Abstract: Policy integration is a substantive and innovative strategy, used to address complex problems that go beyond the scope of sectoral policies, and require a joint and integrated response. While theoretical advances have been made in the field, there have not been many empirical proposals of a comparative nature. This paper develops a proposal for the analysis of integrality in the domain of urban policies, in which the integrated strategy has become a key component. Following a literature review, three dimensions were defined, referring to the diagnosis, the action strategy, and the project governance, which have allowed us to examine the presence of an integrated strategy in the designs of the projects developed within the framework of the URBAN and URBANA, initiatives implemented in Spain between 1994 and 2013, promoted by the European Union (EU). The results show that, as occurs in other public policies, the extent of the integrated strategy is limited and varies according to the dimensions. Moreover, the differences found between the two initiatives support the idea that policy integration is a gradual and dynamic process, with a certain learning effect, which develops over time and in which the dimensions of integration do not evolve in a coordinated manner.

Keywords: urban policies; policy integration; public policies; complex problems; integrality; policy design analysis

1. Introduction

Policy integration is regarded as the most appropriate response to the challenges posed by complex, open, and changing realities [1–4]. When designing public policies, finding solutions to complex problems is a widespread challenge. These so-called wicked problems [5–7] can be defined as cross-cutting and interrelated issues that require an integrated or holistic response; the latter implies starting with a systemic conception of the problems and reaching beyond the sectoral nature of traditional policies [2,8,9]. For this reason, it has become increasingly important to work on an integrated strategy when elaborating policies. Indeed, integrated strategies represent a possible solution to multiscale and interrelated problems, fostering joint and complementary action between various fields, sectors, or political subsystems [2]. Policy integration is deemed to be more effective at fulfilling the desired outcomes than the traditional formula of compartmentalized sectoral policies [4].

Thus, in recent years, policy integration strategies addressing complex problems such as climate change, financial crises, education, or public health have been the object of studies and research [9]. Some of these studies analyze policy integration in specific cases [3,10,11], tool combinations and their effects [12], or the added difficulties brought about by vertical governance between different administrations for policy integration [13]. Other studies have drawn up meta-analyses [14–16] as well as specific theories on the issue [2] or have examined the temporal dynamics of combinations between public policy sectors [2,17].
These studies all begin by setting out the difficult and complex materialization and operationalization of these types of strategies [1]. Indeed, the best way to integrate policies remains unclear [2,13]. In fact, at times, the experiences of joint work, intersectoral collaborations, or integrated strategies themselves are not the most appropriate responses or do not achieve the expected results [3,8,12,14]. On the other hand, situations of “layering”, “drift”, or “conversion” emerge, which lead to internal contradictions between the objectives and the instruments, even between the objectives themselves or instruments themselves, as a result of trying to “patch up” or restructure existing policy elements [18]. Suboptimal situations may sometimes present contradictory, duplicate, or redundant objectives or policies [13]. A major challenge is the fact that integration almost never truly starts from scratch: it is based on existing policies, giving rise to failing, poorly directed, or ineffective situations as a result of inconsistent objectives or tools [19]. The myth of integration as the only, or best, solution to complex problems thus no longer exists, though integration does continue to represent a strategic approach in the design and analysis of public policies [20].

The proliferation of studies on policy integration has also revealed a lack of consensus regarding the concept of integration and its means of measurement [8,9,20]. Although different approaches for analyzing various aspects or dimensions have emerged, few comparative analysis methodologies have been proposed [17,21]. A key element of these proposals is public policy design, as a policy’s successful outcome depends on a good design—in addition to the resources and opportunities existing in the territory [22,23]. In fact, the analysis of a policy’s design quality has become a valuable instrument to improve the policy itself, in turn an essential factor of efficacy [24]. A design’s analysis can shed light on the deficiencies or strengths that could undermine or improve the policy’s implementation and, therefore, its effectiveness [22]. Consequently, many policy integration conceptualizations address design aspects or dimensions. The latter relate either to the nature of the complex problems that the integrated strategy needs to focus on, or to the way in which it manifests itself in the designed objectives and instruments, or the way in which the stakeholders are involved and coordinated [13,14,19,25–27]. Design thus attracts special attention, because many difficulties encountered by policy integration strategies are believed to stem from design deficiencies, the designs failing to adequately incorporate complexity into the policy’s formulation. Faced with such complex and multiscale problems, “the need for intelligent design of policies and a better understanding of the policy formulation processes they involve has never been greater” [18].

In this respect, cities, both large and small, or metropolitan configurations are subject to a complex array of environmental, social, and economic tensions. They require the adoption of integrated policy planning approaches to achieve a common solution to these problems. That is why urban policy reflections and practices insist on the implementation of policy integration strategies. Given the complex nature of urban problems, these strategies aim to promote sustainable urban development based on a cross-cutting agenda which integrates the different objectives of various public policy sectors. Moreover, due to the strategies’ multilevel nature, a multiplicity of actors needs to be involved, both locally and through agreements between various local administrations or different government levels (regional, national, or international). Illustrations of this include the New Urban Agenda proposed by the United Nations (UN) within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals—SDGs [28] and the Urban Agenda for the European Union, which has implemented the European Union (EU)’s previous experience of integrated urban policies since the 1990s [29].

Therefore, policy integration has become a necessary tool to respond to the complexity of urban problems. It is recognized that urban problems are interrelated and that, therefore, their solution must go beyond the traditional models of sectoral policies through the development of comprehensive plans that address issues beyond territorial planning. However, the integration of policies requires a special formulation that confronts municipalities trying to design comprehensive plans, with a great challenge. This research shows that policy integration is not a mere juxtaposition of actions in different policy areas or
sectors, requiring specific steps and considerations in its design. In this way, the analysis methodology used in this research can be a useful tool, not only in the field of public policy analysis and evaluation, but also in the municipalities’ own practice when designing their comprehensive plans.

In this context, the objectives of the present work were to first develop an analytical framework on public policy integration strategies in the case of urban policies, based on the existing literature, and, in particular, that dedicated to its most strategic and processual dimension. This way, we could shed light on the main dimensions of an integrated urban policy. The second objective was to advance a tool for measuring urban policy design integrality based on a comparative perspective among local projects and policies, beyond the most common methodological strategy based on case studies. Although the dimensions and principles of integrated strategies have been theorized, no measurement system has been specified allowing a comparative analysis. The proposal made here applies to the integrated urban development initiatives promoted by the EU between 1994 and 2013 in Spain. It makes it possible to compare 64 local plans within the framework of three different programs (URBAN I, URBAN II, and URBANA initiatives) explicitly geared towards the implementation of the integrated strategy [30].

2. Dimensions of Integrality in the Design of Integrated Urban Initiatives

As in other domains [1,27,31,32], integrated strategies have been applied to urban policies in cases where the problems affecting urban areas are considered of a complex and multiscale nature; they involve an extensive variety of components and actors; and require actions beyond the scope of sectoral interventions. Integrated strategies are recommended by international bodies, such as the UN and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) [33], but they are also observable in the policies developed since the 1970s in disadvantaged urban areas [34] and, in particular, in the integrated urban development approach encouraged by the EU [35]. We thus have at our disposal a wide range of experiences and projects allowing to analyze the extent of the application of integrated strategies in urban policies.

In this way, urban scenarios can be described as complex situations that require strategic, integrated, and sustainable responses, adopting the principles and orientations of the policy framework based on “sustainable urban development”. The usual approach is to start with a conception of the urban problems’ complexity and to consider an integrated solution as the most appropriate response [34,35]. In addition, these policies are markedly multilevel. Indeed, while the general principles are usually defined at higher levels, their specific design and application are implemented at municipal levels to ensure a proper adaptation. Therefore, the implications include, for example, the need to localize the SDGs [28] or the need for EU-promoted initiatives to establish a general framework within which local entities develop a specific plan. We therefore have an optimal context to perform a comparative analysis of integrated strategy implementations, both between local plans, and between programs or policies promoted at higher government levels, e.g., the integrated urban development initiatives fostered by the EU from the nineties onwards.

Nevertheless, the first step to measure integrality—understood as a design feature of these strategies—is to define what policy integration means, specifically, which design elements must be included in an urban policy integrated strategy. A first issue to consider is that “integration” is more than transversality or diversity, depending on the policy sectors concerned and/or involved. It also implies going beyond the vision of the “policy mix” concept, which is limited to the idea of instruments that interact to fulfil objectives. A broader concept is necessary that also includes the objectives and plans to achieve them [36].

Thus, the starting point of integrality is the complementarity of a series of problems, objectives, and actions belonging to a same public action policy or strategy. Through design, it should be possible, based on their interactions, to achieve broader objectives that overcome the fragmentation of policies and sectoral models, and to support multilevel
collaboration and cooperation. As a result, integrality should be reflected in various design dimensions, which must be considered in the planning processes. Integrality would therefore be an added element (a criterion or reference parameter) allowing to assess/measure a policy’s design quality. In this way, together with more conventional criteria relating to internal and external policy coherence (the relationship between problems–objectives–tools and these elements with the environment), integrality refers to the necessary interrelationship, complementarity, and synergies between the different elements (problems, objectives, and instruments) and governance processes [37,38].

At least three basic integrated strategy dimensions have been identified in the literature. The first refers to the need to adopt a holistic approach to problems [2,19], taking into account the interrelations and complementarities between the problems concerned by the policy in question. According to Candel (2017), integrated strategies involve exercises that address complex problems holistically, requiring concerted policymaking efforts across all the sectors and levels of government involved. Thus, a design’s low level of integrality may be due to the insufficient capturing of a problem’s complexity, or to failing to consider the stakeholders’ contributions in the design phase, leading to limited problem knowledge and a lack of support in the execution phase [25]. That is, an integrated strategy requires that all sectors have a common vision of the problem; but it also requires sharing an understanding of how sectoral problems relate to each other, thus accounting for the “complex problem” [2]. Therefore, a key to the promotion of integrality is the very way the problems are construed. Indeed, in the construction process, specific political options can be advanced in order to achieve objectives defined as common goals, that is, options of policies that “seem coherent” [32].

In addition to this shared vision of the problems and their interrelationships, integration is understood as the free-flowing coexistence of different policy elements, such as the objectives, tools, and actors involved in their design and subsequent implementation. This implies that policy element combinations must produce synergies and complementarities among themselves [13] and with their environment [27]. In this way, integrated strategies should reflect a combination of coherent and congruent objectives, as well as a set of consistent tools [2,12,39].

The questions of coherence, consistency, and congruence are basic principles underlying the design of complex policy mixes [40], and integrated strategies should take them into consideration. No unanimous conceptualization, however, has been reached. First, most studies fail to give an accurate account of their conceptual content and provide ambiguous definitions [36]. Second, no uniform terminology exists. Coherence and consistency are often used interchangeably, but they are also differentiated, which leads to confusion [36,41]. In addition, in some cases, these latter terms refer to aspects situated at different hierarchical levels, consistency being the absence of contradictions between different sectors or policy domains, while coherence indicates synergistic relationships to reach common general objectives; in this way, the word refers “to a more ‘positive’ reading in which different policy fields actively work together to achieve common overarching goals” [41]. It is this last meaning that has been considered in this work.

Moreover, the concept of coherence encompasses several dimensions: internal coherence (between problems–objectives–actions–results, that is, within the policy), external coherence (between policies), vertical coherence (between different administrative levels), and horizontal coherence (between different policy sectors) [41,42]. In this paper, we analyze horizontal coherence, i.e., we focus on the relationship between different policy sectors, since the urban policies under study here bring together interventions from different public policy sectors in order to define a single policy, a concrete project. Our objective was to analyze the complementarity between these integrated public policy sectors to define an intervention plan in an urban area, regardless (or not) of its relationship with other policies developed in the same territory. In order to clearly differentiate this dimension from coherence, we call it “integration”. The term refers both to the congruence between the objectives of the different policy sectors concerned, as well as to the consistency between
the planned instruments, that is, the fact that the policy tools reinforce each other in the pursuit of the proposed objectives, rather than undermining one another [43].

Finally, another important dimension of integrated strategy analysis is the necessary collaboration between the actors involved and, therefore, the design of processes, bodies, and institutional changes necessary to achieve this collaboration. Some related studies have established various degrees of integrality depending on the responses given to the fragmentation of policies and their negative consequences [3,44]. In this way, we can observe that strategies are either limited to seeking some coordination or cooperation between policies, or are directed towards achieving true integration, based on governance, and oriented towards integrated or strategic policy formulations [3,8,21,44]. Howlett and Rayner (2007) point to the importance of combining substantive but also procedural tools to ensure policy integration. Substantive instruments refer to the alternative policy measures that can be chosen for problem-solving, i.e., the content of the design itself. Procedural tools, on the other hand, refer to the consultative and participatory activities that lead to the design, as well as to the interactions necessary to ensure that society and stakeholders support the policies’ objectives and development, thus embodying a key feature of modern governance [45].

In this regard, horizontal and vertical governance are differentiated in the reviewed literature. Horizontal governance refers to the coordination between the actors, characteristic of sectoral policies, i.e., to the relations between public and private agents, or public agents among themselves; vertical governance refers to multilevel relations between the different political-administrative levels [36,46]. The subject of horizontal governance seems to be addressed more in the literature on policy integration. However, the relevance of multilevel governance is also highlighted, because it allows to properly understand the functioning of policy combinations and the means and methods to improve them [2,13,46]. The participation of different government levels, in both the design and implementation phases, is key to policy integration [13,25]. Therefore, integrated strategies require hybrid processes that take into account agents both at the same levels (horizontal) and at different levels (vertical) [14]. As commented by Helen Briassoulis: “It is proposed that PI should be construed as ‘integration of policies’, referring to a process of sewing together and coordinating various policies, both over (horizontally) and across (vertically) levels of governance, modifying them appropriately if necessary, to create an interlocking, hierarchical, loosely-coupled, multi-level, policy system that functions harmoniously in unity.” [39] (p.13).

Furthermore, in addition to horizontal and vertical governance, the internal organization of administrations plays a significant role in ensuring that integrated strategies are managed effectively. That is why a third type of governance—internal governance—is included. It refers to the coordination between the departments and administrative bodies themselves involved in the strategy.

Thus, integrated strategies should propose “new governance arrangements” when seeking solutions to complex policy problems that encompass multiple sectors or subsystems [12]. Participation, within the design process, is a key element, not only because of the legitimacy it brings to the process itself, but because it can generate new information that may not be detected in formal analyses; in this way, fostering collaborative links between the policy’s different agents can make the programs more effective [40]. As concluded in a number of the reviewed studies, an integration challenge arises when complex social issues are addressed through traditional means of policymaking [11]. Therefore, in hierarchical governance systems, the existence of subsystems with relatively stable actors and different interests and perceptions of specific problems hinders a true policy integration. It is important, therefore, to make such adjustments according to specific governance contexts [40]. A lack of appropriate incentives or rewards specific to each policy domain, and the absence of a joint budget are other factors that may undermine the potential to collaborate [8,11] or the participation of the sector or subsystem in the management of the cross-cutting problem [2].
Figure 1 shows, in summary form, the dimensions identified in the design of the integrated strategies, including the elements affected (problems, objectives, actions and actors).

As a result, despite debates around the constitutive dimensions of integrated strategies and their definition, it should be noted that the strategies listed in Table 1 are included at least. The first is comprehensiveness: this term refers to a holistic and shared vision of the complex problems leading to the integrated strategy by the different policy sectors involved. Second, we refer to integration as the fact that the objectives of the various sectors are congruent and that the tools advanced to achieve them are consistent among themselves. Third, governance is understood as the necessary coordination and collaboration between the actors of the different sectors concerned, whether horizontal, vertical, or internal.

Table 1. Dimensions of integrality in the design of integrated strategies.

| Dimension       | Definition                                                                 | References                                                                 |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| COMPREHENSIVENESS | • Holistic/integrated definition of problems.                              | Rayner and Howlett (2009); Carey and Crammond (2015); Candel and Briesbrock (2016); Rogge and Reichardt (2016); Cejudo and Michel (2017). |
| INTEGRATION     | • Congruence between the objectives of the different subsystems/policy sectors. | Briassoulis (2004); Rayner and Howlett (2009); Cey and Crammond (2015); Candel and Briesbrock (2016); Rogge and Reichardt (2016); Tosun and Lang (2017); Cejudo and Michel (2017) Lenschow et al. (2018); Lieu et al. (2018) |
| GOVERNANCE      | • Collaboration and coordination between actors: vertical, horizontal, and internal. | Briassoulis (2004); Rayner and Howlett (2009); Carey and Crammond (2015); Howlett et al. (2017); Candel and Briesbrock (2016) |

Source: elaborated by the authors.

The conducted review, as well as the three defined dimensions, brought about three ideas—or hypotheses—regarding the integrality of urban policies. First, integrated strategies arise from a deliberative and intentional process. Nevertheless, even if the initiatives are intentionally planned in an integrated manner, one should not assume that this integration is systematically reflected in their specific design [42]. Indeed, the starting point is each sector’s pre-existing relative complexity, which is meant to be integrated according to different local contexts.
Second, policy integration is usually a gradual process [47]. In this way, one would expect learning effects to be produced at different points in time during the strategy’s ongoing implementation.

Third, policy integration is a multidimensional process. The dimensions identified in the urban initiative designs therefore progress independently, resulting in their uneven development [47].

3. Methodology: Cases, Variables, and Analysis

This section presents the research strategy that was used to analyze the extent of integrality present in the design of 64 projects developed within the framework of the URBAN and URBANA programs. The latter offer a clear example of policy integration in the specific case of the initiatives fostered by the EU developed in Spain. To begin with, however, we briefly present the main features of integrated strategies found in the urban initiatives promoted by the European Union.

3.1. The Integrated Strategy in the European Union’s Urban Initiatives: The Case of Spain

The EU chose to implement integrated strategies in urban policies ever since the first initiatives in the 1990s. It has favored an innovative approach to intersectoral urban policies in member countries through a range of programs. This experience was reflected in the so-called Urban Acquis [34], which highlights integrality as a key element of design [30]. The Urban Acquis defines the main features of the EU’s integrated urban development, consisting of objectives that cut across different public policy sectors (physical space, economic development, social inclusion, environment, and governance), the development of multilevel governance processes for the design, implementation, and evaluation, as well as an active involvement of socioeconomic agents in each phase. The idea of “integrated urban development” has been developed based on these principles as a way of mainstreaming the EU-promoted urban initiatives [48]. These initiatives seek to encourage sustainable urban development and have led many countries to introduce this integrated approach, as well as a new participatory and multilevel work methodology across approximately 200 cities in Europe between 1994 and 2013 [34]. Due to the complexity of the problems proper to territorial dynamics, integration is a key factor in territorial planning and sustainable development [1].

For the EU, the integrated approach has become an essential tool to face the major challenges faced by European cities today. Integrality is at the heart of area-based interventions, both within the specific framework of the Urban Agenda and within the more general framework of the European Union’s Cohesion Policy. In this sense, the 2010 Toledo Declaration mentions that “This implies that conceptual and operational thinking must also stem from strategies or plans with ‘integrated’—global or comprehensive—visions of the city as a whole, but optimal development will often be brought about through; territorialized actions’ (‘area-based’ approach).” [49].

In this way, the EU defines integrated sustainable urban development as one in which the various dimensions of urban life (environmental, economic, social, and cultural) are intertwined. The key to success can therefore only be achieved through an integrated approach. As a result, measures relating to urban physical renewal must be combined with those that support education, economic development, social inclusion, and environmental protection. Yet, integration also refers to the need to generate strong alliances between local citizens, civil society, industry, and various government levels. Therefore, these initiatives explicitly aim to promote integration strategies between different sectors within the framework of the same public policy and within the framework of each municipality’s local plan, if there is one.

The relations between the different public policy sectors involved in the plans must be based on a joint intervention logic or strategy that addresses causal processes, with instruments from different areas applied simultaneously [50]. A classic example in these projects is the combination of actions of an economic nature with actions aimed at im-
proving employability based on the causal logic that support for economic activity in a neighborhood facilitates the inclusion of residents in the labor market [51]. However, what has been observed in the Spanish case is that there has been a shift from a certain combination of different objectives and causal processes to a greater specialization in a specific strategy, and when strategies from different sectors have been implemented, the effects have not been as expected [52].

These policies were developed in Spain within the framework of three programs: the European Initiative URBAN I (1994–1999) and URBAN II (2000–2006), and the URBANA Initiative (2007–2013), a specific program designed at state level within the framework of the EU’s Cohesion Policy through its ERDF funds. Specifically, 29 projects were developed under the URBAN I Initiative, 10 under the URBAN II Initiative, and 46 under the URBANA Initiative. We thus have at our disposal a wide range of projects allowing to comparatively analyze the extent to which the integrated strategy has been developed under the framework of programs explicitly directed towards integration. Furthermore, the projects would make it possible to analyze whether the strategy has been implemented over time.

Within the framework of these programs, the participating municipalities have designed and developed integrated urban development projects to increase quality of life in disadvantaged urban areas, as well as to improve the design of their urban policies by promoting intersectoral collaboration between public authorities and socioeconomic agents [53]. Therefore, each municipality has elaborated a project design to be implemented. The design is included in a document that also contains the following minimum information: the diagnosis of the area of urban intervention; the project’s objectives; the actions undertaken to achieve them; the instruments and management mechanisms; and those for its evaluation. This documentation would therefore make it possible to analyze the extent to which the projects’ designs have incorporated the integrated strategy. As indicated by Howlett et al. (2014), the term “design” refers to a program’s process of formulation, but also to the product resulting from that formulation, the latter being the object of our study.

3.2. The Analysis of Integrality in the Design of Integrated Urban Development Projects: Indicators and Analysis

To analyze the projects’ integrality, we applied the methodology of the “comparative urban policy portfolios analysis” [23,54]. This methodology focuses on the analysis of the projects’ portfolios and allows the examination of different aspects related to design quality. It is in line with previous studies based on the evaluation of design quality, as well as the intervention strategy brought about by the causal processes underlying the policy tools set out to achieve the fixed objectives. In our case, the intention was to analyze the degree of the strategy’s integrality present in the design of local plans based on the theoretical contributions presented above. As already noted, although public policy integrality has been the object of considerable theoretical work, few empirical developments exist allowing for a comparative analysis.

The optimal situation for an integrated design would be one that adopts a holistic approach to the problems, congruent objectives, and consistent tools, and is based on a governance system that takes its three dimensions into account (horizontal, vertical, and internal). As argued above, the latter are the key factors to achieve an integrated policy mix model.

More specifically, we put forward a series of items that aim at operationalizing these three dimensions (Table 2). The first dimension measures whether the project diagnosis covers a holistic and shared vision, reflecting the complex, multidimensional, and multiscale nature of urban problems and pointing to the relationships between them; or, whether, on the contrary, the problems are disconnected, i.e., regarded as sectoral problems defined according to specific domains of public policy. Moreover, the second dimension considers the extent to which the design establishes complementarity and synergy relationships in order to understand how the definition of objectives and actions is integrated. One item was established for the objectives and another for the actions. Finally, with regard to the
governance dimension, we considered whether the necessary coordination between the different agents involved in the projects was planned through specific processes and bodies or not. In this case, the governance is differentiated according to whether the coordination is of an intergovernmental nature—between municipalities and other levels of government, of a horizontal nature—between public and private actors, or an internal one—between the different sectoral departments that will intervene. Therefore, our proposal does not analyze the contents of the projects in terms of challenges, objectives, or actions in different public policy sectors, but in terms of the extent to which the planning follows an integrated perspective.

Table 2. Dimensions and items to measure integrality in integrated strategy designs.

| DIMENSIONS | ITEMS |
|------------|-------|
| Comprehensiveness (shared vision of problems) | Analyses the interrelationships between the problems/needs of the diagnosis, their dependency relationships, the extent to which they influence each other. |
| Integration (congruence and consistency between objectives and actions) | Analyses the interrelationship between the project’s objectives, their dependency relationships, that is, the extent to which the achievement of some influences the achievement of others. Analyses the interrelationship between the actions, their dependency relationships, that is, the extent to which the development of some complements the development of others. |
| Governance (internal, horizontal and vertical coordination mechanisms) | Specifies how various municipal departments will participate in the project. Establishes how the project’s relationship with the social partners who will collaborate in the project’s development will be guaranteed. Establishes how the project’s relationship with other agencies and administrations will be guaranteed. |

Source: elaborated by the authors.

Each item defines an ideal situation on a spectrum spanning from a minimum to a maximum level of integrality, on a five-point Likert scale. This ideal situation refers to the existence of an optimal design, an “ideal type” which, if adopted taking into account specific environments and needs, would be most likely to produce a specific result in line with the principles of integrated EU urban development outlined above. A different issue, though a related one, is whether or not this potential is executed in practice [43]. In order content analysis, a specific protocol was designed in the form of a manual, which included, among other aspects, elements to measure the integrality of the projects in the three dimensions defined. In this codification protocol, in the form of a manual, the definition of each point of the Likert scale is included in the form of a sentence describing the situation of the project in the documentation. A team of seven people, previously trained, used an online platform to codify the projects.

A total of 64 projects were analyzed: 22 within the framework of the URBAN I and URBAN II Initiatives—which we analyzed jointly under the name URBAN—and 42 within the framework of the URBANA Initiative. Indeed, the design documents for the projects developed between 1994 and 1999 in the URBAN Initiative and one in the case of the URBANA Initiative are not available. In the case of URBAN, only those developed between 1997 and 1999 are available. Therefore, due to the lack of complete information on some of the older plans, not all plans developed in Spain under the three initiatives were codified. The two autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla were also excluded from the analysis because they represent specific situations in which municipal and regional realities overlap.

In the section that follows, we start by analyzing the level of integrality of all the projects under study, both on a global scale, including all the items, and for each separate dimension. Second, we examine whether any differences exist between the projects in the two initiatives. Since they were executed at different times, but within the framework of the same policy framework oriented towards integrality, this analysis will make it possible to know whether any learning effects occurred and whether the integrated strategy was more present in the later projects (in the URBANA initiative compared to the URBAN one). Third,
the analysis differentiated by dimensions makes it possible to show whether the integrated strategy is implemented equally in all of them or, as indicated in previous contributions, they can be developed somewhat independently. To facilitate the interpretation of the results, the original scales (1–5) were converted into the scales (0–1).

4. Analysis, Results, and Discussion

As indicated, in order to determine the level of integrality of the projects analyzed, a global measurement was developed, as an average of all the items, as well as a measurement for each dimension: comprehensiveness, integration, and governance, and of each item. The analysis of the reliability of the global scale, based on Cronbach’s alpha test, showed an acceptable level (alpha equal to 0.754).

The level of integrality of the projects’ design was generally medium–low, since the scale’s average was 0.33 on the scale (0–1). The three dimensions therefore presented low scores, although they were somewhat higher when a holistic perspective was present in the diagnosis (mean equal to 0.36) regarding the degree of integration between objectives and actions (mean equal to 0.32) and governance processes (mean equal to 0.3), although the differences between them were not so notable in fact (Figure 2).

The correlations between the items that make up the integration and governance dimensions were equal to 0.60 and 0.70, respectively.

Figure 2. Integrality in the project designs of URBAN and URBANA initiatives in Spain (1994–2013). Error bars (CI 95%). Source: elaborated by the authors.

The analysis between the two programs analyzed shows that the URBANA Initiative projects present somewhat higher values on the overall integrality scale than the URBAN Initiative projects (averages equal to 0.338 and 0.309 respectively). The main reason is the fact that the projects designed under the URBANA initiative framework present a higher level of integration of objectives and actions, as well as of governance processes. On the other hand, their diagnoses present a less holistic perspective than in the case of URBAN projects. Specifically, this dimension’s average for the URBAN and URBANA projects is equal to 0.455 and 0.316, respectively, being equal to 0.289 and 0.336 in the case of the dimension referring to integration, and equal to 0.182 and 0.361 for the governance dimension. However, only in the latter case were the differences between programs statistically significant (Table 3).
Table 3. Integrality of URBAN and URBANA projects in Spain (1994–2013).

| Mean (Std Dev) (Means (Standard Deviation). ANOVA Test) | URBAN     | URBANA    | TOTAL     | F       |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------|
| Comprehensiveness                                       | 0.455 (0.324) | 0.316 (0.303) | 0.363 (0.314) | 2.904  |
| Integration: objectives                                 | 0.273 (0.353) | 0.310 (0.307) | 0.297 (0.321) | 0.187  |
| Integration: actions                                    | 0.307 (0.344) | 0.363 (0.283) | 0.344 (0.304) | 0.492  |
| Integration (total)                                     | 0.289 (0.341) | 0.336 (0.255) | 0.320 (0.286) | 0.379  |
| Governance: internal                                    | 0.159 (0.182) | 0.339 (0.326) | 0.277 (0.296) | 5.760 * |
| Governance: horizontal                                  | 0.227 (0.277) | 0.375 (0.300) | 0.324 (0.298) | 3.707  |
| Governance: vertical                                    | 0.159 (0.212) | 0.369 (0.277) | 0.297 (0.274) | 9.629 **|
| Governance (total)                                      | 0.182 (0.177) | 0.361 (0.261) | 0.299 (0.249) | 8.344 **|
| Integrality: global scale                               | 0.309 (0.183) | 0.338 (0.194) | 0.328 (0.189) | 0.332  |

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.005; ***p < 0.001. Number of cases: URBAN = 22; URBANA = 42, total = 64.

The analysis of each item shows that the aspect that presents the greatest difference between the two programs is vertical governance, moving from 0.159 in the case of the URBAN program to 0.369 in the case of the URBANA program. Internal governance comes next, which, starting with the same score, reaches 0.339 in the URBANA program. Finally, horizontal governance, which, starting from a higher value (0.227), reached a score of 0.375. In the case of the integration dimension items, the differences between the two programs were greater with respect to the consistency between instruments than regarding the congruence between objectives. In both programs, the first aspect achieved a higher score, going from an average score of 0.307 in the URBAN program to a score equal to 0.363 in urban initiatives (Table 3).

In this regard, we can consider that the progress towards integration in the governance dimension could be due to the policy domains included in both initiatives. Indeed, it has been shown that some initiatives can promote hybrid governance processes when they combine different urban policy sectors, promoting the mobilization and coordination of their habitual actors. This is the case, for example, of the regeneration of historic town centers [55].

All dimensions play a part in the success of a policy integration experience, but the fact that these policies are developed at a multilevel political system, in which local, regional, national, and community competences intersect, makes vertical governance even more important. Howlett et al. (2017), for example, conducted two case studies to analyze the role of vertical and horizontal governance in policy integration. These authors noted that in the case of integrated coastal area management in Europe, despite good intentions, the implementation of the integrated approach failed to go beyond the sectoral management of ocean resources, because the significance of intergovernmental agreements was overlooked. The second case study focused on the management of marine protected areas in Australia. Multilevel governance agreements were drawn up, and public participation was fostered via community consultations and the cooperation of non-state or private actors, leading to successful integrated management. In this way, they conclude that “the institutional framework developed in the policy design stage is a crucial predictor of success or failure in multilevel, multi-sectoral integrated governance areas” [13]. As highlighted by Candel and Briesbroek (2016), it is not only necessary to ensure the participation of those affected, as problems may also arise when implementing integrated strategies due to the lack of cooperation between government levels, which makes it difficult to improve results. In their study of policy integration in the biofuels sector in the United Kingdom, Lieu et al. (2018), concluded that theoretical coherence is not always followed by coherence in practice. Indeed, as stakeholders are not habitually consulted, their responses are unexpected. Hence, the authors suggest that these stakeholders be consulted first in order to promote policy coherence in practice.
Ours results coincide with other studies on integrality in the case of other policies, according to which the major problems of integral experiences lie in a lack of congruence between the objectives and an absence of consistency between the actions of different subsystems or policy sectors that are to be integrated [3,12]. Rayner and Howlett (2009), based on case studies on integrated land management in four Canadian provinces, highlight the problem of potentially incoherent objectives as a major obstacle to the success of these policies. Cejudo and Michel (2017), for their part, identified medium degrees of coherence among some of the programs defined in the “Cruzada Nacional contra el Hambre” (the “National Crusade against Hunger”), a strategy undertaken by the Mexican Federal Government in 2013. Indeed, they found that the programs—understood as instruments—were complementary, but they were not oriented towards solving a common problem.

It seems, therefore, that some learning took place regarding the integrated design of urban policies in the URBANA project designs (2007–2013), which followed those of the URBAN Initiative (1994–2006). The improvement, however, was mainly linked to the design of governance processes. The Network of Urban Initiatives—or RIU, by its Spanish acronym—was created by the Spanish Government to fulfil a mission of coordination in the field of urban development and community funds over the 2007–2013 period. It was composed of the bodies responsible for urban policies at different hierarchical levels: the General Administration of the State and the Autonomous Communities, the Federation of Municipalities and Provinces, and representatives of city councils. It seems that the RIU may have contributed to this improvement. The Network has been providing information and instruments for designing and evaluating integrated urban development initiatives promoted by the EU in Spain (https://www.rediniciativasurbanas.es/ (accessed on 9 August 2021)).

Analyses that included other dimensions relating to the design’s quality, such as clear definitions of the objectives and actions, or the coherence between problems, objectives, and actions, did not reveal many differences either between the programs. The results, however, were somewhat more favorable in the case of the URBANA Initiative [23]. In this way, no major differences were found that would point to a significant progress towards policy integration. Rather, the differences between URBAN and URBANA support the idea of policy integration as a gradual and dynamic process, which unfolds over time and in which the integration dimensions do not evolve in a coordinated way. As stated by Candel and Biesbroeck (2016, p: 215), “In fact, virtually all integration processes will show some differentiation in the advancing of dimensions, which may increase or decrease at various paces and even in opposite directions”. Integration experiences reveal that the process is nonlinear and that its dimensions can progress at different rates, shedding light on the multilayered and asynchronous nature of these processes [2,3]. Therefore, although a global scale can be used to understand the degree of integrality of the local plans, each dimension must be taken into account without assuming that they are at the same level, as shown by the analyses.

In this regard, Candel and Biesbroeck (2016) indicate that these situations may occur because certain aspects are easier to change than others: for example, it is easier to change instruments than paradigms or belief systems. Moreover, as these authors affirm, these processes must consider the possibility of frictions between agents, the shifting of ideas, the reduction of governance agreements, fatigue, or the replacement of existing paradigms, and even the change of governments’ political color.

In the case of the EU energy policy, Kurze and Lenschow (2018) observed how a discursive change in the problem’s definition contributed to a change in horizontal policy coherence. Thus, a shift took place from a general environmental perspective, based on sustainability—assuming the complexity of political problems and advancing a global definition of the problem with integral solutions—to a narrower, “single problem” approach. The latter was directed towards climate change and the reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, leading to a repositioning towards sectoral policies. As the authors
commented, these changes unfolded in subtle ways and reveal certain conflicts of interest or institutional barriers to policy coherence [32].

In addition, the literature indicates some factors that may explain the difficulties in developing integrated strategies—although this question goes beyond the scope of the present this work. These factors include, for example, conflicts of interest [32,44], the opposition of some key players who wish to maintain their status quo [12], a lack of a supportive architecture, capable of guiding change and decentralized control [11,14], or the absence of strong inclusive leadership as well as clear political commitment [4]. These matters undoubtedly need to be examined in order to explain the extent of the integrated strategy in urban policies promoted by the European Union, in addition to the aspects related to design, analyzed in this study.

In this sense, it would be interesting to identify the possible variables that may explain the differences found between the URBAN and URBANA programs. Such variations include, for example, the greater or lesser number of sectors involved—understood as the greater or lesser number of objectives, policies, and levels of government and sectors involved in design [56]—or whether or not a support architecture exists, either through local administration units themselves or through external advice [11,14]. Another variable may be that relating to contextual factors. Indeed, the general EU-promoted framework is confronted with a variety of institutional, social, and political contexts, which may hinder (or not) a true common strategy towards integration in urban policies [11].

Comparative literature on planning models usually distinguishes four main types: “urban planning”, “land use planning”, “regional economic planning”, and “comprehensive–integral planning” [57,58]. The urban planning model that has prevailed in Spain is urban planning, more oriented to architectural and urbanistic aspects, in the design of the urban environment and the control of its growth through regulations on land use in order to establish the activities or functions to be developed (housing, services, industrial ...). To a large extent, this is the most classic approach to urban policies and the one from which the design of new urban policies usually “starts” [59], as has occurred in Spain.

Thus, there is a trend towards more comprehensive models (comprehensive integral planning) which show greater concern for the location and impact of infrastructure and facilities, the problems of social exclusion and urban inequalities, and the rebalancing between different urban spaces, as well as the relationships and roles of rural and urban areas in metropolitan environments. In many cases, this shift is the result of the requirements demanded by international and European programs, such as the URBAN and URBANA initiatives analyzed in this paper. This change from traditional planning to strategic planning is linked to what some authors call a repoliticization of the local sphere, a transition from administration to local government since the 1990s, which was favored by the local Agenda 21, which also contributed to the introduction of the strategic methodology [60] and which is currently promoted by strategies such as the SDGs, contained in the United Nations Agenda 2030, configuring a new “policy framework” characterized by comprehensive and sustainable urban development.

However, and in light of our results, this new reality could be causing in local governments in Spain, with a long tradition in urban planning, a situation of “administrative gap”, which arises when trying to integrate different policy areas, coordinating and cohesively developing multisectoral policies involving multiple actors with competing interests [61].

In the case analyzed here, a lower degree of integrality was also observed in the dimension that addressed the projects’ problems or challenges, and this may also be a reflection of conflicts of interest or belief systems that are difficult to change. However, despite this, the absence of correlation with integration changes, or specifically with governance, can be explained by the procedural dynamics of integrated strategies, which develop asynchronously and independently of their dimensions [2]. According to our analyses, progress has been made in the urban policies promoted by the EU in Spain towards a more integrated design, although there are differences according to the three dimensions. Thus, in line with the argument of Candel and Biesbroeck (2016), our results
would show/confirm the hypothesis that the dimensions unfold separately, and, in the case under study, that a shift towards more integrated governance processes has not brought about added integrality regarding comprehensiveness in the problem definitions.

5. Conclusions

With respect to our starting hypothesis, although the design begins with an integrated approach, as promoted by the EU, its implementation in Spain does not seem to reflect high levels of project integrality. We can thus conclude that these integrated strategies are more present in the discourse than in the reality [2]. “It is not about planning (or, worse still, assuming) coherent public policies, but about designing them” (translation of Cejudo and Michel, 2016, p: 21). It is therefore necessary to examine the possible incompatibilities of existing and new standards, ideas, objectives, and instruments in the stages of elaboration and formulation of policies. This will avoid disappointments after having placed high hopes on integrated strategies to solve today’s complex political problems [12]. However, consultative and participatory activities leading up to the design are also necessary, as well as the interactions required to ensure that society and stakeholders support the policies’ objectives and development, a key feature of modern governance [27,45].

One objective of this work was to propose a conceptual framework and a system to measure integrality in urban policy design based on the theory existing to date on integrated strategies in public policy design. As mentioned, proposals have been advanced on how to analyze the dimensions and principle of integrality [2,36]. Less progress has been made, however, on measurement systems that would allow performing comparative analyses [17,21].

Starting from this premise, we defined three basic dimensions (comprehensiveness, integration, and governance) and we proposed a measurement system that enables a comparative analysis of the integrality of urban project designs in the framework of integrated and sustainable urban development contemplated by the New Urban Agenda [28] or the EU’s Urban Agenda [29]. The system was applied to integrated urban development projects developed in Spain within the framework of initiatives promoted by the EU between 1994 and 2013. The results showed that, generally, the scope of the integrated strategy was limited and different for each dimension. The degree of integrality was, nonetheless, greater in more recently designed projects (URBANA), especially in the dimension of governance.

These analyses corroborate that, as indicated in the theoretical proposals and previous analyses of other public policy domains, applying an integrated strategy remains a major challenge compared to traditional sectoral action. Moreover, integrality needs to be understood and analyzed according to its different dimensions, because each dimension unfolds at a different pace [2].

Our design analysis was applied to the case of policies explicitly oriented towards promoting an integrated strategy. We provided some keys and tools allowing to comparatively analyze an aspect that largely determines the subsequent implantation of the integrated strategy, i.e., the achievement of the project’s objectives. Designing public policies is a complex process and many policies fail due to poor design. Therefore, it is essential to focus our attention on this issue [62] and even more so in the case of strategies that aim to integrate objectives, tools, and actors coming from different sectors and public policy levels.

Our proposal is based on the guidelines of the new urban policy framework—exemplified by the new Urban Agenda as a general indicative framework. It addressed the main dimensions of the integrated strategy and defined a number of indicators. Therefore, the proposal provides an evaluation system that allows to measure, in a systematized and comparative way, the integrality of urban project designs within this framework of integrated and sustainable urban development.

The proposal can naturally be improved by including further indicators in each dimension to broaden the measurement. In addition, as shown in other studies, the integrated strategy analysis could focus on each aspect under study in more detail through case studies. Here, we sought to advance a proposal that allows conducting an extensive
comparative analysis between local plans and programs. Yet, the system can also be of use to agents who design urban development projects to develop self-evaluation exercises, or to analysts who study these types of public policy, or to policymakers within the framework of these types of initiatives.

The results are in line with those of other studies conducted in other public policy domains, thus reflecting the need to pursue the systematic and comparative analysis of integrated strategies generally, and in the case of urban policies in particular. Indeed, the strategy seems to represent a major policy orientation according to international organization guidelines. In any event, it would be of notable interest to pursue the research on the extent of integration and the mechanisms of (dis)integration [2] in European urban policies.

Finally, it would be of interest to further research the links between studies on policy integration and the literature on policy evaluation [8]. In this way, the tool presented in this article could contribute to improving the evaluability of the integrated strategies that should be set out in the design itself. Furthermore, in addition to the traditional criteria of rationality and coherence [63], these essential criteria must also be taken into account in the design, leading to the greater effectiveness and efficiency of the integrated strategies such as those identified in this work: comprehensiveness, congruence, consistency, and governance.

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Notes

1. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/themes/urban-development/ (accessed on 9 August 2021)
2. The correlations between the items that make up the integration and governance dimensions were equal to 0.60 and 0.70, respectively.

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