

Large Urban Distressed Areas: a difficult challenge for European cities

Policy paper n.3

Deliverable N 22

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Contents

Abstract.....	4
1 Large Urban Distressed Areas (LUDA): a worrying phenomenon for European cities	5
2 Good governance: a new quality in LUDA regeneration.....	6
3 Recommendations.....	8

Abstract

Since the European City Summit in 2004 and the following Informal EU ministerial meeting of Urban Policy (2004), the European Union highlighted the role of European cities as engines of social and economic growth and innovation, the forefront of sustainable social development and social cohesion. But European cities have to face the challenge of Large Urban Distressed Areas (LUDA) to their development and to the quality of life of its inhabitants.

LUDA PROJECT Policy paper n. 3 is designed to increase understanding of large urban distressed areas (LUDA) and recommend policy and actions to face them. The paper is one of the outputs of a research project which has been carried out for three years by ten research institutions, six European cities (Bratislava, Dresden, Edinburgh, Florence, Lisbon and Valenciennes) and non-governmental organisations from eight different European countries in a interdisciplinary way, which acquired the coordinated experience of 18 European cities.

1 Large Urban Distressed Areas (LUDA): a worrying phenomenon for European cities

Many large and medium size cities in Europe have large urban distressed areas (LUDAs) suffering from multiple social, economic and environmental, such as degraded housing, inadequate or improper facilities and collective services (e.g. infrastructure and transport), rundown or derelict industrial sites, environmental risks and problems (e.g. natural hazards, pollution), unattractive and disconnected urban structures, unemployment and weaknesses in social cohesion (e.g. poverty, low education standards, aging, poor health standards, dependency on welfare).

Improving the quality of life in such areas and enhancing their redevelopment is becoming an important challenge for political decision making and planning practice and requires a new approach to urban regeneration.

The partners of the LUDA PROJECT believes that the question of large urban distressed areas (LUDA) in European cities is an issue of high priority, which should be put on top in the in local, regional, state and EU agenda

Large urban distressed areas are not new, but now, under the pressure of globalisation, fiscal crisis, competition among cities, the break up of the welfare state and the emergence of an information society based on the knowledge economy, the phenomenon has taken a new and more worrying turn. This is because their increasing incidence, scale and diffusion threatens to undermine the safety, security, cohesion stability of European cities as the major economic and social drivers of European development.

Gaining an understanding of large urban distressed areas (LUDAs) is critical because LUDAs now represent one of the most pressing structural problem facing the social and economic development of European cities. The costs large urban distressed areas (LUDAs) place on European national states and their cities are now too great to bear because they threaten the social cohesion and economic competitiveness of Europe in the globalised world. Their political costs are also now becoming too great to bear, for as recent episodes in a number of Europe's capital cities show, they are alienating people from political engagement, undermining trust in democratic representation, threatening to make large urban distressed areas (LUDAs) ungovernable.

2 Good governance: a new quality in LUDA regeneration

Previous attempts to make large urban distressed areas (LUDAs) governable have not proven successful because:

- the ease by which large urban distressed areas (LUDAs) increased in number, scale and diffusion in small, medium and large urban and metropolitan areas all over Europe has made difficult to understand the problem in its structural aspects and in its complexity: there is the need to increase our knowledge on this phenomenon.
- traditional planning approach to urban regeneration, based on town planning, characterised by programmes and investments on the physical aspect of distress is now considered manifestly insufficient to face and solve the social, economic, environmental and even ethical problems of these areas which more and more appear as an inextricable and unmanageable tangle: there is the need for an innovative strategic and cross-cutting approach to large urban distressed areas (LUDAs), able to face simultaneously the highly complex social, economic and environmental and even cultural nature of the problem.
- the political action towards large urban distressed areas (LUDAs) is still fragmented into many different organisations, institutions and powers, and mostly left to local governments which lack of the capacity to intervene: this problem requires meaningful political cooperation among the EU, national states, regional governments and cities.

Evidence suggest that any improvement in the quality of life and LUDA development process has to cope with highly unpredictable problems, trends, events and requires long-term, multi-layered perspectives which need both strategic coordination among power institutions, economic organizations and social structure. Improving of quality of life in large urban distressed areas requires inter-linked actions of a high number of stakeholders (e.g. city governments, authorities, private sector, the civil society etc). In contrast to single area interventions, LUDA interventions aim for enhanced coordination and linkage between different projects and programmes, efficiently making use of potentials and synergies, and minimising any unwanted side effects.

The LUDA research, which involved 6 European towns and 12 research teams for three years, advocates a long-term perspective for redeveloping these areas and improving the quality of life of their inhabitants. Above all the partners argue this requires good governance. Good governance is the appropriate card that EU, national states, regional governments and

municipalities across Europe can play to regenerate large urban distressed areas (LUDAs) and bring about an improvement in the quality of life.

Following this governance approach to large urban distressed areas (LUDA) rehabilitation, key policy drivers of change shall be:

Coordination in concerted decision-making, particularly in political and institutional capacity to set up strategic frameworks for integrated policy packages and to improve communication and cooperation among relevant institutions at different territorial levels, the market and the civil society.

Urban sustainable development, since holistic approach, rebuilding local communities, developing strategically innovative management in an integrative framework proved to be essential for substantial and long breathing take-off of these areas

Political awareness of the problem, which cannot be solved by each single city, but requires coordinated policies and support of national states and EU policies (funds, norms, programmes, etc) to the cities

3 Recommendations

The partners of the LUDA PROJECT makes the following recommendations regarding large urban distressed areas take-off:

- to place the improvements in the quality of life high on the European Commission and national States policy agendas;
- to focus on participation, coordination and innovative city management
- to mobilize additional financial resources to tackle large urban distressed areas (LUDAs) in European cities including the major cities in the New Member States;
- to promote special consideration by the EU Commission and States members of coordinated policies and special incentives for tackling large urban distressed areas (LUDAs), with special consideration of the coming Structural Funds' Programme
- to support learning processes for developing a strategic approach towards Large Urban Distressed Areas (LUDAs), and creating a network of knowledge supporting the dissemination of good practice related to improvements in the quality of life;
- to solve the democratic deficit in current policy making at all levels of government focusing on civil and social rights in the development of local identity;
- to allow the community of stakeholders self-determination and to organize themselves according their own vision of the future;
- to build up new institutions able to legitimate new policy and lead the regeneration of Large Urban Distressed Areas (LUDAs) as part of the drive towards the knowledge intensive society.

The previous recommendations are prospective and will take several years to implement. We recommend that actions will be taken by EU Commission with the support of EU Parliament, national states, regional governments and municipalities, as well as public and private agencies to prevent large urban areas from becoming a LUDA: early warning is very important and prompt recognition of distress through adequate monitoring are essential for whatever preventive policy.