



Recommendation 764 (1975)¹

Social problems of urban decay and resettlement

Parliamentary Assembly

The Assembly,

1. Considering that in many European towns there exist relatively small areas where the community has broken down or is in danger of so doing as a result of physical decay, population movements, the closure of employment opportunities, or some combination of these factors ;
2. Considering that analogous problems may arise even in areas of modern housing where the complex needs of community life have been insufficiently considered ;
3. Believing that the viability of urban communities depends essentially upon the diversity of types of housing, employment and inhabitants, and balance between these three factors ;
4. Considering that problems most often arise in areas relatively close to city centres, and are largely influenced by the pressure upon land and facilities in city centres ;
5. Noting that the rising cost of urban land creates a tendency towards the replacement of existing buildings in favour of ever more intensive land use, and forces housing developments- particularly when undertaken at relatively low cost by public authorities- towards the outskirts ;
6. Observing that recent studies have shown that the rehabilitation of older housing can often provide accommodation of a comparable standard at a lower cost than new housing developments, especially in view of the fact that such schemes avoid the need to provide de novo the essential infrastructure of public services ;
7. Emphasising the fact that rehabilitation also avoids the large-scale disruption of the physical environment which has been found so damaging to community life, and may result in the preservation of a familiar and acceptable environment with the necessary improvements in general standards and amenities ;
8. Noting that treatment of these problems is made more difficult by a dearth of reliable and comprehensive statistics for key factors at an area level ;
9. Convinced that considerable improvements could be brought about without large-scale expenditure by more flexible and imaginative use of existing resources,
10. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers invite member governments :
 - A. I. to take all possible measures- including income support, minimum income guarantees, welfare maintenance- to eliminate the poverty which still exists in certain areas and certain categories of the population ;
 - II. to ensure that the tax base from which the provision of housing and services by local authorities has to be financed is sufficiently broad geographically to avoid serious disparities of public provision caused by varying levels of prosperity in different areas, and where necessary to compensate such disparities by central government action ;

1. Assembly debate on 1 October 1975 (9th Sitting) (see [Doc. 3667](#), report of the Committee on Social and Health Questions). Text adopted by the Assembly on 1 October 1975 (9th Sitting).



III. to enable local housing authorities to acquire sufficiently long in advance such land as will be required for the provision of public housing or services ; when such acquisition is carried out by expropriation a price shall be determined which takes fully into account both the legitimate interests of the owner and the needs of the community ;

IV. to promote objective research into the problems of declining urban areas on a comprehensive basis, in order to establish definitively the functional and structural factors which lie at the root of the problems and thereby avoid an approach based purely on the symptoms ;

V. to ensure that statistics on the key indicators of urban life, for example household size, household income, size and quality of housing stock, availability of employment opportunities, are calculated on the basis of sufficiently small districts to enable pockets of decline to be readily detected ;

VI. to impose and encourage an effective regional policy in the spheres of employment opportunities and industrial location, to prevent the creation of over-populated areas and thereby taking steps towards a more decentralised society, which will reduce the future problems that now strike many cities and areas ;

B. to encourage and, where appropriate, authorise local authorities to adopt the following measures :

I. a. to tax capital profits, except in the case of private houses occupied by their owners, deriving either from changes in land use or from the improvement of the public services infrastructure, and to make provision for appropriate measures to take into account depreciation resulting in specific cases from the deterioration of the environment ;

b. to limit large-scale changes of land use in city centres, for example excessive office building :

i. directly, by zoning mechanisms, and ii. indirectly, by requiring those responsible to contribute specifically to the attendant costs imposed upon public services, for example the transport system, and to compensate the opportunity-costs, for example the loss of High Street shopping facilities ;

II. a. to make all specialised decisions, for example in the fields of housing, transport, education, employment opportunities, only after detailed analysis of their implications in each of the other fields ;

b. to ensure that the infrastructure of public services and community facilities will be available before rather than after any new housing development ;

c. in particular, to provide an effective public transport system linking low-cost housing areas with mass employment centres ;

d. to discriminate positively in the provision of community facilities in favour of urban areas suffering particularly acute problems, for example of depopulation or unemployment ;

III. a. to avoid, wherever possible, largescale simultaneous disruption of the urban environment ;

b. to avoid continuous physical structures of a scale, whether horizontal or vertical, likely to cause alienation ;

c. to promote the use of physical forms favouring social cohesion and order, for example by the provision of "defensible space" ;

d. to exploit the various techniques developed for the rehabilitation of older housing, including the improvement of amenities in respect of light, air, parking, by the demolition of a certain proportion of the dwellings ;

e. to carry out schemes of rehabilitation or rehousing on a "rolling" basis rather than by wholesale removal of the population ;

f. to ensure the availability of diverse forms of accommodation by :

maintaining a variety of tenure patterns ;

providing a range of dwelling types ;

practising flexibility in the allocation of dwellings to households.