

Proposal for the 2005-2008 Commission on Comprehensive Neighbourhood Regeneration

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Introduction

Cities are realities in constant evolution and where the main changes in our society take place. Economic, social and cultural progress today takes place in large cities and relates directly to the modification of the physical space involved and the living conditions of the people. The consequences of the process of transformation often differ in the various parts of a city. While some areas experience the positive side of urban transformations, other neighbourhoods and districts, and even entire cities, can fall into a cycle of depression and abandonment. This urban decline can take the form of a demographic, town planning, infrastructural, economic or social regression, and it is not uncommon for all of these dimensions to occur at the same time.

The causes for decline can vary easily and include: transformation in the mode of production of an entire society, as occurs with the transition toward post industrial economic models; deterioration of urban infrastructure and the housing stock in historical centres, and the evolution of consolidated informal settlements that do not have enough basic urban services, possibly even as an unwanted consequence of public policies, such as the construction of major infrastructure that may alter the balance of the urban fabric.

Both politicians and urban planners have been concerned since the early 19th century with how to use public policies to impact the various facets of decline that has affected urban areas. With greater or lesser success, the answers to these problems have evolved in line with the ideologies and technical knowledge available at the time.

Today, we often turn to policies based on a concept of comprehensive regeneration applied to a neighbourhood or urban area. Such policies work on the premise that the different elements of the urban reality are interconnected and understand that, to achieve the regeneration of an area in decline, it is necessary to make a simultaneous and coordinated impact on the physical environment, the Infrastructures, the economic determining factors, the environment and the social and cultural reality.

Study Aim:

What do we understand by comprehensive neighbourhood regeneration policies?

Urban comprehensive-regeneration programs try to improve the conditions of deteriorated neighbourhoods by impacting all the dimensions, i.e., the physical, economic, social and environmental conditions.

These programs focus on urban areas suffering a process of multidimensional regression that manifests in different situations of urban stress, often at the same time:

- *Urban regression*: deficiencies in the construction and/or conservation of the building and housing stock and a lack of public space.
- *Infrastructural regression*: deficiencies in accessibility, integration and mobility; scarcity of public transport; physical segregation with respect to the rest of the urban or metropolitan area; lack of basic public facilities.
- *Demographic regression*: loss or excessive density of population; progressive ageing of the population.
- *Social regression*: a high percentage of marginalized people, i.e., the unemployed and the dependent population, plus shortfalls in education or a concentration of immigrants.
- *Economic regression*: shortfalls in the local economy; high levels of unemployment and forced labour mobility; lack of commercial activity and absence of private economic initiative.
- *Environmental regression*: presence of current and past polluting activities; abandoned areas; infrastructure in disuse or lack of green areas.

Goal:

The Commission on Comprehensive Neighbourhood Regeneration aims to discover the initiatives being promoted in large cities today to comprehensively revitalize urban areas in decline and regression.

The dimensions of urban comprehensive regeneration that the Commission should tackle include the following aspects:

Public Initiative

Urban regeneration has traditionally been a public-sector initiative with the public institution having a local, metropolitan, regional or, as is frequently the case, national nature. It may also involve an 'ad hoc' project for a particular urban area or a regeneration model applicable to different areas. The Commission should identify the differences in the programs on the basis of these variables.

Management and Financing

To manage regeneration programs, public authorities often create urban development companies in which private agents play a fundamental role. The Commission is interested in knowing the key elements in the management and financing of the different projects.

Physical Regeneration and Comprehensive Regeneration

Dominated by architecture and town planning, urban-regeneration policies have historically been based on a physical concept of intervention, based on the premise that improving physical conditions will necessarily result in an improvement in all the other dimensions of an urban environment. The Commission is interested in studying the experiences of cities and the balances and synergies established among the dimensions of the regeneration program, i.e., economic, social, physical and environmental.

Agents Involved

The work involved in the regeneration of urban areas regularly exceeds a government's capacity for direct intervention. To achieve sustainable revitalization, it is necessary to consolidate a form of public-private collaboration that involves the participation of all the agents present in the area (public administrations, private organizations, NGOs, associations and individuals). The Commission is interested in learning how the different agents are articulated and coordinated to achieve a successful project, as well as the level of institutionalisation of these relationships.

Continuity of the Regeneration

Regeneration programs are defined for a particular period of time. It is essential to know what happens when a program ends, i.e., the point to which it is possible to sustain the changes made in the social, environmental and economic dimensions.

Results Evaluation

It is important for the Commission to know whether there was an evaluation of the results of the experiences of the different cities and whether a definition of the success of the regeneration policy employed was previously established.

Consequences of the Regeneration

As well as the anticipated goals, very often these policies involve associated consequences that were not explicitly anticipated, e.g., the effect of replacing the population, gentrification, the replacement of activities and uses. The Commission would try to ascertain the point to which the consequences were unanticipated, or whether they were implicit or inevitable objectives of the regeneration itself.

Relations Between the Neighbourhood and the Rest of the City

Some neighbourhoods suffer particular problems of abandonment, isolation and disconnection with respect to the rest of the city. This reality is observed not only at the town-planning level but also at the level of the population who live there. The Commission is interested in knowing more about this phenomenon and the proposals made to escape from this circle of abandonment and isolation.

Stages

- Approval of the proposal by the METROPOLIS Board of Directors in Berlin. ""
- Preparation of the terms of reference.
- Request from cities and organizations to participate in the Commission.
- Preparation of a snapshot questionnaire for the gathering of information.
- Analysis and summary of the answers for a better understanding of the situation.
- First Commission meeting to share information, exchange particular information and validate opinions.

- Preparation of an intermediate Commission report.
- Request for case studies.
- Second Commission meeting to present the case studies.
- Preparation of a summary report on good practices and existing trends.
- Preparation of the preliminary version of the final report.
- Circulation amongst members for making comments and suggestions.
- Preparation of the final version.
- Presentation of conclusions and" Commission recommendations at the next Congress.

RESOURCES

For its work, the Commission will have a specific budget assigned by the Metropolis Board of Directors at Berlin in May 2005.

TIMETABLE

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| - Commission proposal | April 2005 |
| - Approval of the proposal by the BoD | May 2005 |
| - Preparation of the terms of reference | September 2005 |
| - Requests from cities to participate in the Commission | September 2005 |
| - Preparation of the questionnaire | October 2005- |
| - First Commission meeting | June 2006 |
| - Second Commission meeting | June 2007 |
| - Final report | December 2007 |
| - Presentation of conclusions | May 2008 |