

URBACT Annual Conference Stockholm

November 24th and 25th 2009

Workshop 6: Quality of life in disadvantaged neighbourhoods

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The workshop focused on the integration of different aspects that can contribute towards promoting quality of life in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The intention was to illustrate how housing, health employment and regeneration can fit together to strengthen community cohesion and create high quality neighbourhoods.

Angèle Lafaye, Nantes Métropole (FR), Partner SUITE, highlighted in her input the importance of an integrated approach to improve the quality of life in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. This includes the development of an appropriate mix of housing and of more attractive public space, the upgrading of commercial centres, improved transportation and manifold social activities fostering support and participation. These procedures and results can be seen in Malakoff, Nantes – a neighbourhood built at the end of the 1960's. These renovation activities also contribute to bettering the image of the neighbourhood, which is also crucial for quality of life.

Michele Marra, Managing Authority Region of Piemonte (IT), associated with Turin, Lead Partner of Building Healthy Communities – emphasized the importance of proximal determinants in improving health. According to the American Model lifestyle and health behavior are most significantly responsible (50%) for peoples' health; access to care, genetics and environmental influences together make up the rest. Each policy affects health, in particular actions involving socioeconomic factors and the environment. But all health policies need some rules: all the actions should be coherent and intersectional, evaluated, systematic, participated, appropriate and based on the context.

Teodora Tsanova, European Programmes and Projects Directorate, City of Sofia (BG), Partner in CONET described the dimensions of cohesion in the Krasna Poliana district, a large housing estate in the broad centre, a rather mixed area, with high rise buildings, bungalows and makeshift housing. The population of the region is about 65 000 inhabitants, among them 35 000 of the Roma population. About 90% of the Roma population has lived for years in the so called "Faculteta" living area - 90% of this population is unemployed. The goals within CoNet are to strengthen social inclusion by proper education, vocational training and an information society, short-courses qualification, parent and childrens' learning, cultural identity, sport and leisure activities.

Is social mixity a concrete solution for social cohesion? Main result of the discussion on this question was:

- municipalities have to create adequate services and facilities, quality of live is important.
- when private investors build new houses, the municipality must use the planning instruments to ensure basic facilities.
- people must have the possibility to leave a segregated area.

The same thing does not work for every place: different people and different situations need different solutions. Sometimes efforts to enlarge mixity lead to gentrification or to social engineering, but this also depends on the scale of intervention. Living close together doesn't necessarily mean communication. Sometimes social homogeneity creates a harbour; people have their networks. Apart from that, in many deprived areas the population is very mixed. Working with Roma or Turkish people or with refugees is very different. Social cohesion cannot be achieved by social engineering. The functionalistic way of planning creates a lot of problems. Also very important is the informal cohesion between people - how people support and help each other on their own.

The group, who worked on health noticed: Health promotion is an important target in policies addressing disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Strategies are:

- Activate citizens into physical activity
- give influence and build capability to improve mental health
- find indicators to validate policies
- use the intercultural competence available in disadvantaged neighbourhoods
- promote participation, empathy and empowerment
- create „linked support points“ (example: Malmö)

Special challenges are that drug abuse and depression seem to affect disadvantaged neighbourhoods more. What can be done on an EU level? Support (finance) demand driven local projects.

How to ameliorate a neighborhood without changing/evicting the people? This question was discussed by the housing working group and the answers are:

- Increase attractiveness! (mixed tenure)
- Increase public space → new image... → market
- Empowerment / participation is crucial
- Social mix doesn't solve problems by itself, must be tailored, monitored, discussed with community
- If demolition, do it quickly!
- 'Temporariness' – short term action, immediate visibility!
- E.G. a new public area! ('picnics'), give hope and future!
- Reflect the life cycle of residents!
- Mix within the street (the space of interaction)
- At least use social infrastructure (schools, sport clubs..) for interaction of groups of population
- Regulation → percentages of affordable (social) housing (20,30%) can work (but depends on market situation), attention: investors try to avoid
- Work on the image!

Unemployment and the lack of jobs is the basic problem. How to also develop jobs for immigrants, this is the basic challenge which we need to work on a lot more. This was highlighted by Paul Lindquist, Mayor of Lidingö (SE), Partner Building Healthy Communities, in his respondent input at the end of the workshop.