



Identification, Dissemination and Exchange of good practice in
Local Employment development and promoting better governance

URBAN I Aulnay-sous-Bois, Paris - France

Local Context

The municipality of Aulnay-sous-Bois is one of the largest in the *département* of Seine-Saint-Denis (93), in the outskirts of Paris, with a population of 80.000 and 3.200 businesses. The northern wards of the *commune*, almost exclusively characterised by social housing, are home to 25.000 people, who are disproportionately affected by the problems of long term economic and social decline (unemployment, insecurity, drug addiction, run down built environment...). 40.5% of the population of these neighbourhoods is of immigrant origin (against an average of 12.9% for the entire region).

15 years after the first targeted public policies (the so-called « *Politique de la Ville* »), all of which were tested in Aulnay-sous-Bois, the area was granted funding for an URBAN Community Initiative Programme in 1994. This created a rare opportunity to tackle the range of problems (physical, economic and social), affecting Aulnay's deprived neighbourhoods

Local Approach

The approach adopted by the authorities in Aulnay-sous-Bois was based on pragmatism («common sense»), with a particular emphasis on the following elements :

- Evening out the pattern of flows, resources and economic effects between the North and South of the town;
- Undertake activities that *generate* sustainable employment rather than directly *create* jobs (which may not be sustainable);
- Involve and engage with the business community in the choice of priorities, identification of test initiatives and in the management of certain activities.

The project focussed on building up relations with local employers to encourage flexible approaches to employment and to tackle discrimination. This was partly achieved through setting up a local Centre for Employment and Enterprise which provided a one-stop shop for the needs of both employers and potential employees, and therefore proved a useful meeting point. The coordinators also built relationships with employers from the principle growth poles which could be found within about half an hour of Aulnay: Roissy Airport, Garonor and Parinor 2 and supported the employment of people within these areas through a variety of methods of assistance including training, mobility.

The coordinators of the project identified a series of steps through which they could 'attract' local employers to cooperate with their project. As employers in France frequently lobby to be consulted and involved by the public sector, they did not experience significant resistance to this. However they recommend a series of key steps including:

- Developing informal encounters between local enterprises to debate together.
- Common local issues, and bringing these enterprises together to develop local common initiatives on the basis of these discussions.

- During this process, progressively sensitize managers to issues around integration into employment.
- Exploring with the enterprises the main skills gaps present in their sector.
- Developing a programme to support local people to develop appropriate skills and competencies.

Positive Results

- At the end of 1999, 2067 people had been helped into work in the northern districts of the municipality (the original programme aimed for 1.500).
- Opening of the *Maison de l'Entreprise et de l'Emploi* on the 5 June 2001: all the economic development operations of the Aulnay-sous-Bois municipality are now based at the heart of the area targeted by the URBAN Initiative.
- With the opening of the *Hôtel d'activités* business centre in May 2002, 50 new businesses (with 200 employees) were located in the northern districts.
- Through building a relationship of trust, the project was able to encourage employers to take a more positive view of people coming from the local neighbourhood.

Difficulties

- If the URBAN Initiative had not been reported widely in the media at the outset, this would have helped to avoid a sense of impatience among the population affected and reduced pressure from politicians.
- The URBAN Initiative has not filled the still considerable gap between the needs of employers on one hand and the skills profiles of the populations targeted on the other.
- The URBAN Initiative has allowed the «employable» members of the population to access jobs, without really strengthening employment-based opportunities for others.
- The redevelopment of the urban environment has not always kept pace with economic development initiatives, which has acted as a «brake» on progress in some cases.

Lessons Learnt

Key lessons:

- Economic development, particularly if it is targeted at employment development, will only work if it is based on local businesses.
- Local development is only effective if one authority has responsibility for economic and employment activities.
- Concentrating public interventions on a single neighbourhood or a single category of the population can engender a sense of rejection among on the part of other inhabitants and an increased level of stigmatisation on the part of employers. It is better to develop methods to promote equality and fight discrimination within wider initiatives to develop and improve the image of local areas.
- Avoiding stigmatisation. It is not always useful to target particular minority groups as this can lead to stigmatisation – targeting whole neighbourhoods which experience deprivation and have a high percentage of immigrant people can be more valuable.
- Being flexible in the notion of the term 'local'. In order to identify employment opportunities for local unemployed people it is useful to think beyond the immediate local area. By linking people with local employment centres and growth poles, through building up the trust of employers and supporting mobility, the project has considerably reduced the isolation experienced by local unemployed people.

Other success factors:

- Political stability since 1983 (same Mayor, same MP), with no strong local opposition to

their policies.

- Government and Regional Council of the same political colour when the URBAN programme bid was made.
- The Prefect (representative of the French State) was also very closely involved in the implementation of the programme.
- The relative lack of success of previous regeneration initiatives in the area.
- A key strength of the project was that it brought together agencies which had previously worked independently from a number of dispersed locations. Bringing together agencies and employers round an URBAN programme proved particularly effective in setting goals and a time limit for achieving them, and bringing together agencies around a common purpose.