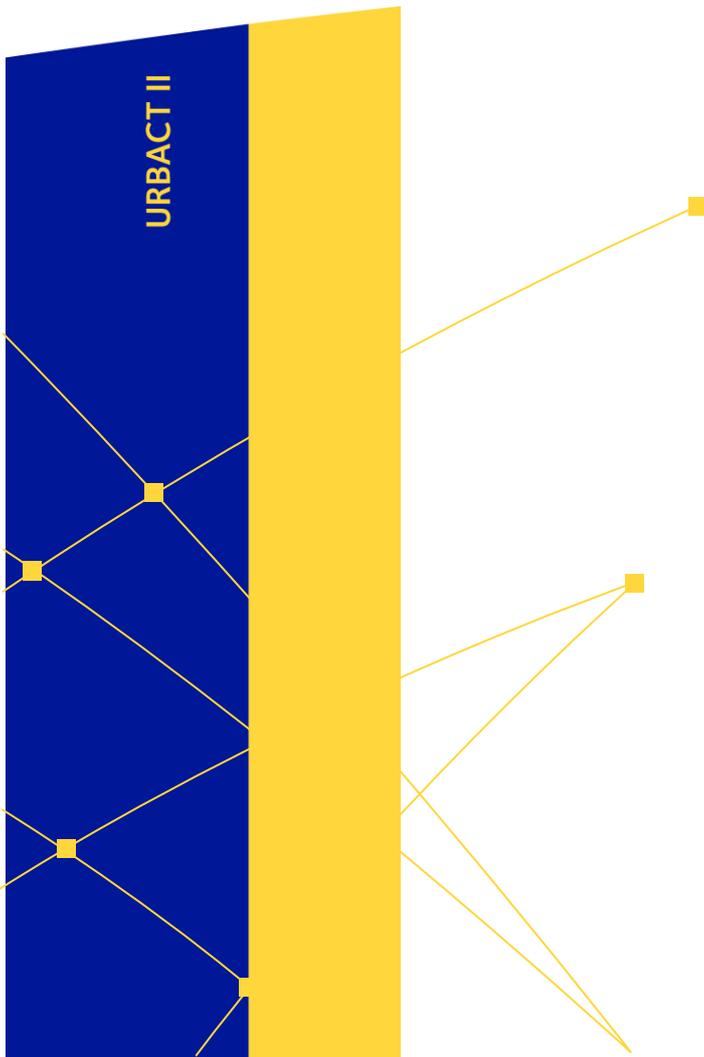


Hopus



Housing Praxis for Urban Sustainability

Final outputs – Fact sheet



Connecting cities
Building successes



1. SHORT DESCRIPTION IN A NUTSHELL

Design coding and other forms of smart project guidance for successful housing development

2. NAME OF THE PROJECT

Hopus – Housing Praxis for Urban Sustainability

Project launch: April 2008

End of the project: April 2010

3. PARTNERS

CITERA – “Sapienza” University of Rome, Italy (Lead partner)

OTB – Technical University Delft, The Netherlands

Gdansk University of Technology, Poland

University of Minho, Portugal

University of Reggio Calabria, Italy

City of Reggio Calabria, Italy

4. WHAT WERE THE CONCRETE CHALLENGES ADDRESSED BY PROJECT PARTNERS?

Urban development is a complex process requiring, in order to achieve high quality levels, a consistent governance structure. Public authorities and private stakeholders need to work together from the outset of the integrated development process to concert shared solutions.

When it comes to housing development, some sophisticated tools such as design coding, which have been successfully adopted in some European contexts, have shown that there are ways to streamline the governance process by working on shared design solutions from the early stages of development. “Smart” project guidance can therefore prove efficient in providing solutions for high quality, sustainable housing developments.

Designing quality housing brings together local authorities, private investors who find the field of residential development very lucrative, and many other stakeholders each aiming at different objectives. In times of economic drought social housing programs around Europe have lost much of their momentum, and are in many cases altogether absent: this is the reason why private developments have taken over, leading to a more or less fragmented urban growth depending on how efficient the local governance model is. The result is a strongly market-oriented city, where housing is offered for sale not unlike in a supermarket. As we have seen, however, the accurate quality control imposed on food products finds absolutely no equal in the housing market, creating a situation where it is difficult for consumers/users to evaluate ahead of time what they are investing in.

Innovative tools in some local contexts characterized by efficient governance models have successfully led to well-designed, effective master plans, often also providing guidelines and indications concerning the further development of the individual residential buildings. Design codes, which are the center of Hopus’s attention, are one of the possible ways of keeping under control the process leading the city-making, while allowing substantial expressive freedom within a homogeneous whole. Analysis of design coding earlier in the book helps us understand what this sophisticated tool can do for urban development, assessing its strengths and weaknesses, together with the prerequisite conditions which must be in place for the coding process to actually be carried out. Design coding, being a complementary aspect of master planning, is capable of bridging the “gap” between urban vision and building design, guiding designers in achieving a homogenous outcome within a varying range of possibilities. In their site-specific nature, design codes are meant to address individual developments: in the case of a general framework of key quality factors such as that outlined above, it would be necessary to identify an overarching reference system, not connected to specific cases, incorporating the “quality mesh”. This system should on one side be able to provide an output in terms of guidelines, coding, etc., thus acting on the “process”; on the other, serve as the basis for an assessment of the “product”, closing the full circle.

5. WHAT CONCRETE CONCLUSIONS DID YOU ACHIEVE? WHAT RECOMMENDATIONS DO YOU PUT FORWARD?

A significant part of the working group's activities were dedicated to the study and exchange on governance tools which are currently applied in practice in different European contexts, in order to understand the extent to which some of these instruments can be effectively transferred to different situations, or become parts of EU policy on urban development.

Nevertheless, all project partners developed specific action plans, which were implemented through the support of local support groups. Given the project's limited lifespan, implementation was started and achieved some preliminary results, further results will be achieved in coming months as actions and activities are brought forward.

CITERA – “Sapienza” University of Rome’s action plan was closely connected to the adoption, at city and regional level, of specific instruments connected to sustainable housing design. Setting out from existing quality protocols at national level (ITACA protocol), the regional ITACA protocol was developed by a task force which included CITERA, and is now in the process of being approved for implementation. The protocol provides indications related to energy efficiency in building, in relation to both new construction and retrofitting. Its implementation is closely connected to that of Regional Law n.6/2008, which introduces economic and fiscal benefits for building activities which implement solutions for the reduction of energy consumption. The work was carried out during 2008 and 2009, and early implementation is expected for the end of 2010. The role of CITERA within this process was both technical and organizational, since it developed a significant part of the regional-level protocol, and coordinated relationships with the various stakeholders who were part of the Hopus local support group.

At city level, CITERA monitored the implementation of an existing Deliberation (n. 48) providing indications on energy retrofitting of buildings. The study, which was intended as a complement to the activities of the Hopus working group, collected statistical data and used it to assess the various degrees of efficiency produced by retrofitting interventions. The aim consists in creating an evaluation system for energy efficient retrofitting, to be eventually linked to fiscal benefits.

The City of Reggio Calabria and DASTEC, “Mediterranea” University of Reggio Calabria produced a joint action plan which was focused on the issue of retrofitting of existing building stock. This was done by devising a practice manual on behalf of the University, based on previous retrofitting experiences, and by starting the implementation on two pilot locations. The role of the local support group was mainly that of promoting the implementation by involving industrial and builders' associations, which were involved in the development of the technical and operational contents of the practice manual. The pilot cases, which are due to be completed by 2012, will serve as a monitoring station providing feedback on the manual. At the completion of the first monitoring stages, the practice manual will be adopted at City level and become a reference for all retrofitting actions on existing housing stock, for both public and private housing. The local support group, after the end of the project's lifespan, is determined to set up a permanent technical table, a private-public group addressing the issues of public housing stock renovation.

Gdansk University of Technology set up a local support group comprising several public institutions, planning agencies, and private constructors active in the housing field. In this respect, the partner's basic consideration was connected to the fact that the governance structure in Poland is, at this time, strongly influenced by private capital investment, which hinders a balanced urban development in favour of more speculative solutions. The uncontrolled growth of Polish cities in recent years has been the result of lax planning policies and the strong national development derived from the onset of free-market economy.

The local action plan was thus mainly aimed at raising awareness among the various stakeholders of the potential benefits accompanying integrated urban development in terms of urban quality. The conference organized in April 2009 in Gdynia served as the occasion to disseminate to a wide technical and professional audience the themes related to the use of advanced guidance systems for housing development. Although actions undertaken were of a less operational nature, for the first time the themes of integrated urban development were brought to a wider audience at local and regional level. Gdansk University of Technology plans to extend the dissemination effort beyond the project's lifespan.

OTB research institute at Delft Technical University devised and carried out an action plan within its wide-ranging cooperation with municipalities and other local authorities at regional level, which it has been conducting extensively in the past years. Since the main focus of Hopus was related to the use of advanced guidance instruments, the local action plan was the occasion of monitoring the implementation of some advanced forms of design guidance already in place at various levels.

In the framework of The Netherlands' HQ2020 initiative, providing a wider strategy for the reduction of energy consumption, OTB provided assessment for various guidance tools. The role of the local support group, mainly formed by technical offices within the involved municipalities, was that of providing support for the production of quality assessment for the existing toolkits and instruments, as well as contributing to the dissemination of the project.

6. WHAT WAS LEARNT BY THE PROJECT PARTNERS DURING THE PROJECT?

What did work? The working group partners together with the lead expert had the chance of creating a strong knowledge exchange network among each other, where experiences, problems and potentialities at local level were brought up and discussed, in order to identify common traits and differences.

Although five of the six project partners were research institutions, therefore with far less connection to an implementation perspective than city partners, nevertheless, during the lifespan of the project, there was the chance of creating effective synergies among some of the project partners and the local authorities which were actually devising or implementing guidance systems for housing design or renewal, stressing the importance of integrated development strategies from the outset.

In other cases, local action proved more of a consultancy nature, with the research centres providing consultancy and dissemination.

What didn't work? The greatest challenge partners had to confront was that of promoting local implementation of good-practice policies in a timeframe strongly characterized by economic and often political uncertainty. The project's two-year duration, considering furthermore the fact that implementation effectively lasted only about 18 months, limited the potentials for effective action and subsequent evaluation of the results. Although substantially all project partners have pledged to pursue the objectives even after the closing, the option of doing so within a homogeneous and controlled timeframe might introduce some problems and inconsistencies.

Finally, the decommitment of one of the project partners (Sheffield City Council) caused by economic and financial difficulties during the implementation phase deprived the group of one important case study for the project.

What pitfalls were avoided? The success of a European working group working on a strongly culturally specific topic such as housing lies in the ability of striking a balance between general objectives and local identities. In the group's final output, which sums up two years of activity, research findings and issues emerging from practice, a number of basic quality indicators for urban quality, housing design and building technology were identified, in the attempt to outline a "European quality primer". Any further elaboration, potentially leading to more specific and less general results was specifically linked to the local situations of each project partners, in order not to commit the mistake of proposing preposterous "universal" solutions.

7. WHAT ARE THE CONCRETE SOLUTIONS DEVELOPED BY PROJECT PARTNERS?

The local action plans which were carried proved capable of providing solutions to streamline the urban development process. In the case of **CITERA – "Sapienza" University of Rome** the winning idea consisted in binding a regional directive on energy-efficient building, required by EU and national laws, with more sophisticated quality standards referred to urban space in a general outlook. This served to take advantage of energy efficiency, a field where incentives are today abundant, as an entry point for guidance on the wider issue of urban quality.

In the case of **Reggio Calabria**, the presence of both city administration and a high-level research centre set the basis for a strong collaboration on the issue of retrofitting for existing housing stock, a topic which already played an important role in regional and communal programs. Here the implementation of the local action plan, which set the basis for an enduring action and further activities, was facilitated by the newly introduced possibility of allocating structural funds for energy retrofit actions for existing housing stock.

8. AVAILABLE OUTPUTS

Baseline study: “Good green safe affordable housing”, 2008

Final output: “Housing for Europe. Strategies for Quality in Urban Space, Excellence in Design, Performance in Building”, 2010. The final output includes a range of different materials, from capitalization outputs to the local action plans.

URBACT II

URBACT is a European exchange and learning programme promoting sustainable urban development.

It enables cities to work together to develop solutions to major urban challenges, reaffirming the key role they play in facing increasingly complex societal challenges. It helps them to develop pragmatic solutions that are new and sustainable, and that integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions. It enables cities to share good practices and lessons learned with all professionals involved in urban policy throughout Europe. URBACT is 300 cities, 29 countries, and 5,000 active participants

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