

THE CATALAN NEIGHBORHOOD LAW  
AS A SOFT PLANNING TOOL.THE IMPACT  
OF THE POLICY INICIATIVES

SUMARI

**1. Introduction**

**2. Conceptualizing soft planning**

**3. Understanding target areas in Catalonia**

**4. The origin of the Neighborhood Law**

**5. The Neighborhood Law**

5.1. Target areas

5.2. Management and funding

5.3. Fields of action

5.4. The system of evaluation

**6. The universe: The first five years**

**7. Brief conclusions: An end to a new start**

ANA PAGLIUSO

ana.pagliuso@edu.ulisboa.pt

Research Centre for Architecture, Urbanism and Design,  
University of Lisbon

CRISTINA CAVACO

ccavaco@fa.ulisboa.pt

Research Centre for Architecture, Urbanism and Design,  
University of Lisbon

JOAQUIM SABATÉ

joaquin.sabate@upc.edu

Escola Tècnica Superior d'Arquitectura,  
Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya

# THE CATALAN NEIGHBORHOOD LAW AS A SOFT PLANNING TOOL. THE IMPACT OF THE POLICY INITIATIVES<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This article reports on a new approach to urban planning known as soft planning and research into one particular case: The Catalan Neighborhood Law. This law affects 830,000 people (11% of the Catalan population), 93 districts, and 76 towns and cities, and has overseen expenditure of 1 billion euros, and promoted more than 300 integrated urban intervention projects in five years, all with a single goal: The conversion of districts and urban areas into better and more sustainable places in which to live. We discuss the most significant impact of this law in Catalonia and its use as a soft planning tool.

**Keywords:** Neighborhoods law, integrated urban regeneration, soft planning, governance, urban policies

## 1. Introduction

The nature of the current statutory system – rigid, complex and time-consuming – led in past decades to the development of other types of tools and policies that could solve some of the problems that this system did not anticipate. In order to explain these tough concepts and processes were made more flexible, recent literature and practice have begun to employ the prefix “soft” as, for example, in the sense of “soft spaces”, “soft planning”, and “soft law”.

After a brief conceptualization of the term “soft planning”, this article sets out to analyze<sup>2</sup> the Neighborhood Law<sup>3</sup> (hereafter NL) enacted in Catalonia, Spain (Departament de Política Territorial i Obres Públiques 2004a,b), as an excellent example of a “soft planning” tool. We use the Projects of Integral Urban Intervention (hereafter PIUI), designed and implemented in urban areas under the auspices of this law, as a case study. Their characteristics (structural programming, multiplicity of established strategic frameworks, stakeholders’ relationships, and financial approach) and the challenges implicit in the implementation of

projects and locally based programs – all of which were designed to improve the quality of life in many Catalan cities in several ways over a short period of time via (or based on) “soft” planning – justify this combined analysis.

In Catalonia, Local-based Integrated Approaches (hereafter, LBIA) have been associated with both EU-led policy initiatives and policies and laws enacted by this region’s autonomous government. They aim to even out urban and territorial imbalances and meet the specific needs and demands of the territories and their communities by means of an articulated set of local-focused policies that share integrated objectives and a development-led strategy.

In terms of the application and impact of the NL, it is important to (i) understand how neighborhoods have been transformed in recent decades; (ii) appreciate which “soft tools” work best on a world scale; and (iii) understand how they have been applied and what their impact has been. In order to bring together the concept of soft planning tools, and the Neighborhood Law and various related case studies, this article raises the following questions:

- What impact has the NL had on the key drivers of cities’ health within the context of the legal framework?
- Is the NL sensitive to the challenges of urban competitiveness and cohesion, and does it respond more effectively than other policies in the field of urban regeneration?
- How has the NL fostered cross-boundary processes (administrative, social, and physical) as a means of streamlining urban transformation processes complementing statutory planning that are based on strategic management cooperation and community-based thinking?

<sup>1</sup> This research is based on the PhD thesis *Neighborhoods Law: a step forward to urban regeneration* (Pagliuso, 2016) and the SOFTPLAN Project framework being developed by a team of architects and geographers from the School of Architecture and the Institute of Social Sciences (ICS) at the Universidade de Lisboa, funded by the FCT (Foundation for Science and Technology).

<sup>2</sup> This analysis is based on a previous research project that led to the writing of a PhD thesis “The Neighborhoods Law: a step towards urban regeneration”.

<sup>3</sup> The NL aims to improve neighborhoods, urban areas and small towns. In a way, this regulation was a new public tool that supported integral urban regeneration.

- Has this legal tool promoted power and responsibility transference between different tiers of government, thereby fostering devolution or decentralization processes?
- How has this tool contributed to the emergence of a new typology of spaces based on local community participation?

## 2. Conceptualizing soft planning

“Far from contradicting the “logic” of a capitalist economy, soft planning may instead reinforce the conditions for sustained and harmonized growth and partially correct the imbalances and tensions that are necessarily linked to development” (Solasse, 1967). Despite its contemporary-sounding tone, this statement was in fact written several years before urban planning and the concept of soft spaces (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2007) even existed.

In subsequent years, English territorial planning adopted a “very strong tendency towards flexible and somewhat ambitious soft planning”. With the neoliberal offensive of the 1980s, “the situation of urban planning became more complicated and the most general tendencies [were] the abandonment of territorial planning (the extreme case of England and Wales between 1979 and 1990) or, more usually, a diversification of styles that tend in general towards more market-linked soft planning” (Marshall, 1995).

In the early 2000s, planning was seen as a soft process (Faludi, 2000, p. 299) and there was an increased demand for professionals with “soft-planning skills”, that is, experience in “setting up, managing and adjusting regional planning exercises, including interaction with actors of many kinds, whether those fully versed in the processes or those with little knowledge but strong interest” (Glasson and Marshall, 2007).

The European Union’s territorial cohesion policy enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty backs soft planning as one of the mainstays of the concept of “soft spaces” (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2007) and to be “the preferred, indeed the only, realistic model for soft spaces” (Faludi 2010, p. 21). This policy advocates the idea of soft planning wherever new soft planning spaces cross administrative borders within the EU (Luukkonen and Moilanen 2012). This spatial rescaling in these “soft spaces” is influenced by territorial co-operation and development strategies, i.e., forms of soft planning that promote soft security policies (Stead, 2014).

The emergence of those “spaces with fuzzy boundaries” was accompanied by soft planning as a counterpart and complement to statutory “hard planning” (Purkharthofer, 2016).

Evidently, there are disparities between soft planning concepts within European spaces and their practical development governed by traditional administrative territories (Luukkonen and Moilanen, 2012). It seems that the soft planning concept has continued to change over time as a means of adapting planning to a new way of thinking about cities and be part of them

(“soft spaces”), and to meeting the novel requirements of contemporary society (“soft society”).

The ability to connect disciplines and to use them in distinct areas of study has undoubtedly boosted the popularity of the concept of soft planning but has also contributed to its arbitrary and ambiguous use. As a result, we find ourselves, clearly, in a state of “creative disorder”.

In this paper, the concept of soft planning is used as a planning process that crosses and dissolves traditional administrative territorial boundaries or “fuzzy” boundaries (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2009; Purkharthofer, 2016), and introduces new governance practices between formal structures and institutions whose aim is to promote locally based integrated territorial approaches.

Under the umbrella of soft planning, a growing number of integrated territorial and urban tools have emerged together – albeit outside the statutory system – to solve urban (physical, environmental, social, and economic) issues in a way that will improve the system’s effectiveness and efficiency. Currently, “it is not only a matter of corrective measures, directed towards the solving of traditional urban problems ... but also the need to tackle proactive actions to encourage competitiveness and attractiveness” (OECD, 2007, p. 8).

## 3. Understanding target areas in Catalonia

The sociopolitical and economic situation in Catalonia from the sixties onwards was characterized by significant waves of immigration that had a great impact on urban growth and created a substantial demand for housing. On the one hand, downtown areas, already in an advanced state of deterioration, along with suburban settlements, served as cradle for new residents; on the other, in order to absorb this sudden growth, the administration promoted the construction of numerous housing schemes, which was far removed from what was truly needed. As a result, by the beginning of the twenty-first century several neighborhoods had severe deficiencies at urban, social and economic levels (Pagliuso, 2016). In terms of city planning, innovative public policy and statutory planning mechanisms had begun to grow in number from the beginning of the twenty-first century in an attempt to help cities cope with these population avalanches. Statutory planning, besides being part of the history of city and planning theory, must address the real issues facing a continuously growing urban system (Terán Troyano, 1996), something that did not happen in these areas.

The most common characteristics of the different typologies of urban growth in Catalonia during this period were:

- Downtown areas: Compact urban fabric with few public spaces and very little renewal.
- Suburbs (“suburban expansion neighborhoods” or the “marginal urban or self-constructed neighborhoods”) (Busquets, 1999, pp. 17-34, 2004, pp. 285-295): Irregular sub-

**Figure 1.** Downtowns, suburbs and housing estates



Source: Departament de Polítiques Territorials i Obres Públiques, 2005. Oficina de Barris.

division of lots, self-construction (Fig. 1), few public spaces, and very few actions designed to improve the urban environment.

- Housing schemes and estates (Busquets 2004): Far from downtown areas, poor access, lack of facilities, and poor quality of public spaces (Fig. 1). Buildings were not accessible (3, 4, 5... without elevator) and were built using aluminose cement<sup>4</sup>. From a social point of view, housing estates can be divided into those with (i) heterogeneous (civil servants, workers, ...) or (ii) homogeneous (immigrants and shanty-dwellers) inhabitants (Pagliuso 2016).

In a previous study (Pagliuso 2016), we analyzed from a historical standpoint 93 urban areas in an attempt to understand how they were created and transformed, and their situation before the PIUIs began to be implemented.

By cross-referencing data extracted from a system of indicators and information collected *in situ*, we constructed a table summarizing the situation of each district before the implementation of the PIUIs (Pagliuso 2016) (Fig. 2). The following are some of the conclusions:

- Of the three types of neighborhoods, “leasing” was the commonest practice in downtown areas, followed by housing estates and suburbs.
- The quality of the construction of building was relatively similar everywhere, being low in downtowns and suburbs, and slightly better in housing estates.
- The quality – but, significantly, not the quantity – of public spaces was low in all three typologies. Housing estates were endowed with large open spaces that could be transformed into public spaces by quite simple urban regeneration. On the other hand, in the other two types of areas there were few public spaces and those that did exist were degraded by intensive use.

**Figure 2.** Summary of the situation of Catalan neighborhoods in the early twenty-first century.

	DOWNTOWN AREAS	SUBURBS	HOUSING ESTATES
<b>Prevailing system of land tenure</b>			
Owner	Dark	Dark	Dark
Rent	Light	Dark	Dark
Environment	Dark	Dark	Dark
<b>Location relative to center</b>			
Geographic complexity	Dark	Dark	Dark
<b>Public spaces</b>			
Global quality	Dark	Dark	Dark
Places and spaces for leisure	Dark	Dark	Dark
Accessibility	Dark	Dark	Dark
Parking public	Dark	Dark	Dark
<b>Building quality</b>			
General state	Dark	Dark	Dark
Structural pathologies	Dark	Dark	Dark
Habitability	Dark	Dark	Dark
Need lifts	Dark	Dark	Dark
<b>Lack of facilities and equipment</b>			
Neighborhood	Dark	Dark	Dark
City	Dark	Dark	Dark
<b>Economy</b>			
Local gaps	Dark	Dark	Dark
Unemployment rate	Dark	Dark	Dark
<b>Society</b>			
Population at risk of social exclusion	Dark	Dark	Dark
Proportion of population replacement	Dark	Dark	Dark

	Intensity of problems				
	+	4	3	2	-
Downtown	Dark	Dark	Dark	Dark	Dark
Suburb	Dark	Dark	Dark	Dark	Dark
Housing estates	Dark	Dark	Dark	Dark	Dark

Source: Pagliuso (2016).

- Districts usually had spaces for civic centers, senior and youth centers, neighborhood associations, etc. (i.e. facilities for local residents). However, the real lack was of “city facilities” such as city council and administrative buildings or hospitals that would attract more people to these areas and so help invigorate them.
- Social and economic conditions are very sensitive questions and are closely linked. The situation was more serious in downtown areas, although in the suburbs and housing estates the scenario was not that different. Few local job offers, low-level professional employment, and high unemployment were just three of the characteristics of these areas.

<sup>4</sup>Aluminize is name given to the injury to concrete that occurs especially in the joists of building slabs. Such injuries make the concrete more porous and less resistant, thereby jeopardizing the stability of the structure. This occurred because aluminous cement (CAC-R, which sets faster than traditional cements) was used in the construction.

#### 4. The origin of the Neighborhood Law

Urban areas are the result of the interaction of many different processes and stakeholders, some of which are drivers of change, others the receptors. “Urban regeneration is ... a response to the opportunities and challenges which are presented by urban degeneration in a particular place at a specific moment in time” (Roberts and Sikes, 2000, p. 9).

Urban regeneration policies started in the 1950s with the post-Second World War reconstruction strategies, then continued through periods of revitalization (1960s), renewal (1970s), redevelopment (1980s), and finally comprehensive regeneration (1990s) (Roberts and Sikes, 2000). Sustainable urban development, cohesive policies<sup>5</sup>, locally based integrated territorial approaches, and the unbundling of powers came few years later. Countries like USA, Germany and France also found it increasingly necessary to introduce specific programs to address the problems of urban degradation, segregation and social exclusion (Massey and Fong, 1990; Musterd 2011). Nevertheless, Britain is considered to be at the vanguard in the development of programs for degraded urban areas, possibly because the scale of the problems there was greater than in other advanced western countries.

In the European Union, urban policy is the responsibility of each member state. Nevertheless, above all in southern Europe, cities, towns and their legal institutions have always taken – and still take – advantage of EU funds and services.

It should be noted that local policy responses to urban problems differ considerably between countries even if the problems they face are shared (Roberts and Sikes, 2000); yet, new policies tend to look back in time and learn from solutions that have already been implemented in order to provide more accurate answers to current issues. The NL was no different in this sense. It is clearly based on pre-existing tools such as the URBAN Initiative<sup>6</sup> projects that were unfurled in Europe from the 1980s onwards. Some of these projects aimed to cross and expand boundaries, others attempted to set up new types of governance, and some even opted for LBIA.

In previous research, several examples<sup>7</sup> were studied to understand how these new projects have been implemented around the world and what lessons can be drawn from these good practices in terms of policy typologies, project management, citizen participation, and city improvement.

This article highlights the fact that all of the programs referred to here are in some way or other examples of

soft planning tools. Although some are/were laws<sup>8</sup> with rigid guidelines, they were not mandatory (usually local administrations/institutions could choose whether to join the program or not) and the boundaries of the implicated areas did not always coincide with administrative limits. In some cases, they included a harbor area or a park, whilst in others they embraced parts of more than one administrative district (fuzzy boundaries). These programs focused on community regeneration and aimed to connect neighborhoods and the rest of the towns and cities they belong to via partnerships with various agencies and departments. This locally based renewal of districts had a dual function: To improve the quality of life and to attract people to these shrinking areas.

The programs themselves did not transform these neighborhoods; rather, they put a stop to the inertia behind their degradation. Nevertheless, the efforts undertaken in a number of different countries have provided a major boost to the focus in contemporary urban regeneration on LBIA, sustainability and unbundling of powers.

#### 5. The Neighborhood Law

An understanding of the transformations that have taken place in the three different typologies of Catalan neighborhoods, together with a study of good practices in urban regeneration projects as soft planning tools, enables us to analyze the PIUIs sketched out by the NL. This article discusses the instruments and techniques promoted by the NL in five spheres: Target areas, management, funding, fields of action, and evaluation.

##### 5.1. Target areas

The NL applies only to areas designated “urban areas for special attention” that belong to one of the three typologies (historical areas, housing estates, and suburbs) (Departament de Política Territorial i Obres Públiques, 2004a). In order to evaluate whether an area warranted this designation and was therefore eligible for assistance for urban regeneration from the Fund, the Fund Management Committee took into consideration 18 different indicators relating to processes of urban decline and deficits in facilities and services, urban and local development, demographic problems, and the incidence of economic, social, and environmental issues (Pagliuso, 2016).

All areas were examined using this indicator system and each year some areas were included in the NL program on the basis of the scores awarded and other factors such as territorial balance, quality of the PIUI, the respective city council’s economic potential, and

<sup>5</sup> Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Art. 174) 2012.

<sup>6</sup> The URBAN initiative was created to promote sustainable development in urban areas with problems of physical and social infrastructure in the member states of the European Union. Its comprehensive approach takes into account all the dimensions of urban life. Thus, it applies a package of measures that combine the rehabilitation of obsolete infrastructures with economic actions and effective actions in the labor market. These are complemented by measures aimed at combating the social exclusion inherent in decadent neighborhoods and improving the quality of the urban environment.

<sup>7</sup> New Deal for Communities, UK; Model Cities and Dudley Neighborhood Initiatives, USA; ARIs (Area of Integral Rehabilitation) and PERIs (Special Plan of Interior Reform), Spain; Urban, Europe; The Amsterdam Wijkaanpak, Netherlands; 4 Rs, Hong Kong; and other programs implemented by the Urban Renaissance Agency, Japan; Housing and Development Board, Singapore; and Urban Renewal Authority, Hong Kong.

<sup>8</sup> New Deal for Communities was created by a statute (HM Treasury and Cabinet Office and Treasury 1998), URBAN Pilot was initiated under the support of Article 10 of the ERDF (Innovative actions), the Neighborhood Law was the second law approved by the Catalan parliament in 2004 (Departament de Política Territorial i Obres Públiques, 2004a).



the percentage of the population that would be affected by the actions of the PIUI (Departament de Política Territorial i Obres Públiques, 2004b).

In the case of the NL, as in the other studied soft-planning tools, the areas were not necessarily required to be delineated by a strict administrative boundary (fuzzy boundaries) and so could be part of different municipalities or different districts. However, they did have to be geographically differentiable in some way, usually in terms of usual place of residence (Departament de Política Territorial i Obres Públiques 2004a).

## 5.2. Management and funding

The NL has many positive aspects including the fact that it amassed over time a significant amount of financial, personal, and material resources (Pagliuso, 2016), and acts like an urban “acupuncture” strategy (Lerner, 2003) or a “resuscitation”. The term “acupuncture” is used in the sense that it intercedes directly and intensely on the problems of these areas, while “resuscitation” highlights its powers as a revitalizing element. There are four main actors involved in carrying out this “revival”: On the one hand, the Generalitat de Catalunya (the Catalan administration) and the affected city and town councils are the “doctors”, while, on the other, the territory and local residents are the “patients”. The “doctors” aim to cure the “patients’” diseases, which are caused by various kinds of disturbances.

In order to oversee the financing of actions in the PIUIs, the NL created a Fund<sup>9</sup> (Departament de Política Territorial i Obres Públiques, 2004a, b) and a management system, the Management Committee, composed of people from different government departments and the municipal administration, as well as professionals working in urban sustainability. Each local administration had to set up an Evaluation and Monitoring Committee (hereafter CEM) (Departament de Política Territorial i Obres Públiques, 2004b) consisting of local residents and public workers from different administrative bodies whose task was to establish management, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms that would be able to execute each of those projects. The CEM was, together with the Neighborhood Office, the most important mechanism for improving citizen participation (Pagliuso, 2016). The Neighborhood Office was the focal point of the PIUI in the territory and each intervention area had to run an office that would concentrate all the information about the interventions, programs, and actions that were being carried out. In this sense, it acted as a bridge between the administrations (Generalitat and city and town councils) and the citizens.

At this point it is clear how this soft-planning tool, the NL, implemented a new type of governance by fostering the creation of a new structure to promote collabora-

tion between different institutions, within institutions, between institutions and other actors, and, above all, between institutions and local people.

## 5.3. Fields of action

The PIUIs were based on eight areas of action established by the NL (Departament de Política Territorial i Obres Públiques, 2004a), each with the requisite that projects be heterogeneous and tailored to suit each territory, thereby ensuring a balance between representative<sup>10</sup> and participatory democracy<sup>11</sup>. These eight fields of action are as follows:

- Field 1 - Improvement of public spaces and provision of green spaces.
- Field 2 - Rehabilitation and improvement of facilities in public buildings.
- Field 3 - Provision of facilities for public use.
- Field 4 - Incorporation of IT into public buildings.
- Field 5 - Promotion of sustainable urban development, especially in terms of energy efficiency, savings in water consumption, and waste recycling.
- Field 6 - Gender equity in the use of urban spaces and facilities.
- Field 7 - Development of programs using the social, economic, and urban resources of the district.
- Field 8 - Accessibility and removal of architectural barriers.

The PIUIs were also obliged to present an action program, containing information about each area of action, as well as a four-year management and financial plan including strategies and priorities for each action and actors that would provide an institutional framework and public participation for its development.

The interesting fact about all the PIUIs is that, besides the broad spectrum of areas covered by the action fields, they were – or at least should have been – designed in collaboration with local people during meetings and work groups, to which all involved actors were invited to participate. This was mandatory, although some city councils did this better than others and managed to achieve greater citizen participation.

## 5.4. The system of evaluation

The evaluation process was divided into three stages: An Integral Intervention Project Evaluation by the

<sup>9</sup> This Fund's contribution to financing the PIUI's actions must in each case cover at least 50% and no more than 75% of the overall budget of the project (Departament de Política Territorial i Obres Públiques, 2004a). The PIUI's maximum funding for the 4-year period was EUR 20 million (Departament de Política Territorial i Obres Públiques, 2004b).

<sup>10</sup> In representative democracy, the people delegate sovereignty to the elected authorities regularly through free elections. These authorities in theory must represent the interests of the citizenry that elects them.

<sup>11</sup> Participatory democracy is a broad term that often refers to forms of democracy in which citizens have greater participation in political decision making than they are traditionally given in representative democracy (Saurugger, 2004).

Management Committee from the Catalan administration; assessment during the execution of the projects; and an evaluation of the project's impact at the end of the whole process (both performed by the CEM).

The aim of the initial assessment was to select the areas that would receive subsidies for implementing the PIUI's actions. Projects were ordered according to the following parameters: Seriousness of the problems; level of comprehensive intervention; overview of the project (identification of local issues, strategic coherence and appropriateness of the proposal, clearly specified objectives, justification of the project's viability, degree of citizen participation in the proposed actions and assessment on the impact of the project; population benefited and per capita spending; level of local economic effort; types of areas; and actions in areas covering more than one municipality).

The NL contains details of the final report on the degree of implementation of the program, which should discuss both the actions and funding provided, any divergence from the program, the achievement of results in relation to the proposed objectives, and, finally, the incidence of actions in relation to degraded environments, the lack of social facilities and services, and demographic, social, and economic problems.

Unlike statutory planning, the NL as a soft-planning tool promotes the evaluation of its actions and their implementation as a means of learning from its mistakes and introducing any required changes in future years.

## 6. The universe: The first five years

In order to understand the physical impact of the implemented PIUIs within the framework of the NL, we took into account a previous analysis of the physical actions carried out in the 93 studied neighborhoods (Pagliuso, 2016).

Based on a morphological investigation, it is clear that the physical actions used three different methodologies depending on the typologies of the neighborhoods involved (Fig. 3) (Pagliuso, 2016).

- Actions in downtown were disseminated and usually followed two criteria: The proximity of key buildings (e.g. churches, museums, or council buildings) and/or commercial itineraries ("spread action") (Fig. 4).
- In the housing estates, actions both for improving public spaces and providing facilities tended to be concentrated directly along the main commercial axes. These axes are often the most important elements structuring the territory and in some cases are developed within the spaces formed by blocks of housing (axial interventions) (Fig. 4).
- In the suburbs, actions in public spaces were significant along commercial axes but decreased in intensity in other public spaces in the neighborhoods. In most cases of suburban expansion, the site of the intervention

is a combination of two other types: "Spread actions" and "axial actions". For this reason, they are referred to as "axial actions with ramifications" (Fig. 4).

It is worth mentioning results at the level of landscape impact. In downtown areas, in general, re-urbanization has respected the environment in terms of the forms of the spaces and the use of materials. In the case of housing estates, the effect of re-urbanization of public spaces is quite positive, and large multifunctional spaces have been created to replace abandoned interstitial plots. In suburban expansions, re-urbanization has been more moderate than in housing estates and has affected a smaller body of residents. Furthermore, due to the smaller size of these spaces, their impact has not been as significant as in other cases. In terms of the materials used, in these latter cases priority was given to durability over aesthetics.

We observed that in downtown areas building rehabilitation for housing was carried out on a smaller scale (rehabilitation/painting of facades, roofs, or installation of an elevator). In housing estates, the actions were, for the most part, implemented on a much grander projects.

In terms of the provision of public facilities in downtown areas, actions normally involved the rehabilitation of buildings and/or spaces owned and/or being used by/for the local administration, generally as council facilities (i.e. council department offices). In housing estates, however, buildings were new in most cases and large-scale facilities consisted in some cases of city-run installations (e.g. courts and markets; Fig. 5). It should be noted that both socially and economically the impact of the construction of these installations has been very significant.

In total, 2,846 physical actions from the 93 PIUI were analyzed and the following are some of their most significant aspects:

- Field 1: The re-urbanization of streets represents 43% of the number of actions and 55% of the funds invested. This action is followed by the provision of green spaces and the re-urbanization of squares and parks (Fig. 6.1).
- Field 2: Given the serious problem of accessibility in existing buildings, mainly in housing estates and downtown areas, this field accounted for 30-58% of investment in the repairing of common elements (facades and roofs) (Fig. 6.2).
- Field 3: In downtown areas the adaptation of public facilities was the most affected category and received most investment. In housing estates and suburban expansions, the construction of new public facilities accounted for the greatest amount of funding.
- Field 4: The few resources devoted to this field were mainly used for installing fiber-optic networks in public buildings.

Figure 3. Map of the physical actions in neighborhoods from first five years

2004



Source: Pagliuso (2016).

2005



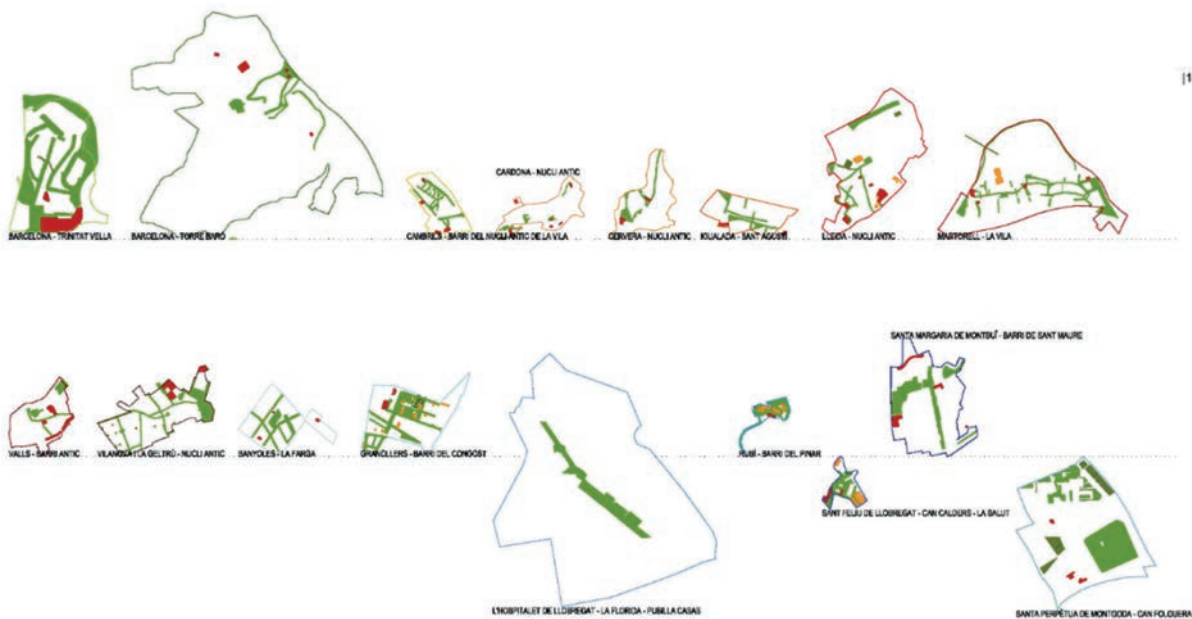
Source: Pagliuso (2016).

- Field 5: Measures to promote waste recycling (usually via the placement of underground containers) and energy saving in resource consumption (i.e. change in the type of street lighting and new water tanks) were the most important items in the budget in this field.
- Field 6: Gender equity in the use of urban spaces, a concept that was poorly under-

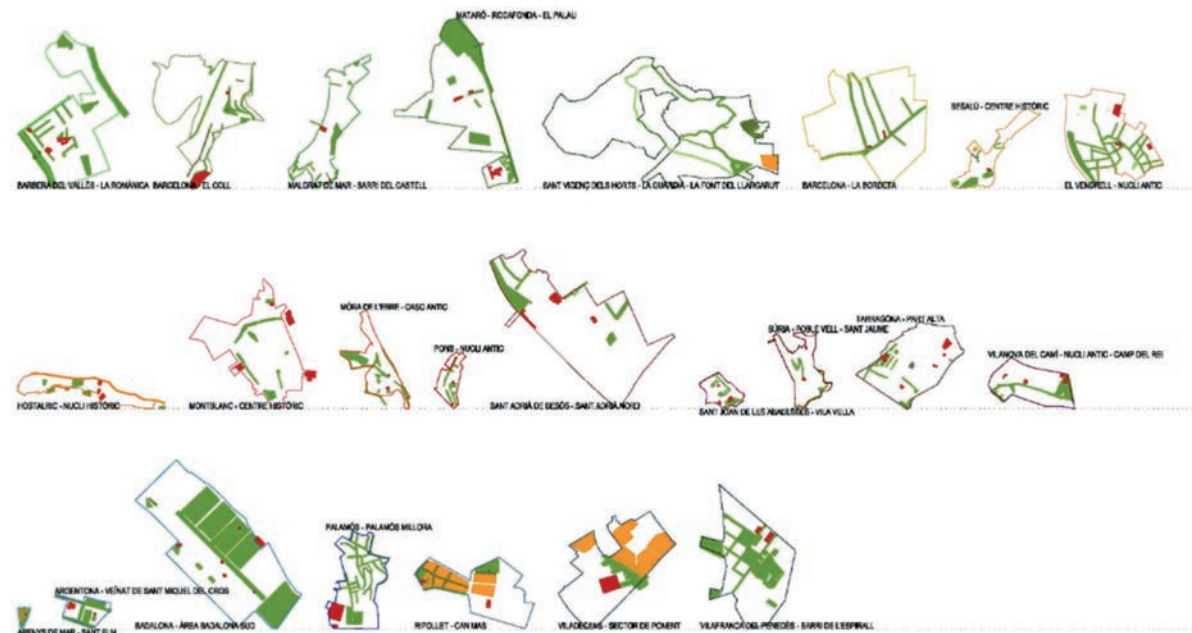
stood by most PIUs. The commonest actions were training activities for women and the creation of urban security measures in public spaces.

- Field 7: 50-55% of the budget allocated to this field was for creating or continuing job promotion programs.





Source: Pagliuso (2016).



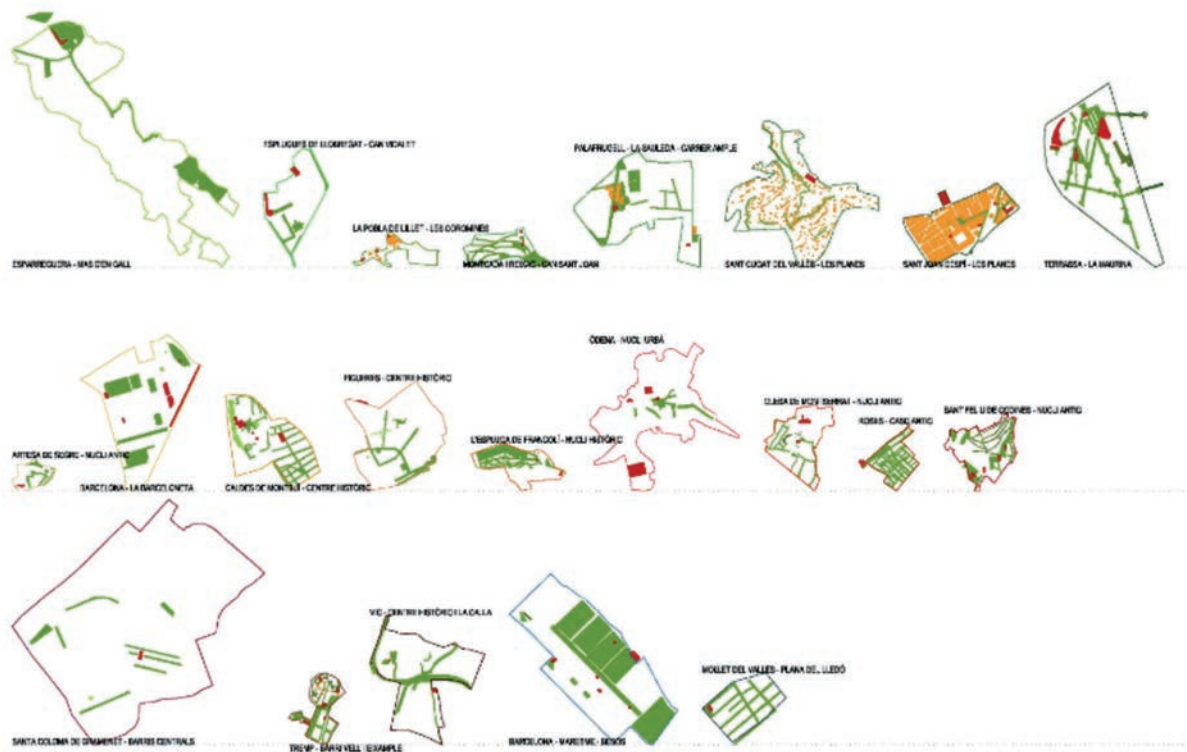
Source: Pagliuso (2016).

- Field 8: The commonest action in this field was the suppression of architectural barriers in public spaces via the construction of escalators and ramps (Fig. 6.3).

**7. Brief conclusions: An end to a new start**

In the universe of the studied soft-planning tools, the main features were as follows:

- Strategical - when they strengthen and focus on potentialities, these tools are at the same time flexible and a multiplier of the resources of social and economic expertise.
- Global - because they acted locally at neighborhood level and affected globally the whole town. They are also global in their implementation as a whole when they promote actions in all areas of urban life.



Source: Pagliuso (2016).

Figure 4. Detail of typologies of actions



Source: Pagliuso, 2016.

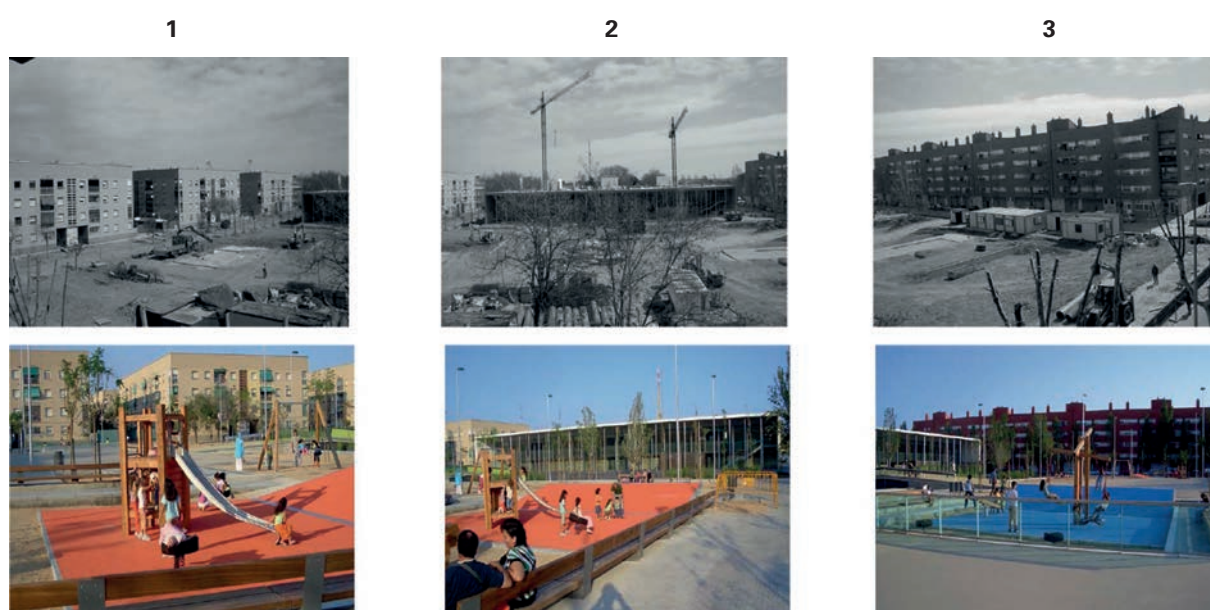
- Intense - due to the wide range of resources concentrated in a very specific territory and over a relatively short period of time.
- Participatory - because they promote participation rather than simply informing. They seek consensus between the involved parts during the whole process.
- Time-constrained - being limited by time, they are committed to fulfilling the calendar established by the action plan, with exact starting and finishing dates.
- Effective and efficient - since they completed a series of objectives with limited time and resources.

Figure 5. Sant Cosme: Jutjats Square – Court Building. (Children participated in the design process).



Source: Prat de Llobregat Town Council, 2009.

Figure 6. Images of actions executed during the first five years of the application of the NL.



Source: Author.

Regeneration projects in the Netherlands and, above all, in the UK were intrinsically equipped with these characteristics right from the beginning as they had been built up over decades, and today none of the actors involved there need be taught as everyone has a role to play. However, when applying these policies in Spain, these features were based on an EU vision and funding, as is the case of the Neighborhood Law itself. To be awarded funds, public administrations needed to implement certain rules, many of which implied citizen involvement throughout the whole participation process.

Michael Parkinson (2007) established certain key factors for urban policies and for urban regeneration projects, of which one is that the “attitudes (of all the stakeholders) are more important than instruments”. Thus, it is clear that management tools must be present at the beginning of a PIUI and right up to the end of the final action. Management must coordinate citizen participation and collaboration between all the actors involved in the process. Management must also help design and, during the implementation of the PIUI, fulfill the execution schedule. In practice, good

PIUI management will help resolve any initial deficiencies and generate satisfactory results.

The management of such projects is usually highly complex, above all given the wide variety of fields in which it has to act. In Catalonia, PIUI management has created new circuits, new forms of relationship within and between public institutions (chiefly the Generalitat de Catalunya and city and town councils), and with local people. This instrument has ensured that, although actions were performed in collaboration with the regional government, decision-making – i.e. where, how and when to apply resources – was dependent on local administrations. Thus, the relationship between government departments and city and town councils has improved. This was an important feature of these interventions and one of the ways in which the NL has fostered cross-boundary processes: Co-operation between administrations is indispensable as proximity is a key feature of urban policies.

Despite the undeniably positive aspect of the active participation by the local community throughout the implementation process, one of the obstacles that the



PIUI managers had to overcome was the lack of awareness or desire to get involved that characterized a significant number of local people (a more acute problem in larger districts in Catalonia but more subtler in effect in Amsterdam); in addition, there was a lack of social networks and effective participation channels. However, throughout the studied neighborhoods within the NL framework, this urban policy did generate positive network dynamics or, at very least, the rupture of the inertia of “non-participation” in the areas where it was put into practice. In the case of the NL, the transfer of competences and responsibilities between different tiers of government was temporary in most instances and was not a generalized devolution or decentralization process, although it did open new pathways in this sense that are being still developed.

Another feature of urban regeneration policies in general and the NL in particular is the way in which they foster the creation of many – more than in any other studied program – projects and therefore opportunities for professional debate about urban and social regeneration. Consequently, these projects require new professional profiles that are able to manage and coordinate different actions in a collaborative and versatile fashion, and, above all, the ability to do so from a technical architectural, urbanistic, economic, legal, sociological, or anthropological standpoint. Thus, very adaptable professional profiles are required to handle these new trends in public administration.

The spatial effects of public investment on the urban fabric of cities subject to urban regeneration policies are obvious and easy to discern. However, a common and highly relevant issue is the complementarity of these urban policies, that is, in this case, the integral urban regeneration programs and the statutory system, which are essential for urban health. These programs are without doubt political instruments that allow for changes in social, economic, urban, and architectural dynamics, thereby regenerating local identities and making urban areas more sustainable and livable. These policies form part of the statutory system but can reach further and be faster; they must be able to solve urban issues the moment they appear and circumvent the statutory system without, naturally, causing it to malfunction.

The relationship between NL and the statutory system was in general fairly superficial. In terms of housing policies and programs, most of the NL programs proposed subsidies for building rehabilitation that aimed just to renovate facades and common elements without any intervention in the interior of the residential unit. These programs often ended up consisting of just “facade painting” and “elevator installation”. Admittedly this latter action was extremely important from a social point of view for buildings with three or more floors with elderly residents; nevertheless, the rest of the “rehabilitation programs” largely consisted of superficial measures that were not properly executed due to the economic and management difficulties of many owners and/or communities of owners. Another issue was the lack of dialogue between the statutory system and policy managers regarding housing and building rehabilitation. Even recognizing the limitations of the PIUI and NL, it would have been important to innovate in these two fields and promote other

housing policies and programs that would, at least in part, solve many housing issues in Catalonia. In other fields such as urban and social policies, the programs proposed by the PIUI did not interact with the statutory system, although some plans (mobility, accessibility, economic activities, and housing, among others) that were designed for certain areas during the application of the NL did sow the seeds for city plans in these areas. Thus, it can be said in the case of NL that its actions and programs could have had a greater impact on statutory systems and achieved greater improvements in the health of the towns and cities involved.

The NL was a powerful force for discussion and learning, and for the capitalization of experiences. However, each neighborhood had its particularities and, even if the problems were similar, the responses of local people and the solutions applied on the ground were often different. Thus, each city council or the respective administrative body must be aware not only of the physical and social shortcomings of its neighborhoods/city as a whole but also how its residents behave. Although the capitalization of the experiences gained with the implementation of the PIUI is highly relevant, the application of the solutions must be tailored to fit local subjective conditions.

Nevertheless, despite not being its chief goal, the NL did help to develop new forms of intermunicipal (municipalities that fell within the NL framework) governance; this facilitated the promotion of the strategic integration of the authorities in urban regions and enabled them at least to begin to address more effectively some of the challenges of urban competitiveness and cohesion (based on the OECD; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2007). Indeed, the NL incentivized the creation of networks at intermunicipal level and fomented cross-boundary processes (between institutions and departments, cities and citizens), thereby creating new work dynamics with common goals. One of the key ways of weakening the barriers between local government and residents was the setting up of the Neighborhood Offices. Another key element in the cross-boundary processes was encouraging neighboring cities to work together in the same PIUI (e.g. Santa Coloma de Gramenet and Badalona, or Granollers and Canovelles).

In terms of city landscapes, we can affirm that the NL transformed neighborhoods in the Barcelona Metropolitan Region and in Catalonia, and promoted “public space standards” (Figs. 5 and 6), “urban education”, and environmental solutions. In some cases, citizen participation was crucial for the functioning of projects and interesting methodologies were often put into practice (e.g. Sant Cosme in El Prat del Llobregat, Barceloneta in Barcelona, Districte 2 in Terrassa, and Sant Roc in Badalona). The NL’s work contributed to the emergence of different typologies of constructed spaces, based in some cases on local community participation.

Finally, we should highlight the fact that, despite the efforts to perform a normalized global evaluation of the NL, we still lack a single framework for assessing the impact of the PIUI on the territory. The results of

**Figure 7.** Urban Art on a secondary school wall. *Ubuntu* is the Nguni Bantu term for “humanity”. It is often translated as “I am because we are”.



Source: Author.

its impact could be used to define multi-sectoral strategies, with interventions that stimulate city development in all its aspects in an equitable and sustainable fashion.

In recent years, integrated urban intervention has grown as a political concern and important policy area. The management of this type of interventions is undoubtedly complex and the perfect formula has not yet been found – if, indeed, it exists – and the balance in most projects is on the side of the “brick”. However, the NL did create a kind of laboratory for urban regeneration consisting of over 300 projects in just four different editions (2004-2008). It made great strides forward in many areas and is still working and leaving its mark on the territory. More importantly, it forced politicians and local people to think about integrated urban intervention, locally based integrated approaches, and collaborative efforts (Fig. 7).

“The evident positive effects of urban regeneration ... can not confuse or hide the parallel processes of exclusion and urban segregation that are hardly visible in the public space.

The ideal goal of a truly equitable urban regeneration cannot be ignored or altered, the construction of a fairer city in which citizens, whether foreigners or not, can access a home and be part of the active population in the cities cannot be renounced.” (Tapada and Arbaci, 2011, p. 216).

## REFERENCES

ALLMENDINGER, P., HAUGHTON, G. (2007). “Soft spaces” in planning. *Town and Country Planning*, 76, 306-308

ALLMENDINGER, P., HAUGHTON, G. (2009). Soft spaces, fuzzy boundaries, and metagovernance: The new spatial planning in the Thames Gateway. *Environment and Planning A*, 41(3), 617-633.

BUSQUETS, J. (1999). *La urbanización marginal*. Barcelona: Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, Edicions UPC.

BUSQUETS, J. (2004) *Barcelona. La construcció urbanística de una ciutat compacta*. Barcelona: El Serbal

DEPARTAMENT DE POLÍTICA TERRITORIAL I OBRES PÚBLIQUES (2004a). *Llei 2/2004, de 4 de juny, de millora de barris, àrees urbanes i vil·les que requereixen una atenció especial*. Ple del Parlament de Catalunya, Espanya, Catalunya.

DEPARTAMENT DE POLÍTICA TERRITORIAL I OBRES PÚBLIQUES (2004b). *Decret 369/2004, de 7 de setembre, pel qual es desenvolupa la Llei 2/2004*. DOGC 4215 - 9.9.2004, Espanya, Catalunya.

FALUDI, A. (2000). The Performance of Spatial Planning. *Planning Practice and Research*, 15(4), 299-318.

FALUDI, A. (2010). Beyond Lisbon: Soft European spatial planning. *disP-The Planning Review*, 46, 14-24.

GLASSON, J., and MARSHALL, T. (2007). *Regional Planning*. London: Routledge.

LENER, J. (2003). *Acupuntura-Urbana*. São Paulo: Editora Re.

LUUKKONEN, J. and MOILANEN, H. (2012) Territoriality in the Strategies and Practices of the Territorial Cohesion Policy of the European Union: Territorial Challenges in Implementing “Soft Planning.” *European Planning Studies*, 20, 481-500.

MARSHALL, T (1995) *Mantenir la fe en la planificació territorial en una època neoliberal*. *Espais*.

MASSEY, D., and FONG, E. (1990) Segregation and Neighborhood Quality: Black, Hispanics, and Asians in the San Francisco Metropolitan Area. *Social Forces*, 69(1),15-32

MUSTERD, S. (2011) The impact of immigrants’ segregation and concentration on social integration in selected European contexts. Documents d’Anàlisi Geogràfica 2011, vol. 57/3, pg 359-380.

OECD (2007). *What Policies for Globalising Cities? Rethinking the urban policy agenda*. Conference procedures. OECD International Conference 2007. Campo de las Naciones, Madrid. 29-30 March, 2007.

PAGLIUSO, A. (2016). *La Llei de barris: un pas endavant en la regeneració urbana*. (Tesi doctoral). Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, Catalunya.

PURKARTHOFFER, E. (2016). When soft planning and hard planning meet: Conceptualising the encounter of European, national and sub-national planning. *European Journal of Spatial Development*, 61,1-20

ROBERTS, P., and SIKES, H. (Eds.) (2000). *Urban Regeneration. A Handbook*. London: British Urban Regeneration Association.

SAURUGGER, S. (2004). Representative versus participatory Democracy? France, Europe and Civil Society. Paper presented at the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, University of Uppsala, Sweden. April 13-18, 2004 (working in progress)



SOLASSE, B. (1967). Le capitalisme moderne et la planification : Réflexions sur l'expérience française. *Relations Industrielles*, 22 (2), 216-240

STEAD, D. (2014). European Integration and Spatial Rescaling in the Baltic Region: Soft Spaces, Soft Planning and Soft Security. *European Planning Studies*, 22, 680-693.

TERÁN TROYANO, F. de (1996). Evolución del planeamiento urbanístico. *Ciudad y Territorio: Estudios territoriales*, 107-108, 167-184.

### Acronyms

CEM: The Committee for Evaluation and Monitoring was in charge of the evaluation and monitoring of the project within the framework of the Neighborhood Law.

DPTOP: Department of Territorial Polices and Publics Works of the Generalitat of Catalonia (Catalan Auton-

omous Government). This department was in charge of the implementation and control of the projects carried out within the framework of the Neighborhood Law.

LBIA: Local-based integrated approach.

PIUI: Project of integral urban intervention. This was how the Neighborhood Law defined the projects presented by city and town councils that opted for funding.

NL: Neighborhood Law.

URBAN: The Urban Programs: Urban Pilot (1990-1993), Urban I (1994-1996) and Urban II (1997-1999) were all EU programs whose aims were to promote innovation and planning in urban regeneration using a "bottom-up" approach in order to encourage physical regeneration and economic and social cohesion.