

## STUDY ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF EUROPEAN FUNDS FINANCED PROJECTS TO URBAN DEVELOPMENT

### **Abstract**

The urban dimension has become increasingly important for the European Union's cohesion policy. In this particular context, in order to reduce the obstacles cities, confront themselves with, local public authorities have started implementing projects financed from structural and cohesion funds. This paper is aimed at analysing the contribution EU funds have in the urban development process by presenting some successful projects of cities that invested in sustainable urban development. The choice of projects was based on two key aspects: (1) high level of complexity, efficient planning and execution; and (2) effects of the implemented projects, that are tangible and measurable, for the urban space rehabilitation process.

**Keywords:** cities, urban dimension, EU funds, sustainable urban development.

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## STUDIU PRIVIND CONTRIBUȚIA PROIECTELOR FINANȚATE DIN FONDURILE EUROPENE LA DEZVOLTAREA URBANĂ

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### **Rezumat**

Dimensiunea urbană a devenit extrem de importantă pentru politica de coeziune europeană. În acest context, pentru a reduce problemele cu care se confruntă orașele, autoritățile publice locale au început să implementeze proiecte finanțate prin fonduri structurale și de coeziune. Acest studiu încearcă să analizeze contribuția fondurilor UE la dezvoltarea urbană prezentând în acest sens câteva proiecte de succes ale unor orașe care au pariat pe dezvoltarea urbană durabilă. Alegerea acestor proiecte s-a bazat pe două aspecte esențiale: (1) nivelul de complexitate al acestora, eficiența planificării și modul de realizare; și (2) efectele - tangibile și măsurabile ale implementării proiectelor - pentru reabilitarea spațiului urban.

**Cuvinte cheie:** orașe, dimensiunea urbană, fonduri europene, dezvoltare urbană durabilă



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, cities development has become a necessity at both national and international level. This is also due to the fact that urban areas contribute widely to social, cultural and economic development (University of Oslo, Department of Sociology and Human Geography, 2013). However, this development can be achieved only if elements contributing to this growth are managed properly - this being the main problem cities often face: how policies and urban development plans are formulated, as well as the methods of implementing them.

The execution and formulation of policies of urban development can be divided into the following five tasks and essential elements (JICA, 2006, p. 22):

- setting and implementing the urban development plans;
- developing the urban infrastructure for urban growth and improving the urban living standards;
- restoring the residential areas in order to create proper living spaces from the health point of view;
- protecting the urban areas, as well as strengthening the natural resistance towards calamities;
- developing the administrative capacities in order to support urban management.

In the European Union, urban development and the problems facing urban areas have become increasingly more important. Thus, in the context of Cohesion Policy, urban areas have earned their place in the URBAN pilot project that was initiated in 1989.

In the time frame 2000-2006, the main EU priorities (laid down by the Lisbon strategy) were aimed at: economic growth, jobs and innovation. For urban development, the programs URBAN II and URBACT I were created (European Commission, 2015).

In the time frame 2007-2013, the EU's top priorities took into account convergence, regional competitiveness and employment, and territorial cooperation (Carey et al., 2007, pp 32-33). During this period, the problems that the towns faced were integrated into all national and regional programs, which have been financed through the structural funds and cohesion funds. Thus, the URBACT II program was focused on the exchange of best practices and the creation of a network between experts and urbanists; the JESSICA initiative has provided support for sustainable investment, growth and employment in urban areas, while the Urban Audit Program has provided statistical data regarding the livelihood of citizens in at least 357 European cities, from Member States. Regarding the timeframe 2014-2020, according to the

Regulation (UE) 1303/2013<sup>1</sup>, the funds contribute, first of all, to continue and intensify the actions to strengthen the social, and economic and territorial cohesion, and secondly, to achieve the objectives of Europe 2020 for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (EUR-LEX, 2013b). Taking into account these aspects, sustainable urban development is becoming very important for achieving the objectives of Europe 2020, therefore, at the level of cohesion policies have been imposed a range of measures including:

- 5% of the ERDF budget will be distributed to each Member State for integrated actions for a sustainable urban development, and also for managing and implementing these actions into cities, in accordance with article 7 of Regulation No 17. 1301/2013<sup>2</sup> (EUR-LEX, 2013a);
- Creating a platform for urban development that would result in an active dialogue between European cities and the Commission with regard to cohesion policy, which will also be a mechanism that underlines the way in which cities can contribute to Europe 2020;
- Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) will be used as a tool to support the actions integrated in urban areas, and will give the possibility to combine the funds according to different thematic objectives, or even merge the funds from priority axes with the ones from operational programs that are supported from all structural funds. ITI is the only tool that implements the Integrated Territorial Strategies (European Commission, 2014).
- The URBACT III program will continue the initiatives of the program URBACT II, from the time frame 2007-2013. This program, is financed by the European Regional Development Fund, will have a budget of approximately 96,3 billion Euro<sup>3</sup> (URBACT, 2015)

## 2. SUCCESSFUL URBAN PROJECTS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

At European level, the urban aspect has gained in time a considerable importance in the context of the Cohesion Policy. In this particular circumstances, cities have benefited - in order to be able to diminish

<sup>1</sup> In regards to Regulation (EU) no. 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006, OJ L 347, 20.12.2013.

<sup>2</sup> In regards to Regulation (EU) no. 1301/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 related to the European Regional Development Fund and specific dispositions for economic development and jobs creation objective and abrogation of Regulation (EC) no.1080/2006.

<sup>3</sup> From which: 71% - FEDR, 5,7% - member state, 17,2% -beneficiary city.

the problems with which they have been confronted - by a series of projects that have been financed by structural and cohesion funds. In order to analyze the contribution of EU funds to sustainable urban development in this subchapter, I've presented two successful projects that have contributed to the achievement of the objectives of the Europe 2020. The choice of these projects was based on two essential aspects: (1) the level of complexity, the effectiveness of planning and implementation; and (2) - tangible and measurable results of implementing these projects - for the restoration of urban areas.

### 2.1. *Malaga (Spain): Restoring the city center*

**Context.** Before 1995, the Malaga historic center was in decline due to the fact that the buildings were in a poor condition, some were even ruins, and also due to the fact that the resident population was getting older, while the number of young people was getting smaller and the rate of unemployment was increasing. All these aspects were severely affecting the image of the city.

The restoration process of Malaga historic center has begun in 1995 with the first URBAN Community Initiative, a process that has also continued in the next stages of the program 2000-2006 and 2007-2013. The restoration process included: (1) measures of regeneration, restoration of streets, green spaces, buildings, factories and commercial areas, and (2) participation and involvement of residents of the area. Also, this process has eased, from a social point of view, the integration of disadvantaged and marginalized groups, who were living in buildings that had an advanced state of degradation (Urban Initiative, 2015).

**Main objectives:** (1) strengthening the cohesion, (2) social integration of disadvantaged / minority living in the area, and (3) increasing the attractiveness of the historic center.

**Budget:** 14,400,000 EUR (the city's contribution: 4,304,757 EUR) (European Association for Information on Local Development, 2013a). In figure 1 are presented the main areas in which European funds have been invested, in the 3 time frames (1994-1999: URBAN I; 2000-2006: URBAN II; 2007-2013: Urban Initiative<sup>4</sup> - POCTEFEX<sup>5</sup>).

<sup>4</sup> *Iniciativa Urbana Malaga "Arrabales-Carreteras"* had as a main objective to improve public spaces, strengthen the identity and its multiple domains. This project has continued the investments from the periods 1994-1999 and 2000-2006 in the historic center, with the note that in the period 2007-2014 different neighborhoods and areas have been targeted.

<sup>5</sup> POCTEFEX - Programa de Cooperación Transfronteriza España Fronteras Exteriores.

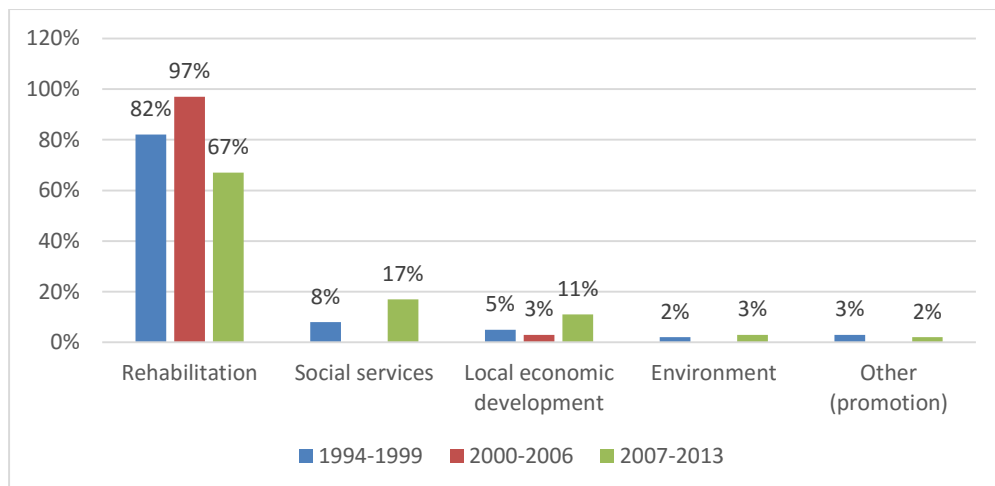


FIGURE 1. BUDGET DISTRIBUTION  
Source: Cavestany, 2013, pp. 65-66

**The project's beneficiaries:** about 2,000 citizens (residents, SMEs that had headquarters in that specific area).

**Project coordinators:** the municipality through the European External Action Service, in collaboration with various public or private organizations (European Association for Information on Local Development, 2013a).

#### The project's results:

- Restoration of the historic center* [for example, the restoration of the Montano Civic Center; creating municipal playground in the Pericon Square (the result being: protecting the child care spaces); the renovation of the Merced Square (the result being: reducing the traffic in the area, improving the infrastructure, reopening of the Carmen Thyssen museum, the renovation of the Contemporary Art Museum Malaga (figure 2) (Cavestany, 2013, pp. 22-43)].



FIGURE 2. THE RENOVATION OF THE CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUM MALAGA, IN MERCED SQUARE  
Source: <http://www.datuopinion.com/mercado-de-mayoristas-de-malaga> and  
<https://pintorjosemariafernandez.wordpress.com/2013/05/02/viaje-de-estudios-a-malaga/>

- b) *Supporting local economic development* (for example, a center for supporting entrepreneurs was created with the purpose to strengthen the economy of the historic city center, by supporting the opening of new business and improving the business from the area).
- c) *Ensuring inclusion and social cohesion* (for example, starting a series of training workshops for different categories of people, who have problems finding a job; starting a program called "Support companion" for people with addictions).
- d) *Protecting the environment and environmental surroundings* [for example, creating an Environmental Consultancy Center for companies that have their headquarters in the historic center; increasing the number of pedestrian areas (figure 3)].



FIGURE 3. RESTORATION AND TRANSFORMATION OF A SERIES OF STREETS INTO PEDESTRIAN AREAS  
 Source: Cavestany, 2013, p. 23 and 28

- e) *Changing the city's image has triggered an increase in the number of tourists.* Thus, the number of nights spent in Malaga has increased from 970,000 in 2005 to 1,697,000 in 2012. Also, cruise tourism has boomed, as the number of those who chose to visit Malaga has reached 650,000 in 2012 (an increase from 205,000 in 2005) (Cavestany, 2013, p.70).

Once the project was completed, Malaga has become a model of sustainable urban development, successfully combining an improvement in the quality of life of its population with economic, cultural and social development of the central area, in the context of an accelerated increase in the number of tourists (European Commission, 2013a, p. 2). Also, the project that was implemented in Malaga can be an

example for other cities that are experiencing problems related to road infrastructure, degraded buildings, industrial wasteland, an increasing unemployment rates and investors who choose to leave the area for more attractive centers, from more developed cities (European Association for Information on Local Development, 2013b).

## 2.2. Bydgoszcz (Poland): Revitalizing the industrial zone

**Context.** Mill Island (figure 4) was a deserted post-industrial area located in the Centre of Bydgoszcz. The zone sprawled over an area of 6.5 hectares and was neglected and excluded from the plans and strategies of urban community for about half of century.



FIGURE 4. MILL ISLAND, BYDGOSZCZ, POLAND BEFORE THE RESTORATION  
Source: <http://www.czystabydgoszcz.pl/upload/file/735.pdf>

In 2004 the City Hall of Bydgoszcz launched a broad strategy<sup>6</sup> for revitalizing the area of Mill Island, which covered three **essential aspects**: (1) maintain the historical characteristics of Mill Island; (2) carry out and to take into account the requirements, or needs of its citizens and (3) attain the objectives of the EU with regard to securing and strengthening social cohesion and environmental sustainability (EuroCities, 2013b, p.1).

**Project duration:** 2004-2012

**Main objectives:** using the entire potential of the Island for its development in the areas of culture, tourism and leisure, through the rehabilitation and reconstruction of historic buildings, leisure parks, road and pedestrian infrastructure, thus fostering economic growth and strengthening social cohesion in the area

<sup>6</sup> "Revitalizing the natural heritage on Mill Island and on its surroundings that are in close proximity"

(EuroCities, 2013a). Budget: 79,649,455 PLN (Polish złotych) (CA. 21 million EUR). The distribution of the budget for the four phases of the project is shown in figure 5.

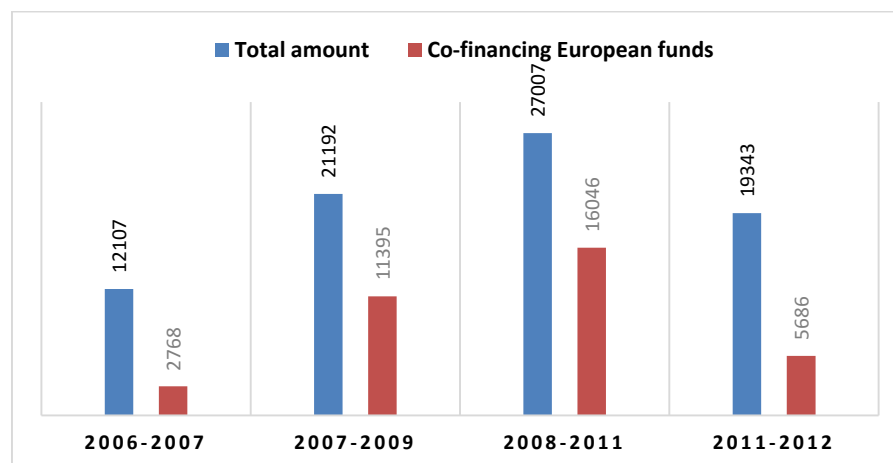


FIGURE 5. BUDGET DISTRIBUTION FOR THE 4 PHASES OF THE PROJECT (PLN)

Source: Bydgoszcz City Hall, 2011; Loose, 2011, p. 67; Szczesik-Zobek and Loose, 2011, p. 32

**The project's beneficiaries:** the residents in the Polish city Bydgoszcz, employees and unemployed persons in the area who are experiencing problems related to work, or have difficulties in finding a job, SMEs that operate in the area, entrepreneurs who want to open up a new business on Mille Island or nearby.

The regeneration process was divided into **four major phases** that have considered (Bydgoszcz City Hall, 2011; Loose, 2011; Szczesik-Zobek and Loose, 2011; EuroCities, 2013b):

1. *Revitalizing Mill Island for business development (existing or new) (2006-2007)* (figure 6) took into consideration: building three bridges that have linked the island with the rest of the city; the reconstruction of the Miedzywodzie channel; restoration of a historic building and turning it into a center for employment and business support.

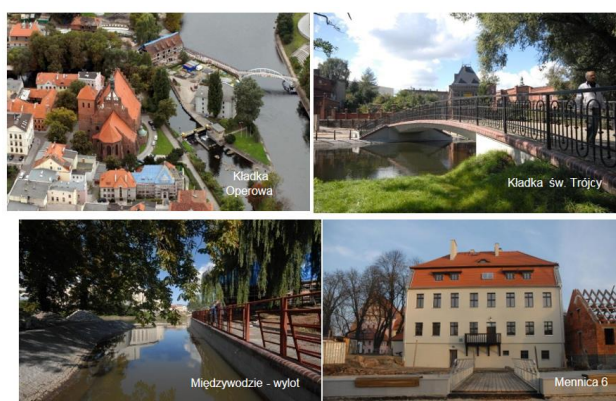


FIGURE 6. REVITALIZING MILL ISLAND FOR BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Source: Loose, 2011, p. 18

2. *Revitalizing the cultural heritage of the Island (2007-2009)* (figure 7) was achieved through: the renovation of the Regional Museum, the restoration of a number of five historic buildings located on Mill Island, three representative buildings have been transformed into the Interactive Art Museum, Archeological Museum and the European Money Center.



FIGURE 7. REVITALIZING THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE ISLAND  
 Source: Bydgoszcz City Hall, 2011

3. *Building a recreational infrastructure (2008-2011)* (figure 8) has envisioned the construction of green spaces, the creation of bike trails, playgrounds and facilities for the water sports lovers; it was accomplished: street lightening, building an amphitheater as a support for organizing concerts, art shows, animation shows.



FIGURE 8. RECREATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE  
 Source: Szczesik-Zobek and Loose, 2011, pp. 27-28

4. *Revitalizing the degraded sports areas (2011-2012)* (figure 9) was accomplished by demolishing the old sports club and building a marina, which offers a wellness center, catering services and accommodation facilities for potential tourists.



FIGURE 9. THE MARINA  
 Source: Loose, 2011, pp. 62-65

#### The project's results (Loose, n.d., p.13):

- (1) Improving the quality of the cultural infrastructure.
- (2) Promoting the Mill's image and history beyond the borders of the Polish city. Thus, after the completion of the project, approximately 20,000 people came to spend their free time on the island, in order to participate in various cultural, educational and sport events).
- (3) Improving the business environment in the area (approximately 3,000-4,000 people have benefited from specialized counseling in the start-up centers, at the premises of the Association Of Employers and Entrepreneurs, and in various offices for business and vocational training).
- (4) In the long run the objectives are: increasing the competitiveness of the area, ensuring and reinforcing social cohesion, and developing a new brand for the Polish city, taking into account the strategy of the Mill Island.

**Awards.** The program that aimed "Reviving the natural heritage on the Mill Island and its surroundings" has received several awards, of which (EuroCities, 2013a):

- (1) in 2008 it received the title "Modernization of the year" from the Polish Ministry of Infrastructure and Development and from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education;

- (2) in 2010 it was the winner of the competition "Seven miracles of EU funds", organized by the Polish Ministry of Regional Development;
- (3) The EUROCITIES 2011 cooperation award;
- (4) In 2013, the project was among the 27 finalists chosen by the RegioStars<sup>7</sup> jury, out of 149 projects that entered the competition, being selected in the CITYSTAR category: approaches to sustainable urban development, along with 4 other projects from different cities (European Commission, 2013b).

Currently, Mill Island represents a true support center for urban development for the entire city.

## CONCLUSION

In order to bring long-term benefits, urban projects that are financed from European funds should: (1) meet the development needs of both the organizations that implement them, as well as the cities and even the regions, and (2) solve the problems that each area faces.

Starting from the analysis of the two successful projects from Spain and Poland, the cities from Romania should start acting. Thus, the Romanian cities have at their disposal, in order to access the European Structural and Investment Funds, Priority Axis 4 - dedicated to Supporting sustainable urban development within the Regional operational program (ROP) 2014-2020 (Regio, 2015). The available budget is 1.38 billion EUR (17.88% of the funds allocated to POR 2014-2020). The projects can be diverse and relate, mainly, to: (1) urban transportation; (2) buildings for educational, cultural and recreational activities; green areas, public squares or urban streets; (3) revitalizing urban areas and (4) educational infrastructure (Regio, 2015).

The projects that could be accomplished by Romanian urban areas by 2020 could contribute (as in the case of Bydgoszcz, Malaga) to the increase of the economic competitiveness (by supporting the development of the business environment), to improvement of the living conditions of local communities (through the development of infrastructure and services), and also to the sustainable development of cities, which will become able to manage their resources effectively and to pursue their potential for innovation and the uptake of technological progress.

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<sup>7</sup> The main objective of the RegioStars awards is to find best practices in urban and regional development, and bring into attention original projects, or programs, from different European countries, which may be appealing and may represent a successful model for other cities and regions. These prizes are awarded annually by the European Commission since 2009 (European Commission, 2013b).

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