



« THE CRITICAL URBAN AREAS PROGRAMME IN COVA DA MOURA »

Amadora, Portugal

Period of implementation: 2006 (launch) | Study case written in 2010

In April 2008, a European Economic Area grant set off a €3.8 million component of a close-to-€100 million complex project to initiate social change in deprived urban areas in Portugal. The grant agreement in the neighbourhood of Cova da Moura was signed on 2 April 2008 in Lisbon. Improving living conditions in the run-down urban area of Cova da Moura, home to an estimated 7000 people on 16 hectares, involves inter-ministerial cooperation, civic participation, and the participation of local authorities. The manifold project aims to legalize the area's land ownership, laying the ground for social and economic sustainability, and to rehabilitate the community's basic infrastructure. Local residents will be able to participate in social and educational activities, and the project has a strong focus on supporting activities that could strengthen local entrepreneurship and employment. The Critical Neighborhoods Initiative can be considered the first major effort developed by the Portuguese government/administration in order to promote a public policy towards integrated territorial intervention.



The **Inclusive Cities Observatory** was launched in 2008 by the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights with the aim of creating a space for analysis and reflection on local social inclusion policies. The initiative was developed with the scientific support of Professor Yves Cabannes (University College of London) and the Centre for Social Studies (CES) from the University of Coimbra. At present, the Observatory contains more than sixty study cases mostly developed between 2008 and 2010. Even though many of these cases refer to policies that have already come to an end, they still have much to offer: from capitalizing on the learning acquired by other local authorities to discovering suggestive and alternative means to address social inclusion challenges from a local perspective.

Context

City context

In Portugal, the existence of deprived urban areas is directly linked to the decolonization process during the 1970s, when over a million *retornados* (Portuguese *returnees*) immigrated to Portugal from the former African colonies. This substantial influx of new inhabitants, combined with the legal 'void' after the 1974 revolution, resulted in a number of informal settlements characterized by problematic land ownership issues and the absence of urban planning. Later immigration from the former Portuguese colony Cape Verde and other countries have given the neighbourhoods a multicultural flair, a positive asset the Critical Urban Areas programme has enlisted in its community-building efforts.

The area analysed in this report is called Cova da Moura and belongs to the Municipality of Amadora, which is located in the District of Lisbon and subdivided into eleven boroughs or *freguesias*. Cova da Moura is a neighbourhood built without any plan which was illegally constructed in the 1980s. Administratively, it belongs to two boroughs: Buraca and Damaia. For many years, the city has been governed by the Socialist Party, and has a majority of Cape Verdien voters since Law 50/1996 introduced the possibility for immigrants to vote.

The Amadora municipality considers housing to be a major policy question. In this sense, it promotes *incentive* measures for urban rehabilitation, such as: tax exemptions for those who conduct requalification/conservation work (at the value of VAT and exemption from IMI municipal tax); support programs for private works; and a leasing scheme (*regime de arrendamento*).

Decentralization context

Municipalities in Portugal have specific competence in urban and habitation issues. Municipal Plans (*Planos Municipais de Ordenamento do Território*, PMOT) define the local territorial management policies in agreement with ministerial direction. Such municipal plans include sub-plans concerning:

- *Master Plan (Plano Diretor Municipal, PDM)* – establishes the overall model of the municipal spatial structure
- *Urbanization Plan (Plano de Urbanização, PU)* – defines the spatial organization of specific urban areas in need of an integrated planned intervention
- *Detailed Plan (Plano de Pormenor, PP)* – develops detailed spatial organization actions in particular municipal areas. This plan serves as the basis for infrastructural works, architectural ones, and exterior ones.

The Amadora PDM was approved by the Municipal Assembly on 30 December 1993 and ratified through *Resolução de Conselho de Ministros* no. 44/94, on 22 June 1994.

According to the 1976 Constitution of the Portuguese Republic (whose seventh revision dates from 2005), the democratic organisation of the country's political power at a local level is situated in the so-called *local authorities* or *autarquias* (Art. 235). They have their own property and finances (Art. 238), their own permanent staff (Art. 243), and they can hold a referendum for their respective voters on subjects including the competence of their own bodies (Art. 240). The base of the Portuguese administrative structure is made up of 308 municipalities. These are

subdivided into 4260 parishes (*freguesias*), which are decentralized political administrative bodies that derive from the former territorial divisions of church parishes.

The elected bodies, representatives of the parishes and the municipalities, are the Cabinet (the decision-making body elected by universal suffrage in a direct ballot by the voters, whose numerical composition depends on the number of voters registered in the respective territory) and the Parish Council or the Municipal Council (the collegiate legislative body). Both include members elected by the opposition parties, a legacy that makes the political life of the executive difficult. This situation can be understood in the light of the post-revolutionary situation when the rule was conceived: its objective was to give value to all the dynamic forces of society.

A Mayor (*Presidente*), the citizen who heads the most-voted-for party, always coordinates the executive body both in the municipalities and the parishes. The elections of the executive bodies and the decision-making bodies are separate but simultaneous, except in the case of by-elections, that is, when one of the two bodies has to terminate its mandate for political or judiciary reasons (as was the case of Lisbon in 2006). In the Municipal Assembly, only a part of the members is directly elected. This has to be a higher number than the number of Parish Council Chairmen, who also form an integral part as 'members by right'. The mandate for the bodies of the Local Authorities is a four-year term of office. Since 2005, the mandate of the chairmen of the executive bodies of the local authorities cannot be renewed for more than three consecutive terms.

In Portugal, the administrative divisions at a level higher than the municipalities include the 18 districts of Continental Portugal and the creation of continuous territorial units made up of Local Authorities: the Urban Communities (ComUrb), the Greater Metropolitan Areas (GAM), and the Inter-municipality Communities (Cominter).

Social context

Cova da Moura is the most stigmatized area in the Lisbon region – an informal neighbourhood of approximately 6000-7000 inhabitantsⁱ (this number is approximate), of which 70% are from Cabo Verde. The neighbourhood is characterized by low schooling levels, high unemployment rates, and a very young population, with over half of the residents being under 30 years of age (22% of the population is under 14 years old; 45% is under 24 years old) and a high percentage of adolescent mothers. The buildings are run down, the infrastructure is poor, and visible drug trafficking occurs in public spaces.

Policy development

The Critical Urban Areas (CUA) programme is a €120 million urban regeneration and social empowerment scheme targeting socially and spatially isolated neighbourhoods in urban areas in the Lisbon and Porto Metropolitan areas. It is administered by the Portuguese National Housing and Urban Rehabilitation Institute (IHRU). The €8.79 million contribution from the European Economic Area Grants targets the [Cova da Moura](#) and Vale da Amoreira neighbourhoods in Lisbon and the Lagarteiro neighbourhood in Porto, all multicultural areas known and stigmatized for their high concentration of disadvantaged groups and lack of opportunities. The Cova da Moura case is the most active and effective for this policy.

The CUA programme is innovative in that it takes a holistic approach incorporating social, economic, and environmental issues. Recognizing that culture, employment, security, and health all contribute to an area's social cohesion, sustainability, and growth, the CUA programme stresses the importance of community building and achieving community development by encouraging entrepreneurship and associations.

Background

Cova da Moura was selected not because it used to be one of the most stigmatized neighbourhoods but, rather, because it was the only CUA neighbourhood with local representation in the management structure. The neighbourhood is characterized by a wide range of local organizations covering different interests and activities. It was already well organized and motivated to engage with the Programme.

Policy goals

The goals of the programme are: (1) to contribute to the social, economic, educational, and cultural development of disadvantaged neighbourhoods; and (2) to develop an organizational and methodological framework as part of a national learning process.

Chronological development

The Critical Urban Areas Programme is a project coordinated by the Secretary of State for Territorial and City Planning (*Secretaria de Estado do Ordenamento do Território e Cidades*) as an instrument for urban policy. It aims at developing qualification solutions for urban territories with vulnerabilities through integrated socio-spatial interventions experimentally applied in Cova da Moura (Amadora), Lagarteiro (Porto), and Vale da Amoreira (Moita).

The programme was created by [Resolução do Conselho de Ministros nº 143/2005 of 2 August 2005, published in DR, I Série – B, 7 September 2005](#). The initiative, shortly designated as 'Iniciativa Bairros Críticos' (Critical Neighbourhoods Initiative), was initially designed to last two years but was prolonged until 2013 by [Resolução do Conselho de Ministros nº 189/2007 of 31 December 2007](#).

The programme adopts a system of governance based on institutional and local partnerships engaging 11 Ministries (Presidency; Environment; Territory; Regional Development; Work; Social Security; Internal Administration; Health; Education; Culture and Justice) and more than 90 public entities and local organizations/associations, following an innovative management [model](#).

Stakeholders, beneficiaries and participatory methodologies

The Government of Portugal, the City of Amadora, local associations, and the whole neighbourhood are involved in implementation. Seven ministries are involved in the planning and implementation of the project. The municipalities are also very important, as they are mandated to finance almost half of the programme investments, particularly those related to physical and infrastructural renewal. Problems in getting the national and municipal levels of government to agree on the financial issues have contributed to some delays in the programme.

Residents of the neighbourhoods participate actively in the planning and management of the programme. The resident representatives do not always have an easy relationship with the Municipality, as the case of Cova da Moura in Amadora shows. In a complex political-organizational arrangement, the coordinating body, the Institute for Housing and Urban Rehabilitation (IHRU), has the upper hand in the programme, chairing each of the local CUA Executive Committees and employing each of the local Project Leaders. Moreover, the way of ensuring resident representation in the Executive Committee faces challenges in handling the different local situations. For example, the residents in Cova da Moura are very vocal, and their representatives are highly dissatisfied with having been allocated only one joint seat.

Cova da Moura is a good case for highlighting *the process towards* the protocol. The protocol for Cova da Moura was signed in late 2006 by 25 actors at the central, municipal, and local levels. The variety of actors at different levels illustrates the complexity of urban development processes at the local level. It also shows that the implementation of the programme depends on a successful coordination process where information, communication, and networking become decisive.

During the process of developing an agreed protocol, there were more than 20 meetings before an agreement was reached. These were meetings at local associations for discussion and deliberation. Representatives were elected by local commissions. The Municipality (the Mayor) and the dwellers' representatives did not have shared goals and visions at the outset and had to come to an understanding. To involve the population and local associations in Cova de Moura and their perceptions of a desired future in the area, residents had been invited to take part in participatory planning initiatives.

This process went on from the beginning to the end of 2006. Open meetings/workshops were organized to invite and involve people in the process. In these meetings, people could write their proposals on post-it notes. The protocol was intended to 'catch', compile, and include most of these proposals in the action programme.

This participative approach carries on in the policy's implementation. By building on local resources such as a strong sense of identity and neighbourhood solidarity to unlock positive dynamics, residents and public institutions are teaming up to make public spaces more beautiful and accessible to everyone and to promote cultural initiatives valuing the cultural heritage of the area's residents. Virginia Sousa, a consultant for the CUA programme, stresses the importance of local ownership of the programme. Residents became involved in the implementation of the programme even as they also criticized it. 'The local residents must feel that their participation is an important and valued part of the process. Nothing will change without the active involvement of the residents' ('Combating urban segregation...' 2010). In line with this, the programme is based upon a participatory planning process. This approach brought in a lot of young people with new ideas and new skills, who knew how to innovate and change things there. At the same time, local people went out and came into contact with different realities, learned new things, and brought back new ideas to help solve their problems. Antonio Pereira of the Amadora

Public Security Police echoed this: 'The planning process involved the whole community in identifying its problems and in helping find solutions to them' ('Combating urban segregation...' 2010). People in the community are now looking more positively to the future.

Institutionalization and financing

The policy was institutionalized through the following process: The Portuguese government asked the Institute of Urban Rehabilitation (IHRU) to study a rehabilitation project for deprived neighbourhoods. The IHRU applied for funds from the EU and Norway, and the Critical Urban Areas Programme was approved. The municipality and local associations are implicated in the decisions through the Executive Committee for the programme's implementation in the territory. The representative of Amadora City Council was Margarida Guimarães.

The Neighbourhood Committee in Cova da Moura was established in 2002 as a protest against a consultant report commissioned by the municipality – the report recommended demolition of the existing structures in Cova da Moura. The establishment of the Neighbourhood Committee

was also a result of the European URBAN II programme (2001-2006). In this programme, the Municipality applied for and received EU funding that would benefit Cova da Moura. The impression among the residents, however, was that much of the funding was used for other purposes in the Municipality. This impression contributed to local skepticism towards external programmes at the same time as the programmes were needed and wanted to help improve the area.

Key sources of funding have been the Government of Portugal, Municipality of Amadora (physical rehabilitation, human resources), and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The funding of the CUA initiative is organized in a very complex way, employing integrated financial mechanisms. In October 2007, an agreement was made with the European Economic Area (EEA) worth €10 million. During the 2007-2011 period, 15% of the budget, excluding physical rehabilitation, is covered by the EEA. The total budget of the program going to the Cova da Moura neighbourhood is €3,800,000 (until 2011).

Outcomes and reflections

Key results and achievements

Improved infrastructure

Through the programme, the areas' sanitation, electricity, gas, and communication infrastructure have been upgraded. Trash collection has been introduced, and dirt tracks have been paved, named, and turned into proper roads. Public authorities, NGOs, and local associations have set up educational initiatives and workshops to help residents set up micro-companies to create their own jobs. Health education programmes have been established, especially in the fields of parenting, family planning, and substance abuse. The project also entails legalizing land ownership issues and supporting the citizenship acquisition process for immigrants and persons without legal documents. Various community-building and cultural events have been organized, such as hip hop and rap music festivals.

Socio-cultural programmes

Two programmes – 'The immediate programme for small improvements' (*Programa Imediato de Pequenos Melhoramentos*, PIPEM) and 'The immediate programme for social and educational intervention' (*Programa Imediato de Intervenção Social e Educacional*, PIISE) are carried out under this policy framework. Key results have included:

- In 2008 the Municipality rearranged and rehabilitated the schoolyard as part of the Social Improvement Plan.
- In 2008 the Municipality started the 'politics of the three arts', a project that recycles and reuses plastic, glass, and paper garbage.
- The police continue their work in the area and start new projects. One of these projects focused on people leaving prison and helping them reintegrate into their homes and into the neighbourhood. Another project focused on the integration of descendants of immigrants.

Overall, the list of started and forthcoming activities is in line with the CUA Action Plan for Cova da Moura. In addition to the work anchored in the Steering Committee, the activities show that the individual municipal institutions have taken responsibility by enforcing their areas of action. The first activities that were started focus on improving people's everyday life. This

strategy has proved successful in motivating residents to become more engaged in the neighbourhood (Vestergaard 2004).

Perceptions

The people in Cova da Moura have a 35-year history of political negotiations with the City Council of Amadora. Their negotiations have not yet solved the problem of legalized ownership of the land and the dwellings. Representatives of the local associations as well as other observers following the process today want to believe that the CUA Programme is going to be a breakthrough for the upgrading of the area in line with the inhabitants' needs and preferences. However, the long history of former negotiations has made the local stakeholders aware of the different interests concerning the future use and ownership of the area. On one side, it is believed that the Municipality has economic interests in the land while, on the other side, the inhabitants are concerned with their possibility to remain, own houses and land, and develop the area into a more attractive community for all.

Overall assessment

The Critical Neighborhoods Initiative can be considered the first major effort developed by the Portuguese government/administration in order to promote a public policy towards integrated territorial intervention. This helps explain the visibility of this experience, since it has sought to depart from the dominant 'sector approach' used by Public Administration in Portugal, which dealt with people and territories in a 'disintegrated' form, resulting in frequent incoherency and contradictory policies.

As well, the implementation of this policy gains visibility due to the following factors:

- It focus on territories considered critical from the point of view of spatial segregation and concentration of the phenomena of urban poverty, exclusion, and criminality, as well as inconsistency in terms of urban planning, among other elements that potentially stigmatize these neighborhoods; and
- It is an initiative prompted by central administration/government that follows a participatory approach at the local level, involving Regional Administration services, local municipalities, and civil society associations.

Such an initiative could not avoid running into difficulties and obstacles, resulting in several unforeseen problems and conflicts. In the specific case of Cova da Moura, the difficulties are greater due to the fact that this neighborhood is, at its origin, an illegal settlement, a fact that has hindered the completion of several of the initially established goals, mainly the ones associated with territorial planning, urban intervention, and the construction of infrastructure.

Nonetheless, it should be underlined that, over the three years of intervention, it has become a space of mutual learning, a space to build partnerships and confidences, and a space to test methodologies of community intervention. Through this case, the Municipality of Amadora came to understand the potential of this kind of intervention. Nowadays, similar approaches are being developed in other community neighborhoods that are considered 'critical'.

Replicability

Pre-requisites and recommendations for a similar policy elsewhere are:

- Integrate socio-territorial projects
- Focus on urban space

- Involve and engage the participation of local actors during conception and implementation of the initiatives
- Mobilize new funding solutions
- Strategically coordinate and foster partnerships
- Focus on the sustainability and durability of the results through creating networks to manage synergies and funds
- Orient interventions towards innovation and capacity for structural impact
- Include ongoing evaluation and monitoring

Further information

This case was researched and written by Dr. Elsa Lechner at the Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Portugal, in 2010.

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¹ All statistical data comes from the site www.portaldahabitacao.pt