Sustainable urban development: economic and social regeneration of cities and of neighbourhoods in crisis, URBAN

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Urban areas face significant challenges and opportunities. Cities are key locations for the growth of the EU, but they contain blackspots with high rates of unemployment, crime, poverty and dereliction. The URBAN Community Initiative aims to assist urban areas in crisis, particularly in terms of its three main axes of spending: physical and environmental regeneration; social inclusion; entrepreneurship and employment. It does this in a way with significant added value vis-a-vis national policies and other EU policies, notably in terms of: -targeting on small areas of severe deprivation -a focus on issues of social inclusion, the integration of minorities (who are especially concentrated in URBAN areas) and the natural and physical environment. By removing these barriers to investment, URBAN contributes to economic cohesion and the sustainable growth of the city as a whole. -local partnership. In one third of cases, local authorities constitute the managing authority, and in a further third, they perform many of these functions. In over 80% of cases, local community groups participated in the formulation of the programme. -a network programme for the exchange of experience and best practice. The key characteristics of URBAN: -it is one of the 4 Community initiatives within the EU Structural Funds. The others are Interreg, Leader+ and Equal. -it was launched in 1994. URBAN I (1994-99) aimed to tackle social exclusion in 118 European cities. URBAN II (2001-2006) builds on this success with improvements such as streamlined administration and a more transparent criteria for the selection of sites. -the 70 URBAN II programmes cover a population of some 2.2 million inhabitants, with an ERDF contribution of EUR 730 million and total investment of EUR 1600 million. Aid per inhabitant is some 30% higher than for Objective 2. -URBAN II sites were selected by Member States on the basis of socio-economic indicators reflecting criteria in the guidelines -unemployment and crime rates are both around twice the EU average in URBAN II sites. The proportion of immigrants is more than twice the figure for the cities participating in the URBAN Audit. The proportion of green spaces is half the average for urban areas in the EU. -the programmes proposed under URBAN II give the highest priority to physical and environmental regeneration, which accounts for 40% of planned spending. The other two axes account for a further 42%. -of the 70 programmes, there are 31 inner city areas, 27 peripheral areas, 4 mixed areas and 8 entire cities. There seems to be no direct link between this typology and the priority given to different types of measure. The report concludes that the urban question is an increasing political priority in the EU. The approaches developed under URBAN and other Community Initiatives have potential lessons for the future of European Policy: -the integrated approach, whereby social, environmental and economic measures are combined in a limited area to form a coherent response to the multi-facetted problems of the area. -a focus on relatively small areas. -the flexibility to select areas according to national needs in a transparent manner. -administrative simplification and flexibility -a strong focus on local partnership, including local community groups. This builds local capacity and promotes new models of European governance.