



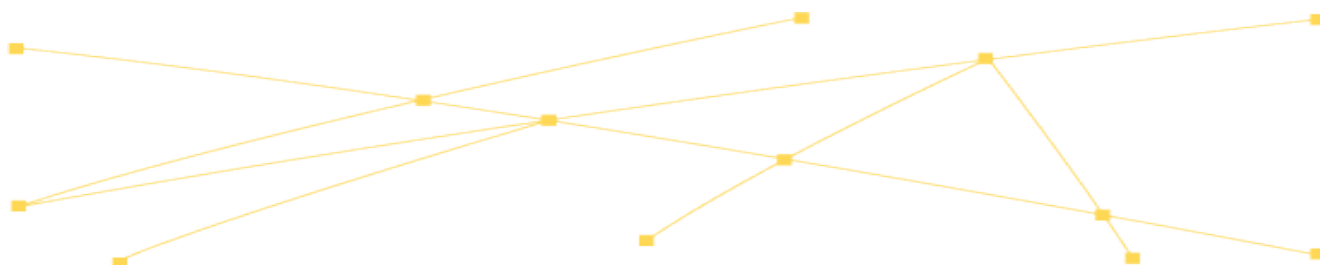
Roma-Net

Integration of Roma Population



Case study on area based regeneration program

Socially sensitive regeneration program of the Magdolna quarter (Budapest, HU)



EUROPEAN
PROGRAMME
FOR
SUSTAINABLE
URBAN
DEVELOPMENT





Introduction

The case study shows the regeneration process of the largest deprived area in Budapest, which still has a mixed social structure with a high proportion of Roma families¹. The Magdolna program is a good example for area based regeneration programs for several reasons. On the one hand, the neighbourhood is located in an inner area of the city which provides the opportunity for true social and spatial integration of the area into the city. On the other hand, the program shows that beside physical improvement of an area a strong emphasis on the development of local society is needed in order to achieve substantial changes in deprived areas.

Background

Most of the residents live in a disadvantaged position over-representing Roma families. The high rate of people with little education is a crucial local problem, which have such consequences as high unemployment rate and very low level of economic activity. Furthermore the high rate of indebtedness with housing costs also shows the existence serious social problems.

The living conditions in the neighbourhood are of bad quality which is indicated by the high rate of overcrowded and substandard flats. The unusual high rate (36%) of public rental flats also gives a hint on the low status of the area. Before the regeneration all public spaces were underused and were in very rundown conditions.

In the mid-nineties a rehabilitation company, RÉV8 was set up in the district in a joint ownership of the Municipality of District 8 and the Budapest Municipality. The RÉV8 is responsible for the management of the Magdolna Program. This socially sensitive regeneration program started in 2005 as a pilot program of Budapest Municipality and from 2008 it has been financed from EU funds in the framework of Regional Operational Program. This phase is going to be finished in the summer of 2011 and it is not seen yet whether there will be any continuation of the program afterwards.

The aim and main activities of the program

The program was a pilot project in Hungary introducing a new, neighbourhood oriented urban renewal scheme with the intention of strong participation of the local communities.

The aim of the programme is to stop the deprivation cycle in the neighbourhood by enhancing the quality of life and reinforcing social cohesion. Therefore to improve the living standard, the housing and environment conditions and the level of employment were important element of the program equally to community development and capacity building of the local society.

¹ There is no concrete data on the number of Roma people but assessment based on several surveys says that it is around 30% percent of the total 12 thousand population of the neighbourhood.



A substantial element of the Magdolna Program is the partnership building with the local community and the local economy. This partnership building included the direct participation of different levels of local communities in the planning and implementation process, and the establishment of a cooperation network of the local NGOs. The establishment of a community center which also served as a local office of RÉV8 in the neighbourhood was an important step, as it has created space for community activities and enabled the permanent presence of the rehabilitation company.

The housing interventions target the improvement of the housing conditions of the neediest households. The interventions concern those buildings that are fully owned by the local governments (public social housing), as these are the most problematic buildings in the quarter regarding both their physical condition (many small, substandard units) and the social attributes of the households. Housing investments do not aim to fully renovate such buildings as it would be very expensive, but to renew the main technical structure of the buildings, to make them more attractive and to improve living circumstances for the tenants. A very strict condition of the participation in the housing renewal program is that the communities of tenants have to take part actively in the intervention both regarding the planning and the implementation process and also that they have to take up responsibilities in the sustaining period as well.

The selection process of the municipally owned buildings started with a broad information distribution process. Then the buildings had to apply voluntarily for the program (it was a simple expression of interest). Then RÉV8 started the negotiation with the tenant community of a building through a series of meetings. The condition of the involvement of a building was that 50% +1 of the tenant households had to agree on the participation. Another important element was that the tenants had to elect representatives, 3 persons in a building, with whom RÉV8 could have direct, everyday connection. During the negotiations the tenants agreed with RÉV8 on the exact terms of the renovation: the forms and concrete actions regarding what concrete works the tenants would do and what renewal works the RÉV8 would carry out. This agreement was included in a cooperation contract made between the tenants' community and the RÉV8, with a schedule of implementation.

The inclusion of tenants in the planning and implementation process had three very positive results: it generated trust between the two parties (tenants and RÉV8), it made the tenants more committed toward the program and enhanced their personal and micro community level responsibility.

The concrete work in which the tenants actively took part consisted of cleaning the basement of the buildings, and the reconstruction and greening of courtyards of the buildings. In these jobs the majority of the tenants and also the staff of RÉV8 participated. The renewal work done by RÉV8 included mostly the changing of the main systems of old electricity, water and gas pipes, strengthening the roof, substructure insulation against water, the reconstruction of the basement creating individual storage places for households, and so on. In the courtyard of one building a cistern was built to make it possible to water the garden in an economical and environment-friendly way. Inside the apartments 'additional jobs' were done in the case of those tenants who





participated in the one-year community reconstruction work, or of those who were socially disadvantaged. The exact details of such jobs were also negotiated at the tenants' meeting.

An innovative education program was launched in the framework of the regeneration program. One of the most important target groups of the Magdolna is children and young people living in the neighbourhood. Therefore a part of the interventions targeted the local elementary school, which was a totally segregated school, attended almost 100% by Roma children. To make the school more mixed it was united with a secondary school specialised in public safety issues. The school was turned into an 'open institution' of the neighbourhood serving as a community place as well in the afternoon hours where adult education programs were run, too.

Special teaching methods were applied. For instance, programs were introduced to teach IT knowledge to students; learning took place in small groups in an alternative way using special art methods to gain and sustain the attention of students. The teachers were also trained to use such new methods of teaching, and several NGOs held special lessons. The school building was renewed and community rooms including an exercise room were built. The main aim of the education program was to make children more interested and stimulate them to acquire a higher level education so that they can find a better labour market position. Currently a considerable part of them do not even finish the elementary school.

The economic and employment programs tried to help to find jobs on the primary labour market as many adults have access only to the black labour market. Thus the level of income is insufficient for many households to cover housing expenditures and living costs often resulting in the accumulation of substantial debts. The main cause of the disadvantaged labour market position is the very low education level; a lot of people have not even completed elementary school education. This is also true for the young people, which is a very negative tendency.

In the local school there are programs for adults to complete elementary school. These programs are attended by more and more people. Regarding the organisation of the training programs the main aim is to provide such skills to the unemployed so that they can find jobs in the long run. Therefore a strong cooperation was built up with the local unemployment office and with several training organisations. During the training a mentor helps participants preventing them from dropping out. Job-seeking and life leading counselling also supports local people to find new opportunities with a special emphasis on women's needs. In the community house there is a permanent job centre as well.

Another part of the efforts to enhance economic activities in the quarter is support for local entrepreneurs, especially Roma ones. There are several entrepreneurs in the quarter mainly working in the construction industry but as they do not have sufficient knowledge (they are also often undereducated) they cannot participate in public procurement. In the housing reconstruction programs two Roma entrepreneurs worked who hired a few people who lived in the buildings to be renewed.





The crime prevention program includes several elements. The introduction of neighbourhood patrols is an important step to increase trust between local people and the police. This program was developed in close cooperation with the local police and a small office was set up in the quarter for the patrols. Their task is to provide permanent police presence and to build a good relationship with the local people. They were specifically trained for this task. Another field of the cooperation is that the police give crime prevention lectures in schools, kindergartens, elderly people's clubs.

A very important step of the community development process has been the establishment of the Neighbourhood Council, which collects those NGOs and people who live in the quarter or are interested in the life of the quarter and want to take an active part in the regeneration process in any form. The community center provides space for other community development activities as well, which largely concentrate on the children and young people.

The development of living environment also constitutes a substantial element of the program in order to provide quality open air public spaces for the locals. A park was renewed with active participation of local people in the planning process, a pedestrian street was developed and a sport court was constructed with the participation of one of the homeless organisations of the neighbourhood.

Results

Altogether 15 municipally owned buildings were /are being renewed and 4 condominiums also got support for renovation.

The construction of a community center proved to be one of the most important investments as it became the heart of local community activities.

The community development and the active participation of local people and tenants have achieved real results which were especially a positive development in Hungary where the civil sector is underdeveloped and local communities are usually very weak.

The establishment of tenant self-organisation on buildings' level is also unique in Hungary. The successful involvement of the tenants in the renewal process provides a good example not only for other deprived neighbourhoods but maybe for a more effective social housing sector as well.

An indication of the successful community development was that several external NGOs became members in the neighbourhood council and also that the local people started their own self-organisation process.

Lessons

To successfully manage an integrated regeneration program an independent organisation must be set up that works on the spot closely with the local people. The organisation must have relevant competencies and has to enjoy the full support of the local government. However local governments usually do not





prefer delegating such tasks to a more or less independent organisation but rather they keep it in-house. But an in-house organisational scheme is not able to ensure the necessary high level cooperation among the relevant stakeholders and the permanent relationship building with the local people and other non-governmental players.

The other very important lesson is that a main condition of such programs is the active involvement of the local people through intensive partnership building and community development. The involvement process has to start with activities that concern the direct interest of local people and micro communities. For this the tenants' involvement in the housing renewal program proved to be a good example as the concerned people were more willing to take part in the broader process of the regeneration program after they had been involved actively in the planning and implementation of their own building renewal.

The presented case also shows that a main emphasis should be laid on young people. This includes the provision of high quality education and a wide range of additional activities. It is also important to provide adequate space for such activities: the establishment of a community centre can be a good solution.

Sources:

Interviews with RÉV8

Case study on Magdolna program in “Study on Housing and Exclusion: Welfare policies, housing provision and labour market, Country Report for Hungary”, within the framework of the EU funded PROGRAMME “Social Protection and Integration”, 2009.

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