

Urban programming law and urban cohesion

Despite the efforts made by all those working with the inhabitants of underprivileged districts in France, many of the latter are still facing significant and persistent inequalities. A little data from the last report issued by the French national observatory of urban problem areas (ONZUS) is all that is needed to translate the scale of these inequalities. The poverty rate in urban problem areas (ZUS) is nearly three times that in other regions, the unemployment rate is nearly two and a half times greater, their inhabitants declare to have worse health and are more likely to encounter difficulties in accessing healthcare, and students from the schools in these districts are more often directed towards shorter courses.

As denounced in many public reports, in particular the report by the French Court of Auditors, «Urban renewal policy, a decade of reforms» published on 17 July 2012, the public authorities' failure to curb the discrepancies suffered by the inhabitants of underprivileged districts can largely be attributed to the ineffectiveness and unsuitability of the instruments of the urban renewal policy and the dispersal of the resources mobilised.

This observation led the President of the French Republic to make republican equality between territories a State action priority. In line with this objective, the action conducted on behalf of underprivileged districts is being reformed by the Government. Reworking the urban renewal policy will strengthen the legibility, consistency and effectiveness of this policy.

In view of this, François Lamy, French urban affairs minister, presented a bill aiming at meeting the commitment made by the President of the French Republic of simplifying and strengthening resources directed towards priority districts. Reaffirming the principles posed by the Interministerial Committee for Cities (CIV) of 19 February 2013 and having been subject to a wide consensus-building process, it

forms the first significant reform of the urban renewal policy in over ten years. It was formally adopted and promulgated on 22 February 2014.

It therefore proposes an in-depth review of the instruments of this policy by recording for the very first time the fundamental principle of co-constructing the urban renewal policy with inhabitants, while looking to redefine the priority districts based on a single criterion, by the creation of a general urban contract, and while committing to a new step in urban renovation, inseparable from the social component.

Inhabitant participation

In terms of participative democracy, the aim is to make inhabitants stakeholders in their own right. This will involve:

- the creation of a college of representatives from local associations and inhabitants within the National Council of Cities (CNV);
- the presence of lessee representatives on the board of directors of the National Agency for Urban Renovation (ANRU);
- the creation of citizen councils in the city contracts, taking part in drawing up, monitoring and assessing projects;
- supporting innovative initiatives regarding participation and capitalising on experiences to create a shared methodology.

Reworking geographical priorities

From the first 39 districts of the Housing and Social Life (HVS) operations in 1977 through to the 2,492 districts of the Urban Social Cohesion Contracts (CUCS) today, geographic priorities have never really been rethought and its territories never redistributed. In order to simplify the current geography and to better direct resources to the regions the most in difficulty, the reform must aim to set up:

- a single perimeter: the priority district of the urban renewal policy;
- a single legible and objective criterion: the urban concentration of poverty through inhabitant revenues.
- an unprecedented, acute statistic network: the grid, the topographic arrangement pattern used, consisting in defining a surface area of identical, localised squares.

The comparative analysis of this new methodology with the current zoning gives an initial preview of this approach:

- approximately 1,300 potential priority districts;
- 85 % of current ZUS concerned;
- 82 % of current CUCS priority 1 districts concerned;
- around one hundred new priority districts which until now have been entirely forgotten by the urban renewal policy (in particular small and medium-sized towns in rural areas).

The new generation urban contract

This new single urban contract covering the entire intermunicipal scale will in particular allow for:

- an integrated approach mobilising all public policies (education, employment, transport and health, etc.);
- the integration of priority districts in territorial dynamics around a joint project;
- a territorial project covering a lower number of priority districts with concentrated resources

The interministerial dimension of the urban renewal policy

is also reaffirmed and reinforced. Commitments have been previously formalised by objective agreements, already signed with 12 ministries and Pôle Emploi job centre. Each ministry must therefore provide resources adapted to suit the needs of each territory and conduct actions specific to its area of expertise. For example:

- additional policemen for the Home Office;
- for the Ministry of National Education, increased mobilisation of its services to help secondary-school pupils in difficulty;
- enhanced future-oriented jobs in these districts for the Ministry of Employment.

The new urban renewal programme

The purpose of the new generation of urban projects is to position housing at the very heart of the process and better incorporate social and economic aspects into the urban renewal policy. The new orientations involve:

- concentrating actions in priority districts showing the highest levels of urban dysfunction;
- creating a «project home» for each operation to provide inhabitants with a site dedicated to co-construction;
- contributing to the sustainable renewal of districts and to improving energy efficiency;
- promoting economic development and the creation of activities in the districts of the urban renewal policy.

To find out more:

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