



THEMATIC GROUPS

URBAN REGENERATION

CONTEXT

Since centuries, cities grow on themselves naturally. This process goes on in many districts following the rhythm of real estate. However, on larger and larger areas (social housing districts, old city centres, abandoned industrial sites and outskirts) this urban renewal does not occur any more.

Many European historical cities in particular – and numerous historical cities in general - face the problem of a valuable cultural heritage in their centres abandoned by many residents and businesses. The results are empty retail spaces, dilapidated housing stock and the waste or under-use of an important asset.

This loss of population, in particular wealthy classes and devitalisation occur to the profit of their periphery and lead to urban spreading and increased automobile use.

A city at several speeds has appeared: certain districts are confronted with economic crisis, social exclusion and physical degradation while others profit fully from the growth.

The stake today for the urban areas is to reinsert these zones in urban dynamics.

Facing an extent and a diversity of problems, European cities have adopted various strategies of urban regeneration for the last decades. The first regeneration projects tended to focus on physical aspects, usually housing, and proved to be incomplete. One important trend has thus emerged over years. Urban regeneration strategies are now global: they target economic and cultural (Re) development, social cohesion (actions on employment, health, crime reduction and education) as well as physical rehabilitation.

It is much the case in historical centres, which pose a particular challenge: how to re-activate business, upgrade public and residential spaces without destroying what makes them so unique and valuable? How to value their identity and heritage while integrating modern functions?

WHAT IS URBAN REGENERATION?

The development of social diversity is one of the principal objectives of urban regeneration. It aims at attracting new inhabitants in degraded districts but also preventing their inhabitants to leave them as soon as the situation has improved.

To reach such an objective requires establishing a strong bond between economic development and physical regeneration. These two themes of urban renewal are, indeed, complementary; insofar they allow a work in the fields of social development and improvement of environment. The first aims at making the inhabitants reach training and employment and the second tends to support their maintenance on the spot and attract new residents, by improving the quality of urban life.



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- expansion of local economy

Recreate activity

To recreate activity and employment in city centres is a requirement. Traditional forms of activities (craft industry, trade and services) are to be developed in central areas. To renew the dynamics of underprivileged districts requires to support innovation and initiative of the residents and to target the development of sectors of potential growth. This supposes the creation of public-private partnerships.

Historical centres are representative, emblematic places for their inhabitants and visitors. The restoration of their image is thus essential for their residential attractiveness and the development of tourist and economic activities.

Factors of external attractiveness are to be developed: diversified trade offer; development of cultural life through headlight equipments (museums, concert halls...) and events; development of the capacity services for the tourists (hotels, restaurants...).

Education and training

Underprivileged districts very often concentrate problems of unemployment and school failure. It is important for youngsters to reach basic knowledge and be integrated in the social life by the participating in activities which enrich their development.

For the adults, in particular unemployed, specific needs must be answered not only in terms of qualification, but personal problems resolution.

Schools and training organizations must thus play a paramount part to reinforce social cohesion taking into account the whole population.

- Improvement of the quality of urban life

Acting on an existing urban context

Urban regeneration projects and programs are by definition implemented in the existing city. It is a question of acting in-depth on the existing city and of reducing its dysfunctions.

To regain deprived areas, means taking into account existing infrastructures and superstructures (road, networks and built inheritance) in order to renew the attractiveness at these zones and to recreate a market. There is an important work of identification of the existing structures to be preserved - public facilities such as streets, squares and parks that must be renewed in accordance with public needs- and of parts that have to be transformed. That is longer and more complex than acting on free grounds (difficulties in the availability of the soils, parcelled property, rehousing inhabitants or activities).

Improvement of the quality of urban life can be carried out only by taking coordinated actions on housing, environment, displacements, services of proximity and culture.

- Housing

To fulfil the requirements of populations and adapt to economic and social evolutions of the district, there should be diversity in housing offer to answer all type of requests from low, middle and higher classes, lonely persons and large families, young and old people.



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Minimal criteria of quality must be respected by all residences and their size or their occupation (rental, ownership) ought to be diverse. The renewal of houses and buildings has to be gradual, a careful change of floor plane will enable new housing standards and the physical situation will be improved by inner renovation and the restoration of façades, by minimum demolition and green development in courtyards (threatening damage to housing have to be redressed immediately).

- Environment

To improve quality of life requires acting on environment. To have a durable impact, regeneration actions have to renew the desire to live in these districts. Environment relates to all that concerns the inhabitants in their everyday life: noise, pollution, cleanliness, presence of public spaces, parks, trade ... It requires heavy works on a long expiry to impact the image of the district.

Thus, in Lille, the action concentrated on public spaces and parks which were missing; in Valenciennes, the treatment of the façades contributed to restore the identity of the city.

- Public transport

To reinforce the attractiveness of certain districts and city centres, it is necessary to facilitate their access (public transport, pedestrian ways and streets). In many cases, underprivileged districts do not profit from a good public transport service whereas their inhabitants are depending on it. This exclusion increases the difficulties of these districts and their inhabitants.

Urban transports are a major instrument of improvement of the everyday life and of urban regeneration. They support professional displacements, access to commercial and cultural equipments and the establishment of economic activities. They are a factor of integration and play a major part in the dynamics and the opening-up of districts in difficulty.

- Proximity services

The economic development must tend to improve quality of life in the cities. It is thus useful to help establish proximity trade and services as well as coffees, restaurants, cinemas which contribute to make convivial streets and animated public spaces. The offer of services in conformity with the needs of inhabitants and economic investors must be reinforced. This offer relies on the public and the private sector (trade, craft industry...). It can be helped by their partnership.

In United Kingdom, in degraded districts the disposal of buildings facilitated the establishment of such services and activities.

- Culture

Cultural programs can renew the image of a city and make districts more attractive. They also support the establishment of certain services and cultural industries (commercial activities related to culture and leisure). It is possible to act on social life and cohesion and to instigate economy by realizing cultural projects

Thus in Lille, the establishment of a concert hall, the Aircraft, changed, in the ten years, the landscape of the area. The district became animated in particular in the evening.



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WHO ARE THE STAKEHOLDERS FOR URBAN REGENERATION AND WHAT IS THEIR ROLE?

To clarify the roles and responsibilities of each actor

Developing successful programs to regenerate deprived neighbourhoods requires an integrated approach involving numerous actors from private as well as from public sector. Work in partnership implies a definition of their responsibility.

Private actors are mainly responsible for the good end of specific projects the objective of which is first economic profitability in short or medium term.

Inhabitants, if they are legitimate in their claims, generally reason over short durations and request fast improvements from the benefit of current residents.

It is the same, in general, for non-profit-making associations and other structures representativeness of which is unequal.

If the involvement of private sector, associative sector and inhabitants is essential, the role of public sector - in particular local communities - is paramount.

Government representatives guarantee national solidarity and respect of the law.

Local councillors are accountants towards their fellow-citizens of the common good in the present and the future.

Public sector

The need to integrate various geographical scales leads naturally to the mobilization of public actors from different levels of the public bodies and from various services or "departments".

Amongst those, cities have a special position: they are the nearest territorial level to identify in a fine way the local assets and problems of a district and the needs of its inhabitants. They are therefore, the best actors to impel and carry on policies integrating all the partners and to set up strategies of urban regeneration adapted to the needs of local communities which must obviously be articulated with broader scales. They must not be reluctant in front of difficulties and rely on the State authority or action of the private sector.

Private sector

Relationships between private and public actors are different from one country to another. Nevertheless, the importance of private sector in regeneration projects is very largely recognized today. The creation of true public and private partnerships is a necessity. The objective is to attract investors in not very profitable zones in the short run by decreasing their risks.

United Kingdom has first introduced massively the private sector into the regeneration of deprived areas since 1980 and the level of co-operation public/private is very important there (Manchester and in Birmingham).

Inhabitants, local "communities"

Taking into account the knowledge of inhabitants is one of the conditions of success. Whatever their competences are, technicians working in a district will never know it as finely as its inhabitants. It is also a mean to restore confidence between partners.

Participation of the inhabitants is recognized today as a condition of effectiveness and sustainability of urban regeneration. It is often carried out by local associations which play a fundamental part.

Associative sector

The associative sector or third sector, tend to play an increasing part in regeneration projects. It goes from district associations to lobbies and charitable "lobbies", religious organizations and groups of influence from the economic world.



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HOW CAN A STRATEGY OF URBAN REGENERATION BE IMPLEMENTED?

To conceive and conclude an effective policy of urban regeneration is a challenge for local decision makers. The diversity of local situations and national contexts dedicates to failure any resort to ready-made processes or receipts. However a series of common conditions must be met for success Creation of partnerships, design of integrated strategies and active participation of citizens are challenges that need know-how as well as organizational and financial instruments.

A project organization

A condition of effectiveness of regeneration projects lies in the capacity to carry out initiatives arising from various disciplines, at different time and geographic scales. That requires simultaneously a total and transverse vision of urban regeneration.

Complex process, the design and implementation of policies of urban regeneration requires multiple competences. Those cannot be controlled by a single person but by a team. It is important to organize the various technical actors and specialized services in the field of study or construction, from public and related institutions (Town planning Agency, social housing organization, developer) or private sectors (engineering and design departments, building firms) in a project team. This team must be animated by a project leader. This job requires qualities of listening, coordination and enthusiasm, which make project leaders a true "trainer", sensitive to social and urban economic themes and in contact with inhabitants.

A solid public/ private partnership

The promotion of public-private partnerships is essential to reinforce the efficiency of urban regeneration programs. To renew economic, social and cultural structures and improve public spaces and housing requires massive public investment (State, City...). Public sector resources are used like "lever" to encourage the investments of private sector. Private investors, ready to intervene in a deprived area, do not only seek a public partner able to assume heavy investments not directly profitable. In this context, a clear public strategy is of importance for investors. It is a condition for their confidence as it is an engagement with the whole population, including their future prospective customers. It should inform on the nature of operations and their realization (it can be an urban plan or a zone of activities), the financial commitments and calendar of investment of the public sector.

Public implication must moreover be strong and lasting; it supposes varied sources of financings and often requires special engineering (to organize the financing from various levels of public authorities, subsidies...).

A long term work, taking into account the various scales of time and territories

To change of the image of a district, restore confidence and act on complex problems (housing, economy, public spaces) implies a long-term work.

Policies of local development are however too often not sufficiently constant in duration.

Professionals of the city consider that heavy tendencies cannot be reversed in less than 10 to 15 years and that one needs a generation at least to be assured that regeneration will be durable.

But times of other concerned actors are different: inhabitants await fast and visible results (one year is already a long time). Local councillors ask for visible results in the short or medium term (3-5 years, duration of their mandate). Private sector cannot assume heavy investments if the return on investment is too long.



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It is particularly difficult to satisfy all participants, but action must be taken in the duration while meeting the most urgent needs.

Urban regeneration must also be carried out at various geographical scales at the same time (urban area, main cities, most degraded districts) and on different territories (city centres, industrial wastages and deprived housing areas).

To establish confidence between elected officials, technicians and inhabitants

Another condition of success resides in the capacity to federate all the actors. The restoration confidence between the various stakeholders, in particular between public actors and inhabitants, is a key-factor. Very often, inhabitants of underprivileged districts doubt the sincerity of the political. They think political promises often do not produce tangible acts.

Only visible and continuous results can reverse this tendency. To associate the inhabitants to the actions carried out on their district, it is of primary importance that they are questioned on their needs, and informed of the strategy of regeneration, actions and devices set up. This supposes a great effort from their part and that of the technicians, tools of information and exchange. The share of a common a base of information (ex cartographic document), even if all the partners never reach the same level of information, insures the transparency of the process.

Thus in Hulme, residents, reticent in the beginning, could invest and play an effective part in the first achievements. They thus showed their will to take part in the project.

Common interests and a clear and shared vision of urban (Re) development adapted to the territory

Urban renewal must be planned and realised with the current residents and entrepreneurs.

The various stakeholders (administrations, investors and local actors of which inhabitants) should identify their common interests before elaborating a common strategy. It is necessary to work together within a delimited framework, to specify the needs of the residents, the targeted objectives and actions, the human and financial means to carry on this strategy. Local communities have then to conceive and implement those strategies that will be used and guide for their decisions and a reference for by the actors in months and years which will follow. It is very important that the strategic vision of urban (Re) development is carried by a strong political commitment. Such an engagement supposes a great coherence in choices, objectives and priorities of the local public action and an efficient communication.

An evaluation of the programs

Continuity but permanent adaptation Continuity does not mean rigidity. If the goals must be pursued in duration and the "rules of the game" maintained, actions must be able to be adapted according to their effectiveness and changes in the context. A continuous evaluation of the projects makes it possible to follow the success of the objectives, to redirect certain actions and to include/understand the reasons of success or failure of a project. The consequences are observed also in the medium term and long-term, as the real effectiveness of a project can be evaluated only after a few years.

Synthesis from articles:

Urban regeneration the issue explained Matt Weaver

Society Guardian 19.3.2001, URBACT Website,

Haansevert Karssenbergh: Urban regeneration in the Netherlands The Twelve Principles for Cautious Urban Renewal;

CHORUS network how enhancing cultural heritage as a catalyst in the regeneration of urban site.



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