GUIDE OF
STRATEGIES FOR
URBAN
REGENERATION
Forum for Sustainable Building of the Valencian Community. Committee for Construction Planning

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Acknowledgements
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This document is part of the Housing Quality and Construction Plan of the Valencian Regional Government (Plan de Calidad de la Vivienda y la Edificación de la Generalitat Valenciana) and of the Innovation Project EURBANLAB, co-financed by the European Knowledge and Innovation Community, Climate KIC. http://www.climate-kic.org/projects/accelerating-urban-innovations

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The publication of the second edition of the White Book on Sustainable Building of the Valencian Community (Libro Blanco de la Edificación Sostenible de la Comunitat Valenciana), in December of 2009, included the suggestions regarding land policies made by the Committee for Urban Planning within the framework of the Forum for Sustainable Building of the Valencian Community. The book concluded with a series of lines of action that reflected the current paradigm shift within urban culture and highlighted the needs for the generation and dissemination of a greater knowledge about the processes and results of urbanization and, more specifically, of urban regeneration. Thus, these lines of action considered drafting a Guide that could cover the basic principles of Integrated Urban Regeneration from a practical approach. Said approach, general and informative, would also allow its implementation in urban contexts different to those of the Valencian Community.

The main goal of this Guide is therefore to provide urban managers with a useful tool to be used in the formulation of comprehensive proposals for integration in the existing city. Additionally, this document facilitates the approach to the most extended tools for urban land assessment, provides recommendations to be taken into consideration within these processes and documents a series of exemplary cases (Good Practices).

In order to draft this document, the Committee for Construction Planning trusted a group of experts with the task of identifying the criteria and lines of action that are usually followed in operations of urban regeneration. In its early phase, the study was divided into two stages: the first was aimed at the gathering of currently available assessment tools, paying special attention to the multicriteria analysis tools (such as the indicators systems and the certifications for urban sustainability). From this first study we extracted an extensive list of useful indicators for its application in different urban contexts. A series of strategies and basic recommendations to be taken into account when launching processes of urban regeneration was also specified. The second stage consisted of a selection of exemplary cases of urban regeneration, the assessment of which was based on the conclusions obtained in the previous stage. This second stage allowed us, on the one hand, to assess the applicability of the selected indicators and, on the other hand, to compare the impact of the strategies implemented in each intervention, related to the rest of case studies.
It is worth noting that the section on strategies and basic recommendations is presented as an open list. The reason for this is that its applicability will depend on the specific situation to be tackled in each of the operations for urban regeneration. The aim is that said recommendations are considered in the discussion of each intervention process, and that they result in a series of documents and tools that use a similar language, making the assessment and future revision of the recommendations suggested easier.

In short, this Guide to Urban Regeneration aims at becoming a reference and inspiration for urban operators, helping them to face the well-known complexity of these interventions successfully, and to demystify the idea that these practices are not feasible.
The participation of a series of agents, the personal interests of which may at first be opposed to each other, is essential in order to ensure the proper development of the processes for urban regeneration. However, these agents must necessarily act under the pattern of the public function of urbanism, respecting in turn their legitimate personal interests. Bearing this in mind, the present Guide is aimed, on the one hand, at the urban manager of the intervention, usually formed by a public-private team of interdisciplinary character. On the other hand, the Guide also wishes to serve associations and citizens in general, hence its informative and didactic nature. It is convenient that this heterogeneous group of agents has first-hand knowledge of the key factors which intervene in this type of operations, their real applicability and their relation with urban indicators of diverse nature. In short, this Guide’s target group is plural and diverse and comprises the Administration, technical officers and the general public.

One of the aims of this Guide is to achieve that policy-makers and civil servants working in town and city halls consider the relevance of counting on these tools in order to improve the decision-making process regarding the city, the efficiency of interventions and the transparency of the processes. Professionals must, in turn, adapt to this new scenario and contribute to it with their studies and projects, helping contextualize their interventions both horizontally and vertically, facilitating their future assessment once the project has become real.

This approach is aimed at providing an easier access to global information relative to urban regeneration and giving it a more dynamic format, thus promoting a higher participation and interaction on the citizens’ side. This will encourage other ways of urban management, such as e-administration, which exceeds the current model based on a bilateral and hierarchical relation between the Administration and the citizens.1

> The main target group of this Guide are policy-makers (especially at the local scale), technical officers within the public Administration, professionals, academic entities, social groups and the general public.

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INTRODUCTION

The huge urban growth since the mid-twentieth century and its effects on the environment and the quality of life of people, have centred the attention of policies and public actions affecting the urban environment.

The spectacular increase in world population together with the aforementioned urban growth have caused a long list of problems, the magnitude of which jeopardizes the balance of the planet and the forms of human life as we know them.

In fact, the evidences of climate change, caused mainly by the emission of greenhouse gases, have revealed the instability triggered by a system in which cities consume around 70% of the planet’s resources.\(^2\) Not surprisingly, whereas at the start of the 19th century the urban population represented a scarce 14% of world population, its dramatic increase has led to an urban population of over 50% worldwide nowadays.

The principal symptoms of this intensive urbanization phenomenon could be summarized into two main categories: effects on the environment and on humans. Regarding the effects on the environment, the problem has become a worldwide issue since the 1980’s when it was proved that the ecological footprint of the planet exceeded its surface, that is, from the moment when the use of its resources surpassed its capacity of regenerating them. Likewise, it is considered that cities, and therefore the urban way of life developed in them, are responsible for 75% of greenhouse gas emission\(^3\). As for the effects on humans, this urban hyper-growth phenomenon, together with the changes in social patterns and structures, has led to increasing issues of public health, a greater concern for security, social exclusion phenomena due to age or gender, etc. These signs have led to a detachment from urban lifestyle. In the past decades, said negative perception of urban habitat was reflected in the flight of great part of the population from the traditional city. These citizens moved to suburban areas with low-population density since the city was incapable of satisfying their growing demand for comfort.

The global nature of the problem together with its increasing seriousness have resulted in the urgency of activating mechanisms which can revert the trend in which we are still nowadays, from all levels. However, although urban systems are identified as the origin and cause of great part of the environmental problems, there is also the opinion that cities are a perfect means to mitigate the effects of climate change and adapt to it. The United Nations states in its report *State of the World's Cities 2012/2013*\(^4\) that cities are the “remedy for global crises, such as the economic and democratic crises that characterize the conflicts which extend like a plague over all the regions of the Planet”, hence the apparent contradiction that identifies cities as the original source of the issue, but also as part of the solution.

The need to find adequate formulae for facing today’s main challenges must necessarily consider that the rigid and complex artefacts that are cities must offer the sufficient capacity of adaptation to ever-changing population demands, largely


\[^{3}\text{Michele A., 2012. Urban Diplomacy: Local Leaders, Global Challenges. Canadian International Council (CIC). Published online at: www.opencanada.org.}\]
due to the intensity and volatility of the flow of capital and persons, so typical of the current, globalized economy. Resilience, which in the field of social sciences is understood as the capacity of systems and organisms to resist particularly extreme adverse conditions, points to the way that contemporary society must follow in order to adapt itself to the huge demands derived from the exhaustion of a growing economy. Said economic model is basically sustained by the idea of having infinite resources at our disposal (petroleum, ground, water) and its consequences are already noticeable, essentially through the effects of climate change.

To conclude, and as mentioned at the beginning of this brief introduction, the increase of the global population since the mid-twentieth century has been very important. Even nowadays it is one of the main factors to consider when fighting climate change. It should be noted in this regard that, although the current economic crisis has negatively affected the population statistics, the official predictions still point to an increasing population pressure at a global scale, with population growth scenarios over a 20-year period.

The Need for Urban Regeneration

Faced with the demand for constantly adjusting the physical basis of the city to growing and ever-changing demands for activities and urban uses, the European Union pointed out the need to “promote resource-efficient settlement patterns that minimise land-take and urban sprawl”, among its objectives for improving the urban environments.

These reflections reinforce the idea of boosting policies and tools that will help build the way towards new resilient urban models, through actions of urban regeneration, making the transition to low-carbon and low-consumption economies easier, as is apparent from the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities from 2007 or from the Europe 2020 Strategy. Taking stock of the current situation in Spain, this being applicable to many other European countries, we find that urban regeneration is starting to count with a widespread political support. For example, the Document of Reference attached to the Toledo Declaration of 2010 explicitly boosts Integrated Urban Regeneration, and states that “the main aim of urban sustainability must be the achievement of maximum eco-efficiency within the network of already consolidated cities”.

Here, thus, is the first and almost unavoidable requirement for achieving any noticeable progress within the improvement of urban resource efficiency: dramatically limiting urban growth or sprawl and focusing the priority action on the consolidated land and built heritage.
Delimiting of the concept of urban regeneration

As with the terms urban development or sustainable development, the definition of urban regeneration is subject to constant revision, having been defined in many different ways. From the end of the 1970’s, the concept of urban regeneration has been associated with different processes, derived from a context of increasing globalization. The vagueness of this term is more palpable in continental Europe. 6

To speak of regeneration, either understanding its academic definition as “to re-create, reconstitute, or make over, especially in a better form or condition” or “to revive or produce anew; bring into existence again” implies considering the evolution between opposed concepts: decadence or degeneration and vitality. In urban science, the regeneration of a spatial entity, like a district or a city, implies returning vitality to an organism that declined or slid into a crisis. Nevertheless, that opposition between positive metaphors (revitalization and innovation) and negative states (obsolescence, decline and crisis) that is meant to be overcome provides a diffuse framework. This situation only becomes clear through reasoning and discussion and is finally specified in fixed goals and objectives for each action. Urban regeneration therefore implies political action, sustained in the debate about the state of the city and the availability of means to modify that initial state, where urban planning (the basis of the contents of this Guide) is a tool aimed at easing the process of decision-making.

The understanding that urban regeneration implies an open process that approaches the city as a living organism and in constant transformation leaves aside the image of the city as a malleable product and comparable to static models. The goal is not to reach an imaginary Arcadia as a kind of ideal contemporary city through this Guide (as we will see in its instrumental analysis), but rather to activate a series of mechanisms for city improvement involving the highest number possible of stakeholders. Said mechanisms will try to ease, at all times, understanding of the urban issue with a double goal, always present: to improve people’s living conditions and to reduce harm to the environment. This implies understanding building as a means and not as a goal.

According to the approach of this Guide, addressing urban regeneration leads to tackling the physical response which, linked to more comprehensive and long-term policies, is capable of integrating the current social and economic challenges in a coherent way. Most of the accumulated experience within tissue remodelling has been traditionally linked to refurbishing operations in historical centres and developmental expansions, the latter focusing especially on the refurbishing of old, open-block districts of the 1960’s. Nevertheless, the existing city currently offers a much wider panorama in which the decline of the urban environment extends to a wide range of situations, the effects of which are evident in many aspects. This is so, that

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Fig 05. Improvement of Urban Environments within the European Union. Source: elaborated by the authors.
the dynamics of consolidated soil overlap in a wide casuistry that includes such diverse settings as that of vulnerable districts, residential, low-density suburban neighbourhoods, areas for obsolete activities and the new urban free spaces that have arisen from the elimination of barriers (e.g. railway excavations, industrial dismantling, military land, tertiary service facilities in decline, etc.), as mentioned by the Spanish Urban and Local Sustainability Strategy in its reports from 2009 and 2011. Semi-consolidated areas are also included in this casuistry; either as a form of dispersed buildings, lacking minimum urban service, or the all too common empty buildings. All of these situations, which are not uncommon, make up the existing city and must be taken into account when dealing with urban regeneration.

Therefore, urban regeneration means intervening in areas as small as a street or a single building or in bigger spaces either through comprehensive operations or using strategic reactivation techniques such as the implementation of resources (used as urban catalysts) that contribute to revitalizing the areas where they are implemented. The decision of sequential intervention in public or private spaces will depend, as we will see later on, on the scope and goals of each action.

Towards an integrated approach of urban regeneration

When dealing with urban regeneration, we are faced with a complex reality that exceeds the generic condition that has recently described cities as generic. Said reality includes a wide casuistry that, as mentioned in the previous section, is full of aspects that reflect the singularity of each place and each moment, and which evidences the multiple layers that underlie the apparent urban reality. This wide range of physical situations adds up to stemming problematic situations which, as mentioned in the introduction to this Guide, range from public health problems, safety, exclusion and lack of social cohesion, to environmental deterioration or a drop in economic activity.

Therefore, having accepted that cities are complex systems in which many and very diverse aspects coexist, the need of shifting from partial fields and points of view to approaching the city as a functional whole becomes immediate. The institutional approach of the European Union regarding urban regeneration, as described in the Toledo Declaration of 2010 therefore assumes the need of adopting a comprehensive approach that understands the city as a physical body, indissoluble from its citizens.
Following the recommendations included in the Leipzig Charter, the Toledo Declaration aims at a common understanding, the key aspects of which are: the adoption of a holistic approach and way of thinking, the idea of cities as a social construction resulting from the combination of time and space, and the need to integrate the parts into the whole. There are still many aspects to improve until we can count on assessment tools which address the casuistry of urban regeneration reliably, from an integrative perspective. In fact, it can be observed that there is still a lack of certifications which are applicable to complete urban areas and also to consolidated or semi-consolidated ones.

However, according to the Document of Reference attached to the Toledo Declaration, this concept of Integrated Urban Regeneration “aims to optimise, preserve or revalue all the existing urban capital (social, built environment, heritage, etc.) in contrast to other forms of intervention in which, amongst all this urban capital, only the value of the land is prioritised and conserved, by traumatically demolishing and replacing the rest of the whole urban capital and — most lamentably —of the social capital”. This integrated approach is already assumed as fundamental in most part of the policies for organization and planning of cities internationally. An example of this is the recent compromise reached at the World Summit on Sustainable Development which took place in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012 (Rio+20 conference), where it was ratified.

Fig 07. Increasing demand for social and economic environmental sustainability within urban growth. Source: elaborated by the authors.

Political and Institutional Framework Regarding Urban Regeneration and Sustainability

GLOBAL


1996  > The Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements (second UN Conference on Human settlements).


2002  > World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg (Rio+10).

2007  > Curitiba Conference on Cities and Biodiversity.


EUROPE


1999  > European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP). Informal meeting of Ministers responsible for spatial planning held in Potsdam.


2001  > The European Community’s Sixth Environmental Action Programme (EAP).
Political and Institutional Framework Regarding Urban Regeneration and Sustainability

VALENCIAN COMMUNITY

Regulation of Town Planning and Management (ROGTU).
Territorial Strategy of the Valencian Community
Law on Regional Planning, Urban Development and Landscape (LOTUP)*

* This law was passed after the present Guide was drafted and therefore will not appear in the rest of the document.

SPAIN

2011 > Spanish Strategy for Urban and Local Sustainability (EESUL).
2013 > Law 87/2013 on Urban Regeneration, Refurbishing and Renewal.

2007 > Revised EU strategy on Sustainable Development.
> European Thematic Strategy on Urban Environment (ETSUE).
> The Green Paper on urban mobility “Towards a new culture for urban mobility”.
> Marseille Declaration, which approves the European Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities. Informal Meeting of Urban Development Ministers.
2010 > Toledo Declaration. Informal Meeting of Urban Development Ministers.
> Europe 2020 Strategy: “A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth”.

Conference Aalborg+10 - Inspiring Futures. Third European Conference on Sustainable Cities and Towns.
Revised EU strategy on Sustainable Development.
European Thematic Strategy on Urban Environment (ETSUE).
Leipzig Charter on sustainable European cities.
The Green Paper on urban mobility “Towards a new culture for urban mobility”.
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Toledo Declaration. Informal Meeting of Urban Development Ministers.
Europe 2020 Strategy: “A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth”.

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Law 87/2013 on Urban Regeneration, Refurbishing and Renewal.

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