



Sweden 2004

**Local development
agreements as a tool
to stop segregation
in vulnerable
metropolitan areas**

Comment Paper, Belgium





1. The Belgian institutional context

A structure on three levels

By gaining independence in 1830, Belgium became a unitary state where the decision-making power derives from a national parliament and a national government. Four state reforms (carried out in 1970, 1980, 1988-1989 and 1993) have transformed Belgium into what it is today: a country that reconciles regional and cultural identities in a single federal structure.

The unitary Belgium of 1830 gave birth to a current, more complex structure on three levels: the upper level comprises the **federal state**, the **Communities** and the **Regions**; the middle level is occupied by the **Provinces**; and the lower level is that of the **Communes**.

Accordingly, Belgium is made up of three Communities (the Flemish Community, the French Community and the German-speaking Community), three Regions (the Flemish Region, the Brussels-Capital Region and the Walloon Region), 10 Provinces (Antwerp, Flemish Brabant, Walloon Brabant, West Flanders, East Flanders, Hainaut, Liège, Limburg, Luxembourg, Namur) and 589 Communes.

At present, decision-making powers are no longer exclusively the province of the federal government and federal parliament. The country is run by various bodies which discharge their allotted duties autonomously.

Competencies of the various bodies

The federal state remains responsible for managing everything that affects the interest of all Belgians, independently of any linguistic, cultural or territorial considerations: for instance, foreign affairs, national defence, justice, finance, social security and a major share of public health and domestic affairs. It is also the federal state that assumes all the responsibilities that Belgium and its federated entities have vis-à-vis the European Union and NATO.

The Communities are competent to deal with matters relating to the people composing them, such as language, culture and education.

The Regions are competent to deal with territorial matters such as town planning, the environment and employment.



Instead of being under the supervision of the central state like before, the **Provinces** act within the framework of competencies at the federal, Community or Regional level, being primarily also under the tutelage of these various authorities.

The Communes are the seats of power that are closest to our citizens. Like the Provinces, they are under the tutelage of the various other authorities.

2. Metropolitan policy

The 17 urban regions in Belgium not only form the basis of Belgium's urban network but are also home to more than 57% of the country's population, 65% of jobs and 73% of management personnel. All of this is concentrated in 26% of the country's total area. The heart of the urban regions is the cities (5) and the regional towns (12).

Large towns in Belgium (large on a national scale, i.e. those with a population of between 150 000 and one million) have not escaped the accumulated economic, social, economic and environmental problems that are common to many European cities. In some neighbourhoods, the departure of the population for the suburbs, insecurity, the deterioration of the urban fabric, speculation in the property market and problems of cohabitation have all conspired to unleash a downward spiral, intensified by the concentration of deprived sections of the population in large areas of social housing. Moreover, cities lack the resources to cope with these difficulties alone.

In 1999 and in 2003, the Federal Government decided to make the development of a policy directed at large towns a priority in its programmes. Minister Charles Picqué in 1999 followed by Minister Marie Arena in 2003 was given the task of introducing an overall approach to restore good living conditions for everyone in our cities.

Since then the Federal Government established the basis for an integrated overall policy with the involvement of residents. This policy covers safety, mobility, employment, the strengthening of the economic and social fabric and encouragement to new investment.

The direction of future Federal urban policy is summarised in the Government agreements concluded in 1999 and 2003. It is within these framework that the



Government is today implementing a policy, programmes and projects which all aim at encouraging residents to return to the cities, urban regeneration, social integration, the fight against poverty and the strengthening of legal measures likely to improve the quality of life.

It includes the following priorities:

- Tackle exclusion and poverty (e.g. by creating employment);
- Offer affordable and quality housing for everyone;
- Improve safety in urban areas;
- Urban regeneration, in part by introducing tax breaks to stimulate the social mix in cities;
- The promotion of sustainable development;

An important tool has been implemented to achieve these goals: contracts with the cities to support local projects

The Government has also undertaken to provide direct financial support to the large cities. The Federal authorities have adopted the technique of offering financial packages under which cities undertake to achieve pre-defined objectives into the deprived neighbourhoods. City contracts are regulated by **the law of 17 July 2000** “determining the conditions under which local authorities may receive financial aid from the state for urban policy measures”.

The decision to take a **contractual approach** to developing cooperation measures with local authorities is an example of the principle of partnership. Indeed, also the other political bodies as for instance the Regions and the communes themselves invest in territorial based policies. Cooperation and partnership make out essential principles of this complementary approach. The Federal contracts with the cities are signed annually on bases of the local authorities projects. Although projects are funded at 100%, many projects are co-financed by other authorities.

Since 2000, contracts are concluded with cities having a population of more the 150 000 inhabitants; **Antwerp, Ghent, Liège, Charleroi**, and the seven Brussels municipalities qualifying under Structural Funds Objective 2: **Anderlecht, Brussels City, Forest, Molenbeek, Saint-Gilles, Saint-Josse and Schaerbeek**. Since 2001 four smaller cities having particular difficulties **Seraing, La Louvière, Mons, Ostende** joined the programme.



Projects are financed on the base of a local diagnostic developed by every local authority. The following principles are applicable:

- Integrated approach for project proposal
- Few one shot projects
- Equilibrate Personal and Investment expenses into projects
- Support innovative actions for unsolved difficulties
- Flexibility to implement the projects
- Evaluation system through indicators

So far, more than 40 Million € are invested yearly in more than 150 projects.

The 152 projects financed in 2003 under this policy can be broken down as follows :

Improving the living environment	15
Improving living conditions (social cohesion)	55
Urban renewal (physical regeneration)	22
Improvements to safety	30
Economic regeneration	13
Project coordination	17
Total	152

Types of measure (not exhaustive)

Many of the measures are aimed at improving respect for the environment, public cleanliness etc.

Some aspects of preventing delinquency are covered by urban contracts, as are a number of local services, outreach workers etc.

Community centers, public spaces and playgrounds have been created. An example is the recent networking of youth centers in Liège.

The economic vitality of cities and neighborhoods is also important: various initiatives such as the social economy enterprise centers, reception and career guidance structures in employment information offices, measure for urban marketing, measure to revitalize deprived neighbourhoods etc.



Some Examples of projects:

Molenbeek is a municipality in the Brussels Capital Region with a population of 72 000 inhabitants. During the 1970s, Molenbeek experienced social, economic and planning difficulties mainly due to the economic crisis, the closure of industrial sites and the impoverishment of the population.

For these reasons the municipal authorities decided, in the early 1990s, to launch an ambitious integrated programme of urban regeneration. This programme, based on the historic neighbourhoods, has received support from European, Federal and Regional level. These districts bear the scars of their industrial past and have experienced all the problems outlined above.

Against this background the Federal programme has lent its support to the Molenbeek municipality, which has drawn up a project which includes several aspects :

Renovation and regeneration of industrial buildings by the municipality (creation of public facilities, etc.)

Improvements to safety and living conditions (urgent breakdown teams, attendants in areas around schools, public cleanliness team etc.)

Strengthening the social fabric (establishing cultural and social cohesion centres, community centres etc.)

Economic revitalisation (measures to foster employment etc.)

In addition to these measures aimed at resolving problems that are historical in origin, the municipality is also taking into account newly arising difficulties. For example, taking its lead from the Government campaign launch in early 2000 to regularise the position of illegal immigrants (1850 cases in Molenbeek), the municipality has set up the SAMPA, (aid service for new arrivals), a reception centre aimed at providing new arrivals with material, psychological, linguistic, social and occupational support. In other words, the centre aims to help new arrivals to integrate into Belgian society.

Among the 55 neighbourhoods in **Charleroi**, the “Porte Ouest” sector of the town, which mainly covers the Marchienne-Est district, is one of the most deprived areas today. The programme set up by the Charleroi authorities is almost exclusively concerned with this zone. Formerly an area of intense activity linked with coal mining and the metallurgical industry, the district lost its attraction



during the crises in these industries and has experienced impoverishment, urban exclusion and increasing social and economic disinvestments.

All the characteristics of a devastated neighbourhood can be found here: dilapidated, unhygienic and decaying housing, an unattractive urban environment, security problems etc.

Against such a background only a multi-dimensional, pro-active policy can improve the overall quality of the district. To accelerate the regeneration of Charleroi Porte-Ouest, it was decided to implement innovative actions into this area. The projects hinge on six approaches: local employment, specific support for the Charleroi Porte-Ouest neighbourhood, urban marketing, quality of life, safety, integrated community development (and project direction).

Several measures are being run involving outreach workers, the Espace Citoyen programme, the centre for community associations, and even street sweepers and park keepers. The issue tackled meet the priorities that feature in the Charleroi "confidence pact" initiative (contrat de confiance): the development of democracy and citizenship.

3. Comments and questions on the paper

3.1. Relevance

At first sight, we note a great deal of resemblance between the Swedish and Belgian Federal approach. The holistic and cross-sector approach, the contractualisation and the management by objectives are all elements we find in both policies.

Metropolitan policies are not a goal in itself but a strategic approach in which overall objectives are focused on a territorial base. That means that a metropolitan policy that aims at combating segregation cannot be seen without the context of the global policy for social security, the global policy for housing,... In Belgium, for instance, the social security system leads to a fall of the number of households at risk of poverty from 40 % to 13 %.

Given the Belgian institutional context in which the responsibilities are at different levels, it means that the implementation of a territorial based policy



becomes dependant of the way a coordination is put in place. A lot of work is being done, but it remains a constant point of attention. The Swedish approach is a very transparent one, with the relevant national ministries involved on the one hand, and the municipalities on the other hand.

In comparison with Swedish approach, which is more based on a institutionalized stakeholders involvement, Belgian local agreements are designed and approved by the local authorities without any institutionalized process of participation.

3.2. Transferability

Important ideas that differ between both countries are for instance

- the co-funding by the local authorities;
- the investment funding for urban renewal itself (public space, building renewal);
- strong link between social cohesion goals and Belgian program design.

3.3. Questions

- The migrant theme is present in the text but it remains unclear in what way the categorical approach fits in with the territorial approach?
- In Belgium too, the evaluation is on a yearly base. The combination with a policy that will lead to results only on the longer term is not easy to make. Question is if there yearly adaptations based on the evaluation possible or desirable. Can a negative evaluation lead too not payment of the projects?
- Belgium large town policy and Swedish metropolitan policy are both positive discrimination measures on territorial bases. How to avoid stigmatization of such areas/ districts for the population itself?
- How does metropolitan policy linked is every day actions with the NAP Inclusion goals and actions.
- Some targeted issues are more relevant for regional, national or even European level (immigration rules, mobility) . How could local agreement fundamentally bring solution to these issues?