



RE-Block REviving high-rise Blocks
for cohesive and green neighbourhoods

URBACT II RE-BLOCK

Policy Development Recommendations



This project is co-financed by the ERDF in the URBACT II Programme



EUROPEAN
PROGRAMME
FOR
SUSTAINABLE
URBAN
DEVELOPMENT



INTRODUCTION

Across Europe, high rise housing estates were often the chosen response to the housing shortage which resulted from the impact of: the Second World War, city centre migration and changes in household composition.

However, over the years many of these buildings and their surroundings have deteriorated as a result of poorly maintained buildings and public areas, so that the areas have become deprived. While the nature of the issues vary from one city to another as a result of their very different cultural and historical backgrounds they never the less experience very similar problems.

This has been exacerbated by economic and social trends which have led to problems such as:

- poor image
- high levels of unemployment
- poor educational attainment
- cultural/ethnic conflicts
- high crime/anti-social behaviour
- health inequalities
- poor of sense of community.

In these circumstances the estate issues are usually both complex and multiple and the response to these need to:

- Be driven by a partnership approach
- embrace resident engagement
- Consider the wider environmental and social issues, as well as spatial and economic development issues
- Consider innovative approaches including public and private initiatives
- Be sustainable.

The capacity of cities to regenerate these estates is often limited and complicated by the limited funding available, local tenure arrangements, political priorities and national/local policy.

However, the transnational cooperation which has formed the basis of this project has enabled the sharing of good practice and innovation across the 10 partner European cities.

The complexity of individual countries and their political systems does not lend itself easily to identifying common ways in which policy changes can be identified in order to facilitate the regeneration of these high rise housing estates. However, the 10 project partners are determined to maximise the potentials of the existing estates (in terms of quality of life and market position within the city) and stop the growing gap between residential

RE-BLOCK

RE-Block is an exchange of information and good practice project, funded by the European Regional Development Funded URBACT II programme.

Made up of 10 partner cities across Europe the project aims to foster efficient regeneration of high rise blocks making them more attractive, improving their environmental quality whilst creating an integrated tailor made approach to combat poverty.

The overall focus of the project is:

- To create inclusive governance structures
- To improve social inclusion
- To improve facilities, in particular public / green spaces (with an emphasis on energy efficiency initiatives)

areas where the poor and the well-off live. The project partners have considered what they want to achieve for their high rise estates, how these objectives link strategically and what changes are needed in order to facilitate achievement of their goals.

The following document summarises a number of recommendations from the Partners which define those conditions which influence the future regeneration of housing estates. These recommendations are aimed at Policy Makers and should be taken into consideration to help inform the future development of European policy and guidance, concerning the regeneration of the built and social environment of degraded housing estates.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



**i. Not just about the buildings:
An holistic and cross-
sectoral approach to
regeneration.**

All partners in the project recognise that dealing with elements of neighbourhood regeneration in isolation does not produce the most cost effective or sustainable results, particularly in high rise estates. This includes the recognition that the building of concentrated and high density housing needs particular recognition in terms of transport connections and access to schools and services

Funding which is specifically targeted within very defined and limited boundaries can often hinder the development process, especially when wider building, infrastructure and social issues impact and therefore need to form part of the regeneration response. More integrated funding streams which enable a more bespoke local and flexible response to wider regeneration issues will promote this more holistic and cross-sectoral approach.

Therefore, a recommendation from this project is that criteria for workstreams and funding streams recognise this interconnectivity. This needs to allow for capacity and resources from across all sectors to be brought together for the greater benefit. This includes not viewing housing capital work in isolation from say, health impacts, social infrastructure, schools, transport infrastructure etc.

As well as the opportunities to work across different sectors and funding streams, these same integrated funding streams should enable focus on low income or disadvantaged districts (e.g. where housing estates tend to be located).

Furthermore, this cross sectoral, more holistic approach should be supported at a City level, and as such targeting of estates for regeneration support should form part of the strategic plans for Cities. These strategic plans must take into consideration the impact of regeneration activity on wider interconnecting services and infrastructures to ensure sustainability.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION ONE:

There should be more opportunities to progress work across complex programmes such as estate regeneration through:

- a. The provision of integrated and more flexible funding streams (including focus on low income or disadvantaged districts) which reflect the wider capital, social and infrastructure related interdependencies
- b. Wider City level strategic planning which takes an integrated approach to improve the efficiency and sustainability of regeneration activities, including bespoke planning arrangements to ensure the impacts on services and infrastructure are fully understood before high density housing developments are commenced
- c. Incentives for generating public-private partnerships for whole scale estate regeneration
- d. Support to ensure the services provided reflect the community needs
- e. Local Authorities/Municipalities responsible for proposing estate refurbishment, to work in cooperation with those responsible for preparing Operational Programmes in order to agree on prioritisation of estates, in line with the ERDF and other regulations



ii. Governance: Together with the residents

As noted earlier, estate regeneration is complex and partnership working to address multiple estate issues in an integrated, cross-sectoral way is essential.

To ensure success and sustainability of regeneration activity all key stakeholders need to be involved, including the civil society. The development of community influence and involvement in neighbourhood regeneration is critical.

Mechanisms for multi-level governance need to be developed to facilitate the planning and implementation of regeneration processes.

There are some common features of high rise estates that, whilst making it all the more important, can make it all the more challenging. These include higher levels of population churn/turnover; building design not encouraging casual interaction and lack of social facilities in the wider neighbourhood.

There is no one working governance structure for high rise areas when local, regional and national situations differ. Therefore, the recommendation from this project is that EU funding opportunities should focus not only on investment in housing but also on supporting social and neighbourhood activities to “let people have their say”.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION TWO:

Partnership practice needs to be fostered:

- a. Horizontally between local authorities and civic society – with support to further develop the method of coordination, participatory and integrated mechanisms
- b. Vertically between local stakeholders and city wide, regional and national Authorities, in planning, financing and implementing regeneration projects
- c. Through European funding which should depend on strong local governance and finance supporting structures like local support groups



iii. Good quality housing underpins good health and wellbeing

Whilst across the partners there were a range of building construction types, there was a common view that we need to learn from the decades of management and investment arrangements that have been put in place over the years and use these lessons in future development.

One of the major obstacles to achieving a sustainable scheme for high rise estates is insufficient maintenance and remediation of the housing stock, often caused by former public housing being sold to investment funds, ownership splitting up into many single flat owners or no existing reserves. In particular there is a lack of private investments in housing stock on estates.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION THREE:

- a. Regulations must make sure that investments in housing stock are carried out on a regular basis. Even if the European Union is not in charge of legislation on housing it should encourage private investment in housing stock when investments in the public space and social sector are carried out. Issuing good practice guidance on how to incentivise private owners to invest in refurbishing their properties would be a positive step.
- b. The European Union should seek means to assist landlords in the quality refurbishment of housing stock as part of the regeneration process in order to make underprivileged areas attractive places to live.



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AN URBACT II PROJECT

URBACT is a European exchange and learning programme promoting sustainable urban development. It enables cities to work together to develop solutions to major urban challenges, reaffirming the key role they play in facing increasingly complex societal challenges. It helps them to develop pragmatic solutions that are new and sustainable, and that integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions. It enables cities to share good practices and lessons learned with all professionals involved in urban policy throughout Europe. URBACT is 300 cities, 29 countries, and 5,000 active participants. URBACT is co-financed by the ERDF Funds and the Member States.

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