

Evaluation of the effects of urban improvement programmes: methodological contributions

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Abstract

There are, in Portugal, several programmes and mechanisms of intervention in urban areas. Some of them develop an area-based approach, others are based on a sectoral approach; some of them are directed to deprived areas, others have a more general definition of its scope. In practice, this unintegrated diversity of programmes and approaches underlines the existence of different and even conflictual meanings and options, regarding to the definition of: the problems of urban areas and its causes; the main agents involved and its institutional settings; the relationships between central and local authorities, etc. In this context, the 'governance debate' emphasizes the importance of the capacity of articulating agents and mechanisms of action, in a way that is both effective (dealing with the overall causes of the problems) and legitimate. One of the consequences of this preoccupation is the need to develop methodological instruments capable of discussing and assessing the different means and options involved, the effectiveness of the urban programmes going on and the ways its legitimacy is perceived.

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to contribute towards the debate on the complex issue of the evaluation of urban regeneration programmes, within a context that is marked by an unintegrated diversity of intervention programmes and respective apparatus. This diversity represents, from a methodological point of view, a double challenge. On the one hand, it draws attention to the various possibilities for the combination of the existing mechanisms, depending on the characteristics of the urban areas in need and the strategic options to be considered by the relevant involved parties. On the other hand, it shows the existence of several models of action. Accordingly, the evaluation of its capacity, in terms of contributing towards the reversal of urban difficulties, is fundamental.

Within the Portuguese context, which is briefly summarised here, the study constitutes an exercise in evaluating the possible effects of the III Community Support Framework upon the processes of urban regeneration. This evaluation is made on the assumption that a framework of reference exists, which details, in an operative fashion, the implications and the aspects that comprise the concept of urban regeneration. Consequently, the establishment of this referential framework is one of the central and meticulous features of the overall evaluation process.

The paper concludes with a discussion of the operational value of the methodologies prescribed, that is, issues related to the use (social) of evaluation and its capacity to identify or reveal relevant challenges, requiring public action.

2. The context: urban improvement programmes in Portugal

Over recent years, various projects have been implemented and developed in Portuguese cities, or in areas within cities, aiming to reverse the trend of urban degradation, and assisted by community financing.

This is the case, for example, of Urban Programme, the Urban Pilot-Projects, the I. O. Urban Renovation, and more recently, the Polis Programme, in addition to various other sectoral programmes.

This diversity of programmes is, in itself, something that should be exploited, serving as the foundation for an assessment of the policies of cities, in relation to schemes that have come to be categorised under “urban regeneration”. In particular, the systematic use of existing programmes has the advantage of enabling an increased response capacity (including in financial terms) to problems that, depending on the area, manifest themselves in miscellaneous ways, by developing programmes in a co-ordinated way, and which have strategic ends.

However, it should be borne in mind that this diversity may also result in divergent methodological principles and conceptions, whether in terms of the underlying analysis of the processes of urban degradation, or in terms of intervening in both the administrative structure and the way in which the role of the various bodies involved is perceived, or even in terms of its own methodological presuppositions.

Naturally, these aspects condition the convergence criteria and the efficiency of the various intervention programmes within cities, from the perspective of its ability to develop urban regeneration strategies. It is thus essential to know how to evaluate its potential contribution in a consistent and systematic manner.

The evaluation exercise presented here – which was developed within the scope of a more generalised study, carried out by the authors in relation to the urban centres in the Northern Region (cf. Breda-Vázquez et al., 2000) – become, in essence, a confrontation between the framework objectives of the various urban intervention programmes, with the various *domains* related to the concept of urban regeneration. In this work, their main methodological features are outlined.

3. Evaluation of urban improvement programmes

3.1 Identifying objectives in general urban regeneration policies

The evaluation of urban intervention programmes, in terms of revitalization of cities, is necessarily conditioned by the benchmark adopted for urban regeneration, which, in turn, affects the ongoing debate regarding intervention theory and practice.

The standard for urban regeneration that has become instilled as a result of different European experiences, opens significant ruptures in traditional intervention strategy theories, seeking to overcome its restrictive and overly sectoral character. The innovative features that are contained as part of the policies for ongoing urban regeneration, are connected, fundamentally, by three general principles or demands:

- The establishment of multi-sector strategies on a local scale,
- The social and institutional legitimisation of the strategies and the means of intervention, and
- The guarantee of its continuity or sustainability.

This study does not endeavour to develop any of these principles in any great depth¹. However, it is taken into account that the requirement for social and institutional legitimisation has an effect upon the way in which they are incorporated in the processes of the different parties (including those that are the subject of the intervention), and upon the scope for enabling co-responsibility for the execution of the proposals. Nevertheless, the multi-sectoral challenge and its local implementation, is the manifestation of conditions of both specificity and integration, which must accompany the realisation of urban regeneration projects to take place.

The study therefore seeks to shape strategies that are adapted to the local nature of the problems, which, in different areas, are manifested in different ways, and which act on various levels: in enabling the work of the relevant parties or social bodies, in revitalizing living conditions, in re-launching vulnerable local economies, in promoting social cohesion and urban safety, in ensuring environmental quality, in improving access to services and facilities, etc.

It is further sought to guarantee the diversity of the interventions, in terms of 'offensive' strategies for the valorisation of the abilities and qualities co-existing with attitudes of simple 'adjustment' associated with the overcoming of situations of deprivation. Diversity also in the sense of knowing how to make different types of actions compatible with each other, combining interventions within a particular area with more widespread or intangible actions, or even with indirect regulation.

Lastly, the study aims to define modes of rapid action, based on an assessment of the institutional set up, with a capacity to respond efficiently and in a long-lasting way, to the complexity of the operations that comprise urban regeneration.

¹ A systematic analysis is presented in studies developed by the authors concerning the theme of urban regeneration (Breda-Vázquez et al., 1999 and 2000) and in Carley (2000), Chaline (1997), DETR (1998), Galès and Mawson (1995), OCDE (1998) or Rogers and Stuart (1998).

Once the main objectives of the urban development policies have been put into a framework, the issue that now arises, in terms of the development of evaluation methodologies for intervention projects, has to do with the ability to specify those challenges and to valorise the particular aspects of the problems of degradation and hardship that the revitalisation programmes aim to see resolved.

3.2 Evaluating the effects of urban improvement programmes: methodological issues

The following are the main methodological criteria related to the exercise of evaluating the different urban intervention programmes currently available in Portugal, within the scope of the III Community Support Framework.

The central aim of the evaluation is to specify the contributions that these programmes make towards the processes of urban regeneration. Therefore, the issue is the analysis of its abilities for developing the conditions required for intervention.

The assessment put forward has, at its root, the pre-defined objectives for each intervention programme. They are compared against an analysis reference table, which has been drawn up according to the different aspects of the problem of urban regeneration. These aspects have been arrived at as a result of the aforementioned challenges. It should be taken into account that the programmes are being evaluated within a framework of aims (its overall objectives), which means that knowledge of its real efficacy and consequences may be objectively difficult to gauge.

The different aspects associated with the problems of urban regeneration have been set out systematically, in accordance with a group of eight domains that cover employment, the urban economy, housing conditions, groups of highest deprivation, social support, urban security, the environment and quality of life and urban governance.

These areas correlate with a very general overall theme and are subject to different formulae. They were chosen using a series of different criteria. Accordingly, and taking the area of 'urban governance' as an example, the following aspects were taken into account; public participation and the implication for "those benefiting" from the programmes, gains in the capacity of definition and knowledge of the problems, the development of new structures for intervention (with the incorporation of new bodies and new cross-institutional links), the development of new intervention methodologies (including issues relating to support and evaluation mechanisms) and the valorisation of the human resources involved.

It should be underlined that this selection of domains and criteria seeks to carry out a critical analysis of the actual programmes, in line with general requirements associated with the "multi-sectoral" problem, or the inclusion of different aspects relating to the problems, the difficulty of locally inculcating the issues, and the challenge of institutionally and socially legitimising the strategies.

The evaluation table, drawn up in accordance with the abovementioned domains and criteria (as shown in tables 1 and 2), allows us to register the presence / absence, in each programme, of the effects linked to the different domains of urban regeneration. A distinction is made between "direct" effects and "induced" effects: the first are explicitly set out as actions that comprise the programmes, whilst the second may occur in the form of supplementary actions, which the programmes themselves may facilitate or cause.

The methodology set out can be viewed in a systematised form in the summary tables set out below.

		POLIS								Urban
		1	2	3	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.5	
Employment	Promotion of employment of the residents									●
	Support for self-employment									●
	Improve resident's qualifications									●
	Active employment policies for deprived groups									●
	Increase in the opportunities of "public" / "social" employment									
Urban Economy	Support for "traditional activities" of the area									●
	Promotion of new activities or "local specialisations"	○								
	More general promotion of the image of the "city" or its areas	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		
	Transformation of the investment regulations	●								
Housing Conditions	Elimination of the defects in the living conditions									●
	Elimination of the defects in other living conditions									
	Increase in the supply of low-cost housing									
	Policies for the granting of housing to specific groups									
	Involvement in the management of housing area									
	Diversification of housing supply									
Support to deprived groups	Changes to the rules of investment and development	●								
	Increase in the supply and/or quality of services for the groups									●
	Increase in the supply of public or private facilities									●
	Better access to different "opportunities" ("citizenship")									●
	Income support systems of the families									
Social Support	Improved entry conditions to the job market									●
	Promotion of local associations									●
	Decentralisation of the support services to people and families									
Urban Safety	Increased supply and quality of the services or facilities	○	○							●
	Promotion of local entertainment areas									●
	Improved surveillance conditions									
	Improved access to security services									
Environment and quality of life	Reinforced security in pedestrian areas									●
	Crime control policies									
	Control of risk of ruin of the buildings									
	Urban design projects (aimed at security)									○
	Projects for mobility systems	●	●		●					
	Infrastructure projects	●	●							●
Governance	Interventions in public areas and projects to increase sociability	●	●	●		●	●	●		●
	Promotion of the quality of the environment	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
	Promotion of the energy efficiency of the urban systems	●	●	●	●					
	Actions in order to promote public health									
	Reinforcement of the mechanisms of public participation	○	○	○	○	○	○	○		●
Governance	Gains in the definition and knowledge of the problems	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●
	Development of new intervention structures	●								●
	Development of new intervention methodologies				●					●
	Valorisation of service's technical and human resources									●

Legend:

Programme for Urban Revitalisation and Environmental Valorisation of the Cities

Component 1 – Integrated Operations of Urban Revitalisation and Environmental Valorisation

Component 2 – Intervention in cities with areas classified as World Heritage sites

Component 3 – Urban and environmental valorisation in areas of re-housing

Component 4 – Supplementary measures to improve the urban and environmental conditions of the cities

4.1. Support for new forms of mobility in the urban area

4.2. Support for the installation of monitoring and environmental management systems

4.3. Support for urban and environmental valorisation in and around the education facilities

4.4. Support for actions to raise awareness and educate people about the environment in the urban area.

4.5. Support for other actions with a positive impact on the quality of urban life

Table 1 - Programme for Urban Revitalisation and Environmental Valorisation of the Cities (POLIS) and URBAN – Summary Table of evaluation

		Mea. 1.1	Mea. 1.2	Mea. 1.3	Mea. 1.4	Mea. 1.5	Mea. 1.6/1.7
Employment	Promotion of employment of the residents			○			
	Support for self-employment			○			
	Improve resident's qualifications						
	Active employment policies for deprived groups						
	Increase in the opportunities of "public" / "social" employment			○			
Urban Economy	Support for "traditional activities" of the area			○			
	Promotion of new activities or "local specialisations"			○			
	More general promotion of the image of the "city" or its areas	○	○	●	●		
	Transformation of the investment regulations						
Housing Conditions	Elimination of the defects in the living conditions	●					
	Elimination of the defects in other living conditions	●					
	Increase in the supply of low-cost housing						
	Policies for the granting of housing to specific groups						
	Involvement in the management of housing area						
	Diversification of housing supply						
Support to deprived groups	Changes to the rules of investment and development						
	Increase in the supply and/or quality of services for the groups			●		○	
	Increase in the supply of public or private facilities			●			
	Better access to different "opportunities" ("citizenship")						
	Income support systems of the families						
Social Support	Improved entry conditions to the job market			○			
	Promotion of local associations			○			
	Decentralisation of the support services to people and families			○			
	Increased supply and quality of the services or facilities			●		○	
Urban Safety	Promotion of local entertainment areas	○		●			
	Improved surveillance conditions	○					
	Improved access to security services						
	Reinforced security in pedestrian areas	○					
	Crime control policies						
	Control of risk of ruin of the buildings			●			
Environment and quality of life	Urban design projects (aimed at security)			●			
	Projects for mobility systems		●				
	Infrastructure projects	●	●				
	Interventions in public areas and projects to increase	●	●	●			
	Promotion of the quality of the environment	●	●	●			
	Promotion of the energy efficiency of the urban systems	●	●				
Governance	Actions in order to promote public health	●	●				
	Reinforcement of the mechanisms of public participation						
	Gains in the definition and knowledge of the problems	●	●		●	●	●
	Development of new intervention structures	●			●		
	Development of new intervention methodologies	●	●		●	○	
Valorisation of service's technical and human resources				●	●		

Sub-programme 1: Support for Municipal and Inter-municipal Investment

- Measure 1.1: Local Environmental Systems
- Measure 1.2: Local Networks and Transport Systems
- Measure 1.3: Urban Qualification
- Measure 1.4: Regional and Local Valorisation and Promotion
- Measure 1.5: Training for Development
- Measure 1.6 and 1.7: Technical Support (FEDER and FSE)

- Direct effects
- Induced effects

Table 2 – Operational Programme of the North Region (Sub-programme 1) – Summary Table of evaluation

4. Conclusions

4.1 The operational value of evaluation methodologies to the development of urban regeneration policies in Portugal

The methodological components set out seek to act as a primary source of reference for the evaluation of the capacity for intervention in the area, within a perspective of urban regeneration.

The results obtained from the evaluation exercise carried out for the different urban intervention programmes currently available in Portugal, show that:

- i. It is possible to work outside the diverse scope of the current methods, within the general framework of the organisation of national and community investment programmes, in order to meet the objectives, which are themselves varied, for urban regeneration. The policy defined for cities, which aims to deal with the issue of problematic or deprived urban areas, should know how to valorise this diversity and the respective possibilities for intervention associated with it.
- ii. Valorising the potential contribution of different methods, within the context of urban regeneration, means taking at least two fundamental aspects into account: the links between the different interventions of a predominantly sectoral nature, and the integration method for the aspects absent from the programmes.
- iii. Both these aspects (sectoral links and the integration of absent aspects) reveal the necessity for appropriate institutional solutions, which promote the convergence of sectoral funds and initiatives, and therefore have an affect upon the challenge of creating local co-ordination or urban government structures.
- iv. The important convergence, in terms of the aims of urban regeneration, of programmes that adopt easily cross-referenced principles (as is the case of the URBAN programme), constitutes a valuable reference point for the framework, from the multi-sectoral standpoint that the debate about urban regeneration has highlighted, and, itself, is evidence of the need for analysis of the ability to promote general acceptance of these experiences through the establishment of integrated programmes of intervention in the area.
- v. Within the context of the overall debate on urban regeneration and the policy of cities, issues of participation, at all levels, are considered fundamental. From the evaluation already made, what stands out is the diversity of possible routes to follow, the various “geometries” of established partnerships and the different mechanisms for participation by the local populations, the groups and “communities”.
- vi. The experiences developed underline the need for an assessment of the meaning of “territorialisation” of municipal projects. This is a multi-faceted issue. If, on the one hand, it is recognised that ‘territorialisation’ of policies is a factor that helps to promote the adaptation of means of intervention to the local

specifications, and that it constitutes the mobilisation of the respective bodies, an analysis of the structural character of many of the problems, suggests that the efficacy of the actions carried out in specific areas assumes a connection with wider strategies, on other levels of public action. 'Territorialisation' of policy is, thus, an important condition in order to make use of the diversity of relevant factors, but it is not a sufficient condition by itself in order to guarantee the correctness of the results. One of the fundamental evaluation criteria consists, then, of being aware of the ability of the set of developed methods to be directed towards the areas and the aspects that are considered to be the most problematic.

- vii. Systematically confronting the problems associated with the theory of urban regeneration, implies a profound knowledge of the processes underway and the extent and severity of the deprivation, as well as the conditions and capacities of local communities, in order to support the active means of intervention and their sustainability. Recognising the centrality of the diagnosis and the challenge of arriving at a shared and validated verdict, has important implications for the formation of intervention programmes and for their ability to adapt to local requirements.

4.2 Concluding remarks

The study aimed to draw attention to three aspects of the evaluation of the contribution made by urban intervention programmes. Firstly, their relationship with the working context was focussed upon, in this instance, marked by diversity of the intervention programmes and apparatus. Secondly, their relationship with the debate on the definition of urban regeneration was discussed. Thirdly, the study attempted to show the usefulness of the methodology followed and its capacity to reveal issues that are central to public intervention, outlining aspects that are absent from the current configuration of urban policies and contributing to focus the discussion on the problems associated with administration and its relationship – albeit complex – with the 'territorialisation' of policies.

In conclusion, certain more general difficulties come to light, pertaining to the evaluation process and its significance.

The diversity of programmes and modes of intervention has been mentioned, to which there are corresponding perceptions of the urban problems and their causes. There are also the respective main involved bodies and their organisational capabilities that are different and, at times, conflicting. At the same time, one of the conclusions drawn as a result of studying the Portuguese case, underlines the particular importance of the debate on "urban governance" and the ability to connect, in an efficient and legitimate way, action bodies and apparatus. In this context, the need to develop methodological means, which are able to identify and evaluate the different meanings and perspectives for action, the way in which they deal with the causes of the problems and the way in which their legitimacy is understood, constitutes a main challenge to the debate on the evaluation of the programmes.

This central challenge comprises various facets, for example: the need to clarify the assumptions – very often tacitly accepted, but not made explicit – of the programmes; the ability to draw up a general framework of reference, suited to the treatment of multi-faceted and cumulative problems, seen from various angles and also from various areas of discipline and fields of action;

the importance of the issue of incorporation, within the evaluation process, of the different parties involved.

In this sense, if from the evaluation presented here, significant results arise, in terms of the analysis of the formation of urban policies, methodological issues also arise, which need developing, concerning the evaluation of the conditions and problems of social and institutional mobilisation, associated to the analysed programmes.

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