

# NODUS

## Linking Urban Renewal and Regional Spatial Planning

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**The URBACT II NODUS Working Group is already in an advanced stage of preparing its end-reporting of the project exchange process for 2010. The culmination of network activity has been built on the confrontation of partner experiences with an “ideal” model described below. In this way the orientation of network activity has been influenced by intermediate conclusions based on reviewing partner contexts, needs and expectations. Some interesting mid-term reflections are included in this paper which set the scene for a final round-up of project findings which we can expect later in the year.**

The main topic of NODUS is to explore the link between (regional) strategic/spatial planning and area based regeneration. As a framework for the comparative work a four stage approach has been developed, which has been approved by all project partners. This framework includes all the steps (stages) which are needed to establish a strategically controlled urban regeneration system with area-based interventions. In this sense the four stage framework could be considered as an “ideal” approach to link regional planning and urban renewal.

The NODUS work contains the following four stages:

1. multi-link and potentially multi-level government cooperation model for linking strategic planning and renewal policies (stage 1)
2. methods to identify and select deprived areas, dependent on the aims of urban renewal and the strategic plan towards renewal (stage 2)
3. possible approaches to achieve the social goal (sectoral and area-based policies), including the content of integrated urban renewal activities (stage 3).
4. evaluating the outcomes on a regional level to achieve territorial balance and greater effects for the whole area (stage 4).

The partners (3 regions and 4 cities) of the NODUS network agreed to address in general all of the four stages of the approach. However, they have not been obliged to deal with all four stages in complete detail, i.e. each partner can depict some of the stages, which are considered the most relevant/interesting for the partner. The content of the Local Action Plan and the composition of the Local Support Group should mirror the priorities of the partner, i.e. they should correspond to the requirements of those stages which are accorded the highest attention by the partner.

The following pages give some overview of progress made and conclusions drawn from the first two of the four stages.

# I INTEGRATED, STRATEGIC URBAN RENEWAL PROGRAMMES

## I. 1. The limits to area-based interventions and the new generation of programmes

Urban renewal policies underwent significant changes in Europe in the last decades. With strong simplifications the following periods can be distinguished:

- 1970s: extensive physical interventions, 'rough urban renewal'
- 1980s: efforts to keep the original population in place with 'gentle urban renewal'
- 1990s: combining physical, economic and social interventions, 'integrated urban renewal'

The last decade brought heated debates about the understanding of the problems of deteriorated neighbourhoods and about the conceptualization of the failures of public interventions over the years.

The introduction of area-based urban renewal policies was a very important step, 10-15 years ago, enabling the integration of physical, economic and social interventions within the selected neighbourhood. There are, however, growing external effects of such policies, such as displacing problems between different neighbourhoods; and the fact that selecting only areas with the most severe problems imply that areas only slightly better off do not receive any attention at all.

It is a very difficult task to overcome these "area effects". What can be the potential methods to handle these problems, which go beyond 'integrated urban renewal'? Earlier it was a common understanding that the problems of deteriorated neighbourhoods are caused by the bad physical characteristics of the places and the disadvantageous composition of the residents. Claude Jacquier (see e.g. Jacquier, 2008) was one of the first to call attention to the role of the crisis of local institutions and their incapacity to regulate the interactions between place (environment), people (social) and institutions (economic and political). According to Jacquier an integrated programme for sustainable urban development has to manage and improve the interactions between all three components, in order to give the deprived areas a chance to become 'normal' parts of the settlement pattern. From this statement it follows that deteriorated neighbourhoods need complex interventions which have to cover not only physical and social issues but the whole range of planning and governance issues, and taking into account the dependent relationship between strategic, city-wide objectives and targeted localised action .

Thus the 'new generation' of integrated, strategic urban renewal programmes, to be suggested by NODUS, aims at improving deprived areas through complex and interlinked multi-sectoral interventions. The novelty of this approach compared to the previous ones is the emphasis on cooperation on different levels: horizontal (among neighbouring municipalities, among districts of the city), vertical (among different layers of the government structure) and transversal (among policy areas and among different types of planning). Such an approach combines spatial/strategic planning with urban renewal and allows for supra-local level planning. If external effects across the city boarder necessitate it, the integrated approach should be extended to the city-region level, while areas for intervention should be selected within this broader perspective. Furthermore NGOs and population groups should be involved in the area programmes and the outcomes should be monitored. This means a 'second integration': local area based actions become integral parts of larger scale, regional development strategies. These 'next generation' integrated policies will also enable the more sophisticated and controlled use of social mix ideas in urban renewal.

## I. 2. Supra-local urban renewal planning and administrative structures

In order to understand the present circumstance, NODUS partners were requested to present their planning systems and multi-level government structures.

In all cases the main responsibility with urban renewal lies with the local municipality.

Regarding the higher level framework for urban renewal there is a sharp split between the experience presented by partners from the “old” and the “new” member states. In the case of Catalunya, Emilia-Romagna and Amsterdam there are upper-level programmes existing for urban renewal in which municipalities may participate, either on a competitive basis (Cat, E-R) or on contract basis for areas assigned by the national programme (Amsterdam).

On the other hand, in the case of Mazovje, Katowice, Alba Iulia and Dobrich no such upper-level programmes exist. This is a special consequence of the transition from socialist into capitalist society: the administrative middle tiers (counties, etc), which were politically very powerful in the socialist system, have been terminated, or made very weak, terminating all their redistributive functions. In order to satisfy EU accession criteria NUTS2 regions have been created in each of the new member states, which are, however, also weak in the sense that their tasks are limited to EU programming and their leadership is delegated, not directly elected (except for the Polish regions).

Another potential explanation for the difference between the two groups of NODUS partners can be found in the difference in their development period. Partners belonging to the second group come from countries where the main tasks are to finish the construction of basic infrastructure (roads, rails, etc) and accelerate economic development. For this reason much less attention is paid to deteriorated areas and urban renewal than in the cities and regions of the old member states.

### **I. 3. The importance of planning and multi-level government**

EU accession and the introduction of the Structural Funds system have brought substantial changes in the case of the new member states. The NUTS2 regions, in the process of the allocation of Structural Funds, require that the municipalities prepare overarching programmes. This “return of planning” to the post-socialist countries can be the starting point for a future development of new multi-level government systems for urban renewal. The first traces of such a system can already be seen in the case of Mazovje: the Regional Operational Programme contains the possibility for integrated revitalization of specific areas.

The experience of NODUS partners show that the ensuring of some money at regional level for integrated local area-based interventions is an important step towards a multi-level government system. However, this is not enough, there is also a need to create professional capacity at the supra-local (e.g. regional) level, which is able to perform all the stages NODUS is dealing with: establishing the framework for the territorial programme on urban renewal, laying down the main policy aims, determining the methods of how the most deteriorated areas can be selected (according to the policy aims), selecting the areas for interventions, helping the development of local renewal programmes and controlling their execution, finally monitoring the results from the perspective of the whole area (region).

NODUS partners from the old member states already have many experiences in such multi-level government programmes. However, even in their cases a lot of special problems emerge. Typical problems are the following: “too many layers” (Catalunya), a somewhat unclear allocation of roles between the layers (Emilia Romagna), or not optimal territorial coverage of the layers (Amsterdam).

The problems of the administrative levels can partly be handled through informal processes, coalitions, governance methods. One type of such informal processes refers to procedures, tools (planning conferences, territorial agreements), while another type is the setting up of alternative territorial groupings.

On the question of how to achieve better multi-level governance cooperation, very different answers were given. Mazovje suggests to create a Regional Committee for Regeneration to perform advisory, coordination, and supervision functions. Amsterdam does not see it as necessary to create multi-level governance cooperation in the issue of area-based urban renewal. Catalunya suggests important improvements (spatial planning control) to its already existing regional level programme in order to handle the weaknesses. Emilia-Romagna intends to improve the programme by introducing more integrated interventions into the selected neighbourhoods, based on participatory project design processes and other innovative planning tools.

## II IDENTIFICATION AND SELECTION OF DEPRIVED AREAS

Within the context illustrated by partners in the previous chapter, one of the main challenges which the NODUS project aims to address is encouraging political representatives, spatial planners and technicians involved in urban regeneration affairs to start to think over the real factors which determine in every city or region, what can be considered a deprived area and to identify it within a broader area.

The identification of deprived areas consists not only on their physical delimitation in every specific city or region but, overall, on the debate on the mechanisms and the criteria to identify these areas and the capacity of local and regional administrations to detect them.

### II. 1. Identification and selection

A preliminary distinction must be made when talking about acting on deprived urban areas in need of regeneration. The process of regeneration begins with a double requirement consisting of, first, the identification of the deprived areas and, second, the selection of those that will be finally object of a specific regeneration project.

While identification is the process through which information about the characteristics of the different urban areas is gathered, treated and, finally, presented in comparative results, selection involves basically the final decision whereby, according to certain criteria, specific areas are prioritised for programmed intervention.

It can be assumed that urban regeneration projects will be carried out on those areas with most need and considerable information will be needed to identify the existing conditions of the areas and to detect the possible symptoms of deprivation. However, it is also clear that final selection of these deprived areas for action will depend on the objectives and priorities of political instances responsible and in charge of these programmes, which in turn will reflect their ideology or their political commitments.

Thus, the existence of deprivation is the fundamental motivation to act upon an area. But it is not the only one. It may happen that the areas finally included in a regeneration programme are not the most deprived in the city or in the region, while those that most need this inclusion are set aside in another considerational context.

There are several reasons that explain this apparent incongruity:

- The existence of elements which can potentially multiply the effects of the intervention. Some physical, social or economic elements existing in a specific area can multiply the effect of an intervention through optimizing the efficiency of the supplied resources. This is the case of, for example, an active community willing to take the responsibility of undertaking social programmes in its neighbourhood. It is clear that investment in this area will have a more efficient return than in an area where the local activity is traditionally resistant to any institutional support. Making the most of the investment is a powerful reason to select one area instead of another.
- The existence of other projects or programmes benefiting the area. Similar to the previous case, the existence of a programme carried out by another administration is a key factor to multiply the effects of an intervention.
- Co-financing with private partners (or other). In the same way, private investment addressed to the improvement of deprived areas (via real estate, via setting up of new businesses, etc) can not just multiply but also provide the necessary complement to public intervention.
- Good projects for the area. The interest in 'districts with projects, not districts with problems', which characterizes the Catalan Urban Regeneration Programme, represents a totally different conception of urban regeneration practice. It assumes it as

possible that some highly deprived areas are not included in the regeneration programme. But, on the other hand, it guarantees that the public investment in that area is fully squeezed. And, also, it stimulates all the cities and towns to start to think by themselves about possible solutions for their problems.

- Supra-local equity. The conception of territorial balance in a regional programme will always differ from that at a local level. In this regard, a local concentration of deprivation might lead to a selection of some of the deprived districts, while some others cannot be included because of the necessary consideration of other areas around the region.

Political criteria and priorities play here a key role, as they will finally decide where to act in function of the condition of the different areas, but also taking these other elements into consideration. The link between regional spatial planning and urban regeneration must take this role into account, as it may represent an important nuance in terms of the spatial evidence to such an extent that it can even result in altering the initial conclusions.

## II.2. The variables that define deprivation

While it is recognised that the selection of areas in which to act is a highly subjective practice, identification of deprived areas can neither be considered as totally neutral. Thus, definition of urban deprivation itself also depends, to a great extent, on the objectives and priorities of those who are politically responsible. This is the reason why there is not a common agreement on the concept of urban deprivation. And this also explains the difficulty of trying to define a single, universal, and commonly accepted list of variables which determine it.

However, and as far as this is a technical document, the NODUS network has set itself the task of trying to propose as many variables which can be considered important when attempting to identify deprived areas as possible candidates for regeneration. This selection does not aim to provide the definitive list of important elements related to urban deprivation, neither to decide how universally important each of these elements should be considered. There are many documents proposing a high number of different variables which could be taken into account.

The objective of the elaboration of this list was determined by three factors:

- To be used as a basis for the development of a methodology in the subsequent sections.
- To become a first document that can be adapted (enhanced, reduced, modified) by any responsible actor involved in urban regeneration policies according to their own particular situation and priorities. In this regard, it is considered advisable that agents responsible for urban regeneration policies know as much as possible about the real conditions of their urban areas, independently of their interests and priorities, since this knowledge can, eventually, modify the pre-fixed priorities. It can also lead to identification of other areas which might require special attention, whether or not they are to be finally included in the programme.
- And, overall, to be used as an 'excuse' to start to reflect, reconsider and to discuss about the real factors which determine in every case what can be considered a deprived area.

Taking these premises into consideration, the Nodus Working Group has started a four-step process in order to gather as many variables of great importance as possible when trying to identify deprived areas:

- All partners have been asked to propose those elements which, in their opinion, should be taken into consideration when trying to identify deprived areas. This contribution was made both directly by the partners and through the gathering of opinions expressed by the members of their Local Support Groups;
- A synthetic list was elaborated gathering all the answers and reiterative items were removed;
- The indicators (elements) were grouped into thematic fields (such as "Housing and buildings, Public Space, etc) and these fields into three main domains (Social, Economic and Environmental):

- All partners were asked to give a weight to every element (3: Very important; 2: Important; 1: Somehow important; 0: Not important), as well as to every field and every domain.

As a result, a list of 95 variables has been finally obtained. Although the Nodus Working Group concluded that there is not a pre-fixed list of variables that should be taken into account when trying to identify deprived areas, as each city/region has both a different situation and interests - it is advisable to consider some variables selected from, at least, the following domains and, within these domains, from the following fields:

- Economic: Quantitative (number of active premises, etc.) and qualitative (type of activities, etc.)
- Social: Education, economic capacity, poverty/marginalization, safety/security, living conditions...
- Environmental: Housing/buildings, public space, land use, transport and accessibility, services and equipments.

In any case, the use of a minimum of representative variables is advisable.

### **II.3. Using indicators as a way of facilitating identification**

Taking into account many or just a few of these elements, the first step to use them as a tool for the identification of deprived areas is to turn them into indicators. Indicators are here considered as the quantitative expression of these elements and, therefore, represent the mechanisms that allow measurement and comparison among different spatial units.

The following section considers the characteristics these indicators must have, but also, the difficulties arising when trying to collect them and, in conclusion, the possibilities to overcome these obstacles.

#### **II.2.1. Characteristics of the indicators**

To be considered as suitable for the identification of deprived areas, the indicator giving information about a variable must fulfil some basic requirements:

- It must be available for the whole region;
- It must be standardized for the whole region (the source must be the same, to allow comparison between different local areas);
- It must be frequently updated (every year, every five years...);
- It must be referred to the smallest areas (always smaller than the whole municipality);
- It must be related to urban deprivation elements.

As it will be apparent in the next sections, most cities and regions find important difficulties when trying to fulfil these requirements. But, more important than their current situation, the direction that efforts should follow in order to achieve these goals is the real protagonist of this section.

#### **II.2.2. Availability of statistical data**

Statistical data has been initially considered the first source to take into account for the identification of the characteristics of urban areas.

As a first step, every city and region answered a questionnaire about the availability of statistical data for the selected variables. They were asked about the disposal of specific information for that variable (Y/N), the periodicity and the smallest spatial unit of reference. The answers revealed that few of them have at their disposal the minimum number of variables following the requirements stressed above.

The availability of statistical data will be logically very different in function of the partners, but the overall situation seems to be rather poor. Thus, on the one hand, some cities and regions, such as Amsterdam or Catalunya have access to data for many variables (specially the ones considered as most important), but they weaken in terms of periodicity and, in many cases, in the spatial unit of reference. Emilia Romagna and Katowice have also access to data for many variables and with a high frequency, but they weaken in the spatial unit of reference for almost all variables. Mazovia has access to data for most of the variables they are interested in and with a high frequency, but it weakens in the spatial unit of reference for all variables.

On the other hand, cities like Alba Iulia and Dobrich do not have access to any data at all, at least at the above mentioned five basic requirements level. This lack of information can not be seen as strange in those countries with a weak or a short existence of a regional administrative level. Thus, while the national administrative level takes bigger territorial units into consideration when producing statistical data, local authorities (or, at least, those interested in producing these data) focus on those variables based on their interest and use the quantitative units in terms of their own convenience, making it very difficult to adapt these for use at a supra-local level.

This situation does not excuse the necessity of having a proper indicators system adapted to every city or region. This is why the Nodus Working Group considers it of the utmost importance to encourage both local and regional authorities to develop their statistical services in order to be able to supply some specific data, with a determined frequency and related to small spatial units

However, and in parallel with these first steps to improve the statistical systems and to adapt them to the local necessities, the different ways that cities and regions have organised and devised solutions to overcome the lack of statistical information have become finally a very valuable contribution. They are not just approaches to an "ideal" information system designed to detect deprived areas but, in many cases, even themselves represent solid alternatives to the utilization of statistical data.

### **II.3.3. Indicators beyond statistical data**

Having observed the existing lack of statistical information required to fulfill the five essential requirements pointed out above, an alternative way to arrive at the identification of deprived areas seems obviously necessary.

With this regard, partners of the Nodus Working Group have now been asked to explain their own mechanism for the identification of deprived areas, both describing their experience (in case it already exists) or trying to work out a solution for their specific need.

The answers to this demand show how several ways, adapted to different requirements, can be found. Some of these proposals were indeed used or tested by partners (and these are more fully itemised in section II.4 ), while others simply represent examples of an approach different to that based on statistical data.

Thus, among other possibilities, the elaboration of surveys, both on specific areas or for the whole supra-local level, or the consultation of experts, were pointed out as possible ways of overcoming the already mentioned problems of using only statistical data for the identification of deprived areas.

## **II.4. The final selection of deprived areas**

As explained above, the evidence of deprivation (through statistical data as well as through other kinds of indicators) is a basic requirement but not the only one to finally select an area for the implementation of an urban regeneration project. The identification happens to be, then, a first step, but is of necessity followed by the selection, where other factors, most of them less tangible, start to play a key role.

In some cases, the previous identification through indicators has been considered of little importance or even not considered at all. In these cases, the deprived condition of the already selected areas is checked after its selection.

The experience of the cities and regions partners of Nodus, both in the identification and the selection steps is helping to discover different ways to combine indicators and other external criteria in the final selection of areas. This provides excellent examples of how cities and regions proceed in function of their own possibilities and capacities as well as their interests and priorities.

Some interesting partner perspectives, therefore, to look out for in the final documentation of the project

- ***Amsterdam: The prevalence of strategic decision***
- ***Emilia Romagna and Mazovia: Complementing indicators with strategic factors***
- ***Catalunya: Mixing statistical data with the quality of projects***
- ***Katowice: Asking experts for the identification of problems in pre-determined areas***
- ***Alba Iulia: Asking targeted working groups for the identification of problems in pre-determined areas***
- ***Dobrich: Overcoming the lack of information by designing objective-oriented indicators***

Jacquier, C. 2008: Cities and territories for urban recycling. Keynote paper for the European Council of the Ministers for Urban development conference, Marseille, 25 November 2008