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

Comment Paper, Spain





1. THE Potencial of local development agreements to reduce segregation in spanish marginal metropolitan areas.

There´s room in Spain for a tool similar to the Swedish local development agreements to curve down exclusion in metropolitan areas. Many big cities in Spain experience problems of a similar nature to those portrayed in the Swedish document. Accession to the labour market is the main cause of exclusion and this access tends to be difficult for some social groups. Also, affordable houses are increasingly harder to find, some structural features of Spanish cities and the division of competencies between different levels of government should be taken into account before implementing any social policy in the urban environment. These topics will make the general background that we analyze next.

1.1 The general background: the labor market

Spanish Economic policy in the 1990s and the beginning of our 21st century has been centred in reducing the gap with the EU average. Spanish GDP has grown at a rate 1% higher than the EU average last decade and Spain wasn´t hit as hard as the rest of the EU by the late recession. However, there is still a long way to go as far as the labour market is concerned. Unemployment is the highest to be found in the EU (11.3%) and we also have one of the lowest rates of employment (41.3%¹) even though the Spanish economy has created more jobs than any other one in the EU.

However, labour opportunities are not homogeneously distributed among population groups. Unemployment among youngsters is 11.4 percentage points higher than the national average and female unemployment, 16%, makes access to the labour market is especially hard for young women. As a natural reaction, young women have invested heavily in education and young women educational levels have grown spectacularly in the last 20 years. Spanish women must also confront domestic violence, an issue that has just recently come to the centre of the public debate and a zero tolerance attitude seems to be developing.

Immigrants enjoy lower unemployment rates but their access to quality jobs is seriously constricted. This lack of opportunities in the regular labour market is among the more difficult obstacles non EU nationals find in their integration process.

¹ Spanish Employment rate is calculated dividing the number of people employed by total population aged between 16 and 65 years old.



In a nutshell, the labour market has, therefore, become one of the greatest sources of segregation for young people, immigrants and women and, as we will see, these groups tend to concentrate in urban areas.

1.2 The scarcity of affordable houses in urban areas

The evolution of the Spanish social tissue had some impact in urban areas. The composition of population is changing both by ethnic origin and age structure. The ageing of the population is becoming an aspect of main concern in Spain and it is expected to be one of the main sources of social dependency in the long term. Many low income retired workers live alone in city centres. Also, the inflow of immigrants to Spanish cities adds pressure since in most cases their numbers are increasing faster than city services and public infrastructure. As a result, ghettos and marginal areas within or outside the cities developed rapidly.

The importance of housing policies increased accordingly. Not only immigrants suffered the scarcity of homes at an affordable price. Finding a suitable home is becoming difficult for the average income family in the biggest cities in Spain. Spanish families' indebtedness has mounted due to the increasingly heavier burden of mortgages. Houses for rent are not very common since this market is still suffering the consequences of decades of rent freezing as social policy financed by house owners and landlords.

In Spain, the importance of houses as places to live has diminished when compared with its importance as an investment. Lower income families with little saving power have therefore been expelled to areas where the quality of housing is far from acceptable. The effort to supply social housing and to boost the rent market has proved insufficient.

To conclude this section, high prices of houses have increased family debts. Young workers experience increasing difficulties to find homes and this makes their transition to social stability longer and more difficult. Another consequence has been the expulsion of vulnerable groups out of the city centres.

1.3 characteristics of the Spanish city

Local development agreements could be useful to counterbalance these trends. However, policies focused in the needs of the individual, as in the Swedish example, must take into account the structure of the Spanish city.



The urban structure is vertical and concentrated: Spanish cities are quite densely populated; they have grown in a vertical fashion more than cities in the north of Europe. They have also grown around a single centre. This usually weakens the feeling of “*appartenance*” to the neighbourhood. Neighbourhoods and district borders are fuzzily defined, unknown by the population and have an existence merely administrative.

The great size of the districts: The law of big cities recently passed (“Ley de Grandes ciudades y participación” Ley 57/2003) intends to promote citizen participation in urban areas (bigger than 175.000 inhabitants). Compulsory establishment of districts has been considered a valuable tool to deliver public services to the citizens. The size of the districts created after the new law is bigger than the in the Swedish case. This will make the district more heterogeneous introducing new difficulties when designing the programs.

Vulnerable metropolitan areas are often not stable: The expansion of metropolitan areas around one single centre favours the absorption of “out of border” areas by the city. Many marginal areas have been transformed by the pressing need of houses but this process didn’t mean any improvement in the segregation or exclusion suffered by its inhabitants. Quite on the contrary, it usually ended with their displacement even further away from the city centre. Some neighbourhoods in the city centres have followed a similar process. Areas of poor quality houses usually inhabited by the elderly and low income families (Ex. Lavapies (Madrid), Ciutat Vella (Barcelona), Cimadevilla (Gijón), etc.) underwent a process of deep urban regeneration, reconstruction and cleaning. The same process of rising prices of houses that favoured this regeneration resulted in the expulsion of their former inhabitants.

The absence of cultural references for people living in urban neighbourhoods, their size that comes out of the “Law of Big Cities” and an always changing urban environment will make more difficult to get citizens involved in any participative policy as that presented by the Swedish authorities.

1.4 The Administrations involved

“The 2nd National Plan for Social Inclusion 2003-2005” tries to coordinate policies in different sectors to achieve the strategic goals defined in the Plan. Vulnerable neighbourhoods rank among the top priorities of the Plan and they are explicitly defined as a strategic goal. However, the focus is on population



groups vulnerable to segregation and exclusion whereas the geographical component of the problem is deferred to the regional plans (Comunidades Autonomas). The regions (Comunidades Autonomas) are growing in relevance in almost every aspect of public life. They account for about 30% of public spending in Spain and they have competencies in most social issues.

Municipalities are gaining importance since it's them who carry out social assistance programs. One of the strategic goals in the PNAIN is the development of inclusion plans at the local level (50% of the population is expected to be covered by one local plan by the year 2005). The idea of driving the decision making process closer to its beneficiaries is in the Plan and the municipalities have been chosen as the lowest decision level. Local development agreements have already been used in Spain and the next step will naturally be the development of a network or institution to generalize and coordinate them.

The coordination of policies coming from regional, cities and national governments is not an easy task since these political bodies are autonomous. However, there are some successful experiences of collaboration between the European Commission, the Spanish Government, the regions and the cities like in the neighbourhood of La Mina in Sant Adrià del Besós, Barcelona. One risk is that the need to coordinate efforts from different administrations may result in moving the decision process in the wrong direction as far as closeness to its beneficiaries is concerned. Accountability and transparency need also to be reinforced as the number of institutions increases.

A bottom-up approach like the one depicted in the Swedish document will need in Spain the consensus of different levels of government politically autonomous. However, this difficulty can become a strong point since the effort to reach a consensus with the citizens will have a previous training field in the political process.

2. Local development agreements network: Would they be applicable be in Spain?

2.1 A few examples

There have been some experiences in Spain to use agreements and consensus between the beneficiaries to implement social policies and some metropolitan areas have been classified as vulnerable:



Some of these local development agreements have been considered a success and recognised internationally as examples of good practices. Two shining examples will follow:

- “Integral Intervention in the neighbourhood of Ribera (Córdoba)”. Ribera was a marginal area in the historic centre of Cordoba included in the European program URBAN. Public and private agents cooperated closely designing a multi-sector plan. The local approach and the identification of responsibilities in the plan propitiated an unexpected level of participation.
- “Social Integral Intervention in Moret village (Cáceres)”. Moret village was a marginal neighbourhood out of the limits of the city of Cáceres. This program tried to promote coordination among social agents in the area and to incorporate the villagers to the decision process in close contact with the program managers.

2.2 And some difficulties

As we have just seen, agreement based programs have been used in Spain even though they are not among the instruments of social intervention usually used. If they were more widely used there surely would be a need to reinforce coordination, identify vulnerable areas in a systematic way and to create a network to share successful experiences.

As mentioned above, the feeling of belonging to a neighbourhood is not deeply rooted in Spain. Community associations are weak when compared with other European countries. We can find, though, some counterexamples like “Chueca” or “El Pozo” in Madrid. In Spain, as in many other countries in Southern Europe, the family is the main institution acting as a safety net against social exclusion. However, the Spanish family is changing rapidly out of its traditional structure and regional migrations have also weakened the capacity of the family to prevent social exclusion as the distance between family members grows. These trends are appearing first in urban areas where some alternatives to the family as a social stability provider should be envisaged.

Community life is not as strong in Spain as in the north of Europe except for a few cases. Some ethnic groups in Spain have a strong tendency to lock themselves against all external influence. Getting people from their community involved and accountable for the success of social programs can be an approach worthwhile to explore. Also, in some urban neighbourhoods, the environment



is so degraded that it proves by itself that the usual mechanisms to avoid exclusion have failed. New and more intense efforts are needed and these areas demand an integral perspective, a holistic approach. NGOs are also playing an important role in the implementation of inclusion plans in these areas where their flexible structure, motivation and know-how have been very valuable assets.

Urban regeneration in city centres may have given the wrong impression that social problems have alleviated but beyond the visibility of the urban problem the needs of many social groups haven't disappeared.

The law of big cities and the introduction of city districts are too recent in Spain. Moreover, if the districts add to the cities, the provinces, the regions, the national government and the EU there's a need for reinforced coordination and collaboration between these bodies should be carefully designed.

The main conclusion of this document is that even though Spain suffers problems of social exclusion in urban areas similar to those in Sweden and even though there are some successful experiences of local agreements, there are some factors that make them difficult to implement. Among them we may cite cultural factors, political decentralisation and a too rapid city growth.