are migrants who arrived twenty years ago and have families in Venice, others arrived more recently and their families are still abroad. The documentary shows that half of the workers of Fincantieri come from among these 'newcomers', and that 60 different nationalities are represented in the job market of Porto Marghera.

The neighbourhood called Cita built between 1965 and 1974 is the only one where a slight form of "concentration" of the migrant population could be recognised. Its 938 flats area is

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[8] VEGA - VEnice GAteway for Science and Technology - is the Science and Technology Park of Venice.

characterised by mixed-tenure (public housing run by the municipality, as well as private flats), and also the migrant situation is mixed in terms of tenure: some have bought the flats, some have rented them from Italian landlords, others rent from other migrants. The proportion of migrants in Cita is now around 32% in a settlement inhabited by 2500 people. Among these, 48% are from Bangladesh, 15% from China, and 7.9% from Romania and Moldova (Marconi, Shkopi, 2022). The neighbourhood has always been quite isolated from the rest of the city, and housing is not in good condition. The same could be said for the public spaces that are intensively used by newcomers. A wide number of local associations work in the area, cooperating with public bodies, as well as with grassroots groups which are less 'institutionalised' than associations. All these realities promote a wide range of initiatives related to cultural mediation and intercultural relations in local schools and libraries (Marconi, Shkopi, 2022). The public library of Porto Marghera is a point of reference for many teenagers including boys and girls with a migrant background. Similar issues related to concentration can be found in the Southern part of Porto Marghera.

Among the most relevant social issues arising in the metropolitan city due to the migrant presence, interviews of actors working in the office running social services make reference to overcrowding in some buildings (especially with respect to the Bangladeshi presence, and particularly problematic during the pandemic); the presence in the whole metropolitan territory of baby gangs formed by young second and third generation migrants of different origins; the high proportion of migrants in some local schools hindering integration and learning. Some public spaces and parks are meeting points for the migrants, but also for the baby gangs. For this reason, these areas have been one of the epicentres of public intervention, including regeneration initiatives carried out through Cohesion Policy funding 2014-2020.

5. Policies and practices – Implementing SUD strategies in the metropolitan area of Venice

Italy is the only EU country where Sustainable Urban Development (SUD) Strategies in 2014-2020 have been channelled both through 16 ERDF regional operational programmes[9] and a national operational programme called PON Metro. As a result, some cities benefited from both funding channels.

In the majority of the regional operational programmes (12 out of 16), SUD strategies were implemented through a Priority Axis, and supported only by the ERDF[10]. This was also the case of Veneto ERDF regional operational programme, with its Priority Axis 6, which was specifically dedicated to sustainable urban development. Priority Axis 6 allocated EUR 59,8

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[9] Only a few Italian regions (Valle d'Aosta, Basilicata, Lazio and the two autonomous provinces of Trento and Bolzano) did not use their regional ERDF resources to promote SUD strategies.
[10] With the exception of the Umbria region which supported its strategies also with the European Social Fund. This was the case also of the four regions (Marche, Molise, Sardegna and Sicilia) which implemented the strategies through Integrated Territorial Investments which allowed the combination of more funds.

million for the implementation of interventions targeting six functional urban areas in the region (among which the one of Venice) formed by the main cities and from two to five municipalities of the first belt around them.

On the other side, the National Operational Programme for Metropolitan cities (PON Metro) was adopted to promote SUD strategies in the 14 metropolitan areas of Italy, among which Venice. Its creation of the is related to the fact that, in the Italian context, based on the Delrio Law (56/2014), the provinces are experiencing downsizing in their functions, while the metropolitan cities are playing a more active role as major demographic hubs, and as the drivers for development and innovation. For the programming period, 2014-2020 EUR 892 million were allocated to the PON Metro. EUR 588 was funded by the EU Cohesion Policy (EUR 446 from the European Regional Development Fund, and EUR 142 from the European Social Fund) and the rest came from national co-financing. The strategy areas concerned the territories of the metropolitan cities, with area-based projects targeting specific districts and the urban cores.

In Venice, the two channels of funding were used to promote two SUD strategies: the Integrated Strategy for the Urban Area of Venice funded by the ERDF operational programme of Veneto Region and the strategy for the Metropolitan Area of Venice funded by the national operational programme PON Metro.

The two strategies implemented in Venice were both managed locally by the Economic Development, Community Policies and Participatory Processes Sector of the Municipality of Venice. They both focused on the same three thematic objectives: (1) Sustainable mobility, also encouraging the use of public transport systems that have a lower environmental impact; (2) The promotion of social inclusion, intended to contain poverty and reduce the marginalisation of homeless people; (3) The strengthening of the e-Government services through the digitalisation of administrative procedures and the dissemination of digital services in the interaction among the public, businesses and the public administration.

In both cases, migrants were not a specific target but were 'indirectly' concerned by at least three types of measures: (1) sustaining innovative and affordable residential solutions; (2) developing a greener public transport system that also led to improvement in connections with central Venice; (3) promoting regeneration of public spaces, especially in Porto Marghera and Mestre, where the migrant presence is higher.

The SUD strategy for the urban area of Venice

The SUD strategy for the urban area of Venice focused on a very limited number of measures contributing to the consolidation of relationships and connections in the metropolitan territorial systems. Projects were an integral part of the Strategy for the Metropolitan Area of Venice 2014-2020.

In terms of governance, the Economic Development, Community Policies and Participatory Processes Sector of the Municipality of Venice was responsible for the selection of operations and represented the urban area in relation to the regional level. The process was very 'centralised' as, according to the actors interviewed, the small municipalities involved in the strategy were not so used to thinking 'strategically' beyond the municipality level. The office relied heavily on the metropolitan city administration to foster cooperation among the municipalities at metropolitan level, but certain issues came up. The metropolitan city has the same boundaries as the former province, and provinces did not have strategic planning and programming functions. Also for this reason, the process that led to the strategic plan of the metropolitan city[11] was slower than expected, and the plan was approved in 2018, rendering integration with SUD strategies very difficult.

The total contribution for the strategy of the urban authority of Venice was EUR 20.127.200[12]. A core point in funding measures on these lines was to reconnect the urban fabric of the municipalities involved by improving the quality of life of people in marginal areas. This entailed a set of measures concerning sustainable urban mobility and social inclusion through the physical regeneration of housing and buildings to be used as co-housing or structures for strengthening the network of social emergency services, or housing structures for homeless people.

A synthetic outline of all the interventions carried out in the strategy, and of their territorialisation in the urban area is represented in figure 4.

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[11] PIANO STRATEGICO METROPOLITANO - CITTÀ METROPOLITANA DI VENEZIA 2019-2021
https://forumpsm.cittametropolitana.ve.it/
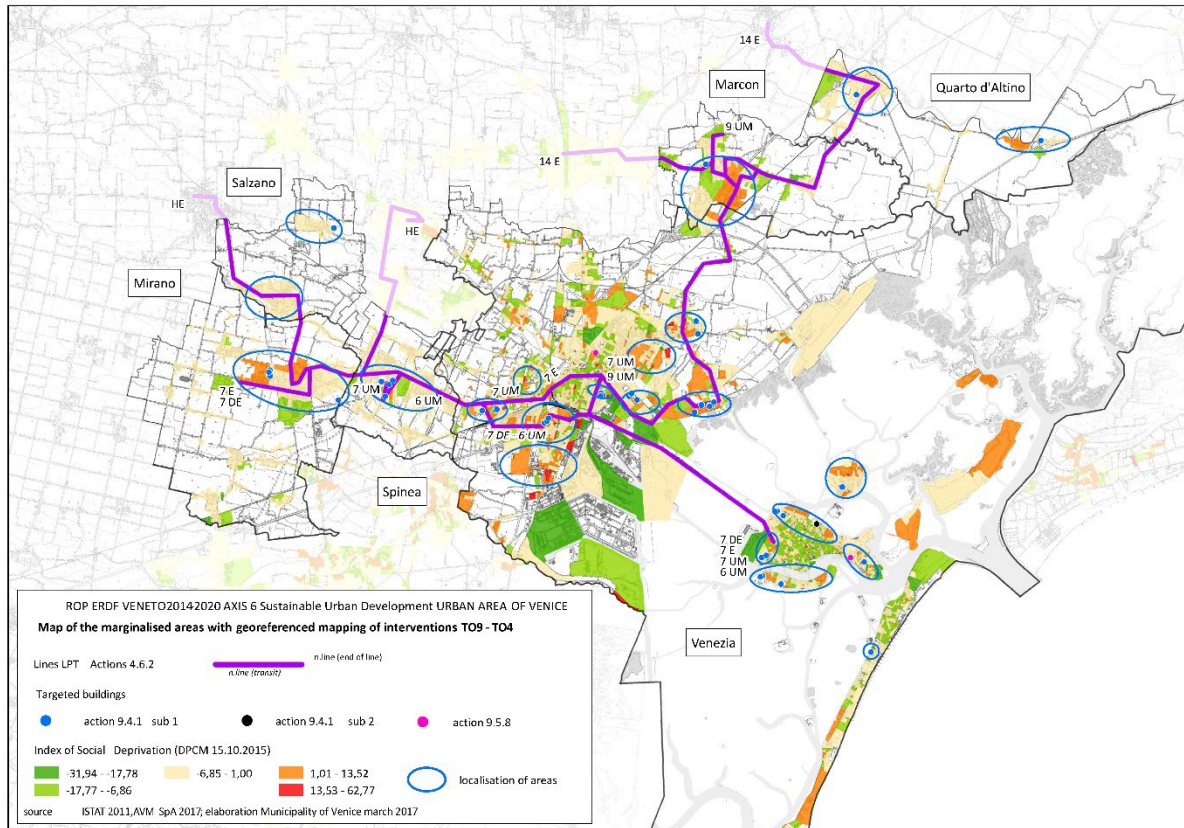[12] Of which 11.053.600 coming from ERDF

Figure 4. - *Map of the interventions through priority 6 ROP-ERFD. Source: ROP-ERDF Veneto Region*

As it is evident from the map, the strategy area is broad, concerning the core city of Venice, and the municipalities of the first belt around it. At the same time, the projects are targeting specific areas characterised by high levels of social distress as identified through a composite indicator. The intervention on transports enables connecting several intervention areas.

To the North, Venice worked with the municipalities of Marcon and Quarto d'Altino by investing in three lines of activity: housing renewal, promotion of co-housing for vulnerable groups in vulnerable conditions, and shelters for homeless people. In these cases, measures were promoted, confirming and consolidating pre-existing relationships related to housing issues. Housing renewal involved a series of flats owned/managed by the regional public housing agency, with a particular focus on energy efficiency. In regard to co-housing, measures aimed at restoring public buildings to cope with the housing issue for very groups in vulnerable conditions. Co-housing structures were conceived to mix people with different needs (old, young, people with disability). Under these measures for housing, 370 flats were restored/improved. Another line of action related to homeless people, especially in Mestre which is a sort of 'hub' in this sense, covering the needs of the neighbouring municipalities. The objective, in this case, was to restore buildings located in the urban context, going beyond the idea that these places are just places to sleep. This means that not only first reception centres were promoted, but also 'social' housing (small flats with facilities to cook) to help

homeless people to become less dependent on social services. With these measures, 68 flats have been restored.

To the West, Venice has worked with the municipalities of Spinea, Salzano and Mirano on smart mobility (purchase of electric, hybrid and Euro VI environmental class buses for the local public transport service in urban areas) to improve green public transport. The connections between these municipalities and central Venice are very important both for migrants and for the students living in this area. So consolidating this connection in the context of a policy to make transport greener has been a core issue.

In most of the measures, migrants are not a specific target but are targeted 'indirectly' as it could be said that measures to boost sustainable mobility towards Venice also benefited this population. The same could be said about initiatives for people in vulnerable conditions with reference to housing (homeless, migrants and refugees transiting in Venice) as well as about the experimentation with innovative 'social' housing solutions.

The PON Metro strategy

The Pon Metro funded the Strategy for the Metropolitan Area of Venice. Its objectives were formulated taking into account the local strategic plan approved in 2004, as well as with a series of planning tools, dealing with energy/environment, culture, mobility and infrastructures, housing and tourism. In the Strategy, housing is a key point and has to take into account issues related to affordability as well as the increasing diversification of the urban populations living in Venice and on the mainland. Other important issues are related to the quality and accessibility of public spaces, the improvement of mobility infrastructures, and the consolidation of welfare provision also through e-government systems.

Focusing on migration and looking at the main programming documents, migrants are mentioned explicitly in only two sections with respect to demographic and social challenges. In regard to demographic challenges the migration issue is mentioned in reference to the built environment, as in the Venetian mainland – especially in Mestre and Porto Marghera – the housing stock built from the post-war period until the 1970s is in very poor condition, both in terms of aesthetics and energy saving performance. Some dwellings have been abandoned by the native inhabitants and rented/bought by migrants who also use public spaces more frequently as meeting places. According to the strategy for the metropolitan area, these dwellings and related public spaces deserved attention (Comune di Venezia, 2016).

In regard to social challenges, the programming documents underline that Venice is characterised by an international and cosmopolitan vocation, both thanks to the tourism flows and to the presence of major traffic points. New populations move into urban and metropolitan areas with specific needs that the current city welfare policy does not contemplate. Marginality concerns residents, as well as people passing through the city and

looking for temporary solutions: refugees and asylum seekers, but also Italian or migrant people without economic resources.

Given this context, the strategy for the Metropolitan Area of Venice refers in particular to two social challenges: (a) the need to promote integration policies to ensure that the contribution of second generations (foreign births) will be able to contribute to the growth of the society as a whole; (b) the need to develop through welfare and social policy systems strategies to support families and women (family-work conciliation) also by experimenting with flexible and innovative housing offers for migrants and refugees. In both these challenges, issues also related to the migrant presence intersect more or less explicitly (Comune di Venezia, 2016).

The main measures to have an impact on the lives of migrants, or on the places where migrants live, are related to transport, housing, and projects for public spaces/ facilities.

With respect to transport, measures address the improvement of sustainable mobility (e.g. from Mirano, Spinea and Salzano towards central Venice). This isalso helpful for the significant number of migrants who live in this area, and who need to reach Venice daily to work in the hospitality sector.

Looking more closely at some of these projects, in regard to housing, different projects were promoted in a series of neighbourhoods on the mainland of Venice (Altobello, Bissuola, Cita, Circus, Pertini), as well as in the historical part of the city (Sant'Elena). First of all, 167 public housing flats were refurbished (73 in Venice/islands; 94 on the mainland), but a core point was also the promotion of forms of empowerment for people in need. A helpdesk was opened, through which forms of mediation were offered to people (including migrants) to find a housing solution in both the public and private market, matching demand and offer. A similar logic guided the implementation of a co-housing project (50 beds) for short stays (6 months/2 years maximum) where no more than four people could share a public housing flat. But what is of interest is the fact that this particular project is managed by a third-sector cooperative also engaged in an empowerment objective: transfer the skills required to the residents to find a place to stay on their own, gaining independence from the public/ other service providers.

All the actors interviewed working in the municipality of Venice agree that the most innovative solutions were related to the possibility of mixing measures addressing the physical space, coupled with measures addressing the promotion of socio-economic activities to bring life to those spaces, as in the PON Metro both the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund could be mobilised. In many cases, the main point involved addressing the improvement of physical spaces, and also the promotion of a series of activities to revitalise those spaces. Different initiatives improved green areas, public parks and sports facilities, especially in Porto Marghera and Mestre.

These measures were innovative also in terms of governance as they led to cooperation between the offices that deal with social services, public works and green spaces in the metropolitan city. At the same time, many third sector associations, but also very grass-rooted and not so 'institutionalised' groups working at the neighbourhood level could develop projects and get funding for them. The associations proposing and managing the projects could count on the support (especially for accounting issues) of the Chamber of Commerce and a dedicated helpdesk. According to local actors, measures like this can make a difference in terms of the vitality and liveability of a neighbourhood, and are sustainable because, with a low investment of money, associations and citizen groups could be supported, improving activities that they already do. Also for this reason, this approach will be confirmed and consolidated in the forthcoming PON Metro for the new programming cycle.

The project for the Bissuola park in Mestre, a very marginal and deprived green area characterised by social exclusion, the presence of baby gangs and drug dealers, can be given as an example of how the area-based approach was applied in Venice, and in which way it promoted the inclusion of groups affected by vulnerabilities, integrating hard and soft measures. Not only was the park improved, but also a series of buildings to be used for social and cultural activities. A multifunctional building was opened in the park, and many public social services were located there. The centre also has some spaces that can be used on request by the local associations to carry out different types of activities, not necessarily permanent ones. A significant role is also played by the park library, a specialised library for teenagers where comics and books in different languages can be found. In all these types of green areas, culture and sport were used as means of social activation to 'fill with life' the regenerated areas.

A highly coordinated series of measures worked on social innovation through the project *La città SIcura di sé* (The city takes care of itself – *sicura* means also 'safety'). This project promotes the creation of new opportunities and services in vulnerable areas through the active mobilisation of the local community. Through this programme, the metropolitan city aims to sustain active third-sector stakeholders, supporting them in making proposals for innovative and sustainable solutions to cope with public needs. The project is structured in four areas of activity that will contribute to the urban welfare renewal by funding new services at the neighbourhood level, social innovation, and initiatives aimed at enhancing the vitality of deprived/ marginal areas: (1) community welfare; (2) solidarity networks inside the buildings; (3) civic crowdfunding; (4) community innovation.

The civic crowdfunding platform aimed to boost cooperation between the public administration and the existing third-sector realities, by developing a plan of possible projects to be activated. The platform has been helpful for the public administration as in this way they were able to also see many micro-scale pockets of problems and opportunities that would have not been so visible if operating in a more top-down way.

After a selection of the proposed projects, the public administration will offer a crowdfunding platform to help the proposals obtain funding from the public. The municipality will guarantee co-funding for all the projects that obtain 50% of their needs through the crowdfunding platform. This initiative aims to enhance public engagement in sustaining projects aimed at improving the city.

It's interesting to notice, that under the broader 'umbrella' of *La città SIcura di sé*, some measures in Mestre and Porto Marghera worked explicitly on the multicultural dimension:

— The project "Costruire una Comunità Signific-Attiva" (which means building up a significant active community) is promoted by an association supporting kids, with the aim of supporting them and their families in Porto Marghera. The project promotes 'multicultural workshops', offering different kinds of support to parents and kids when they are not at school, and organising meetings for families to get to know each other better.

— The project V.E.C.I. (which stands for Venetians, Chinese and Italians together for a Venice for all). In this project, an association located in Mestre and formed by Italian students of oriental languages received funding to offer linguistic support to Chinese individuals.

— The project SQUERI, promoted by the provincial ACLI (ACLI is present in many Italian cities and territories. The name means Christian Workers' Association), aims to facilitate social cohesion in Marghera. A series of meetings to improve the capacity of local service intervention in the face of foreigners' needs has been organised, and a multi-language guide to services has been published. Moreover, courses in Italian for foreigners, courses related to digital literacy for everyone, and formative training to cope with the multicultural society for officers working in the local services have been organised.

Conclusions

The paper aimed at disentangling the area-based approach as promoted by the EU to bring about integrated sustainable development in European urban areas. In particular, the paper looked at how this approach has evolved over time and to what extent it has been used to foster the inclusion of migrants through a territorialised or spatial perspective.

In this final section, key elements on that are derived from the case of the metropolitan area of Venice and the two Sustainable Urban Development strategies implemented there in the framework of the EU cohesion policy 2014-2020. Starting from the case, some more general reflections are made, helping identify the meaning and scope of the area-based approach in contemporary European cities, and the challenges faced by policy-makers in implementing it.

From the literature review, the area-based approach is defined as the concentration of cross-sectoral integrated actions targeting specific areas suffering from multidimensional issues. In the two SUD strategies of Venice, this approach has been applied within the framework of broader strategic areas in line with the EU-supported trend of opening up the area-based approach through an outward-looking perspective. In fact, the spatial scope of the first strategy is the urban area formed by Venice and the municipalities of the first belt around it, while the second strategy focuses on the metropolitan area of Venice. At the same time, both of them are implemented through integrated actions that target specific neighbourhoods and specific places.

As described in the literature, the area-based approach is especially useful to target groups in vulnerable conditions among which migrants, addressing 'spatialised' local challenges; to integrate actions pertaining to different policy domains; and to engage with the local community. The case of Venice brings interesting insights into each one of these three aspects.

For what concerns the first aspect, the strategies of Venice well depict how migrants are targeted indirectly, through a spatialised approach. As seen, strategies and several projects in Venice do not explicitly address the issue of migrant integration, ethnic diversity, or intercultural policy, but areas with a 'concentrated' migrant population have in fact been a target.

The relationship between the areas targeted by the policies and the areas with a higher presence of migrants is especially evident in Mestre and Porto Marghera where the overall presence of foreigners is greater. As a consequence, several projects located there intercepted migrants' needs, for example social innovation measures sustaining associations that address different aspects of migrant integration (language skills, understanding of bureaucracy to obtain support from social services, and also investing in people working in the local services to help them to understand and cope with the migrants' needs).

The projects on housing as well, especially the 'soft' aspects of them, even if did not target the migrants specifically, reached them anyway (e.g. measures aimed at stimulating forms of empowerment for people who live in co-housing to enable them to find a place to live on their own). Other measures were activated to establish bridges between migrant and native populations renting homes to overcome prejudice.

Measures to improve the transport system in the diffuse city also benefited migrants living in the smaller municipalities involved in the SUD integrated strategy for the urban area of Venice.

In Venice's strategies, the area-based approach is particularly evident, because the target of the actions was not a specific group identified as 'vulnerable', and instead the target was the place where different groups of people share their lives, problems and also opportunities. The aim was thus not only to address migrants, but to sustain networks broadly involving migrant and native inhabitants, old and young people - and so on - finding ways to help people to

cooperate on shared problems, going beyond ethnicity, age, or any other type of segmentation. Identifying the spatial dimension of shared issues has been then crucial to define a common foundation from which building forms of inclusion that concerned both migrants and natives.

A second distinguishing aspect of Venice's strategies is the level of cross-sectoral integration that they were able to achieve through their area-based approach. Both strategies integrate different thematic objectives, but then when looking more in detail at the projects it is clear how while the strategy of the urban area of Venice promotes more purely physical, infrastructural measures, on the contrary, the strategy of the Metropolitan Area of Venice is able to promote projects that combine hard and soft measures, and doing that contribute to the inclusion of migrants and other groups suffering from vulnerabilities.

From the viewpoint of the policy instrument, this was possible thanks to the fact that the national operational programme PON Metro mobilised both the European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund. The Strategy for the Metropolitan Area of Venice seems to have been the main driver of innovation and it is a common opinion among the actors interviewed that the combination of measures addressing the 'physical' dimension with measures addressing the 'social' dimension, stimulated cooperation inside the public administration, as well as cooperation between very locally rooted actors that it would have not been possible to mobilise otherwise. According to the managing authority, the PON Metro worked better because procedures were faster and more flexible. At the same time, mixing two different funds allowed measures aimed at the physical regeneration of buildings and spaces to be combined with measures aimed at bringing life and activities (public and/or run by the third sector or by some very grass-rooted associations working at the neighbourhood level) to these places.

Local actors talk enthusiastically about the way of working triggered by the PON Metro. They think that it was a great opportunity for overcoming the long-term division between different offices in the local authorities, and a way of experimenting with new ways of working that will be consolidated as, in the 2021-2027 programming cycle, funds for the metropolitan area have been tripled.

Finally, a third point concerns the way in which the area-based approach of Venice's strategies was used to engage with the local community. In general terms, it is possible to affirm that especially the Strategy for the Metropolitan Area of Venice had a strong focus on involving intermediary bodies, namely local associations and grass-root groups, in project design and implementation. In several initiatives, like, for example, the housing ones, the involvement of the third sector allowed to develop the soft dimension of projects, and to reach indirectly migrants. This was possible because associations are closer to citizens and more aligned with actual local needs. Another distinguishing aspect of the case of Venice is the way in which social innovation projects like the crowdfunding platform, were used not only to engage with citizens but also to bring the area-based approach to an extremely granular level,

detecting places of citizens' mobilisation and at the same time pockets of exclusion at the micro-scales, both not acknowledged by the public administration.

The case of Venice revealed that the key spatial dimension where to intervene is not necessarily the (deprived) neighbourhood, but on the one side, it expands to include a network of infrastructure and services of the diffuse city that connects - and in some cases 'house' - people and places in a metropolitan perspective. On the other side, the spatial dimension of the area-based approach in Venice shrinks to a micro-scale, much more detailed than the neighbourhood, that is the one that can be more meaningful to understand the overlapping of problems but also the opportunities for regeneration and inclusion.

This double change in the spatial scale of intervention, which expands and shrinks at the same time, well reflects the spatial dimension of poverty and exclusion in the contemporary city, especially in the context of Southern Europe and Italy, where the segregation of migrants and of lower-classes is not necessarily evident at the level of the neighbourhood. Although a mainstream narrative tends to associate socio-economic deprivation with peripheral areas, pockets of exclusion, deprivation and concentration of migrants are more relevant at the micro-level (a street, a building) and scattered in the city region.

At the same time, this expansion and contraction of the spatial scale of intervention brings with it some challenges for policy-makers that should be taken into account in the broader framework of EU-supported sustainable urban development.

First, placing the area-based interventions within the broader strategy of the functional urban area increases the complexity of the governance system. In the Venice case, the management of both strategies is still strongly centralised by the government capacity of Venice, the core local authority. Smaller municipalities of the hinterland take part in the process and play a key role to reach the overall objective, providing some of the building blocks of the strategy in terms of affordable housing and a system of diffuse welfare services. At the same time, they suffer from a lack of strategic and administrative capacity, that in turn hinders their role in the governance system and their active involvement in the strategic planning process led by the core city.

For many realities across the EU, that do not have an institutionalised government of the functional urban area and suffer from power and capacity imbalances, cooperation among municipalities is a key challenge. In the Italian case in particular, metropolitan cities have been recently formed and they are characterised by a large number of small municipalities. In order to be meaningful, and not only an administrative boundary drawn on a map, it would be key to work on a common 'metropolitan' culture among the municipalities that form the metropolitan area, and to invest in the strategic dimension of each single measure promoted at the municipal level.

The second key challenge concerns how to deal with the concentration of disadvantage and exclusion at the micro-scale. The case of Venice shows the difficulty for the local authority

to identify the target areas at this granular level, considering a lack of data and methodologies available. A promising way of dealing with it is to involve the local community and intermediate bodies in the process of definition of the target areas. At the same time, this bottom-up approach should be consolidated, further developed and coupled with a quantitative, evidence-based methodology. This suggests the need to invest at the EU level on the topic, promoting research and debate around it, in order to question the notion of deprived neighbourhoods, in favour of a reflection on deprived places, as pockets of disadvantage within functional urban areas.

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