

**Preliminary Definition of  
Large Urban Distressed Area (LUDA)**  
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**LUDA**  
PROJECTImproving the quality of life in  
Large Urban Distressed Areas

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## Preliminary Definition of Large Urban Distressed Area (LUDA)

Approaches to describe and define distressed urban areas in different European countries and in the US as well as results of the OECD study and further scientific and empiric analyses create a basis for the definition of large urban distressed areas. Described as follows is the preliminary draft for the definition of LUDA.

Defining large urban distressed areas is a precondition of any further work within the LUDA project. It serves to identify the main characteristics of these areas and helps to find a common knowledge and language basis. This approach has to be considered as an open definition, still leaving room for discussion and interpretation. As the LUDA project will gain progress the LUDA definition will be extended through further analyses of case studies and reference cities. It will also become more appropriate for practical applications by narrowing it to the core factors and significant criteria and indicators which still have to be defined.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore the process dimension for the take-off of urban rehabilitation of LUDAs will be included into the definition.

**A large urban distressed area (LUDA) is a large part of a city of multiple deprivations characterised by a quality of life below the average standard within its urban boundary but constituting a strategic factor in the functioning of a city.**

LUDA means a considerable part of a city, larger than a neighbourhood or an ordinary rehabilitation area. LUDA suffer from multiple deprivations such as degraded housing, inadequate or improper facilities (e.g. infrastructure and transport), rundown or derelict industrial sites, environmental risks and problems (e.g. natural hazards, pollution), unattractive and disconnected urban structures, unemployment and weaknesses in social cohesion (e.g. poverty, low education standards, aging, poor health standards, dependency on welfare) which are detrimental to the sustainable development of the city as a whole.

Large urban distressed areas evolve over time and result from previous failures of public intervention, private investment and local community involvement leading to a dynamic and interlocking mix of environmental, social and economic circumstances, sometimes exacerbated by public policies. This mix of circumstances causes a high complexity of problems and intervention, discourages investment and job creation and encourages social alienation and exclusion, producing cycles of economic decline, social exclusion and environmental deterioration.

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<sup>1</sup> Report D2 (Appraisal of Urban Rehabilitation Literature and Projects) gives a preliminary approach on indicators for assessing the quality of life in LUDA.

Large urban distressed areas are characterised by three main aspects: Their large dimension, the complexity of problems and the uncertainty of their future development.

## **1) Large Dimension**

Due to their large dimension LUDAs have an impact on the urban region as a whole. This impact can either be explained by the spatial size of the area, their strategic and functional importance or with regard to time.

### ***Large in a spatial dimension***

LUDAs are much larger than the rather compact urban rehabilitation areas which have mainly been addressed by urban planning and development programmes so far, they are larger than a neighbourhood but smaller than a whole city. The boundaries of LUDAs can be independent of administrative boundaries or boundaries of city districts but do not necessarily have to. Often several neighbourhoods and districts are part of a specific LUDA which is more characterised as a functional unit. LUDAs might be situated in the core as well as on the fringe of a city. "Cross-border LUDAs" are part of the territory of different municipalities.

### ***Definition of boundaries of LUDAs***

The boundaries of every LUDA will have to be defined in a flexible manner according to the specific problems of the respective LUDA as well as taking into account the specific situation within the country. Boundaries might not be clearly fixed; different aspects of distress might have a varying outreach over the area of the urban region. Within the core area of a LUDA various problems overlap at its borders single problems might predominate. Nevertheless, the analysis of change in a respective LUDA through specific criteria and indicators might require determining its boundaries in a fixed way by taking administrative boundaries into consideration.

### ***Large in a functional dimension / LUDAs as a strategic factor***

LUDAs are strategic factors in the functional fabric of a city and they feature structural effects on the city as a whole. These strategic factors can be specified in several ways, e.g. a LUDA can be

- a spatial or functional barrier within the cityscape,
- an aspect of a negative city image,
- a barrier for city development,
- a burden for the city budget,
- an area of social exclusion detrimental to social cohesion,
- of large dimension relative to the capacity of the administration to deal with and to control the situation.

Due to the functional impact and the complexity of problems LUDAs might need more intervention from city administration and private investors than other areas in the city. Because of the specific situation (e.g. size, crossing administrative boundaries etc.) traditional instruments of urban planning may not be applicable within these areas.

***Large dimension with regard to time***

The aspect of time is important for LUDAs in two different ways. First LUDAs evolve over a long period of time e.g. due to economic or demographic change or due to previous failures of public intervention, private investment and local community involvement. The urban decline must not be seen as a static phenomenon but as a downward cycle of economic decline, social exclusion and environmental deterioration (cf. D2: emergence of LUDA). By defining and analyzing the different steps and processes of the evolution of distressed areas the emergence of future LUDAs might be avoided. Second the rehabilitation of LUDAs will take a longer period of time and requires short-term as well as medium and long-term action.

**2) Complexity of problems**

LUDAs are characterised by an accumulation of problems, mainly by an interrelation of environmental, economic and social problems as well as problems of urban structure. Often they contain heterogeneous land use structures creating multiple land use conflicts. However, LUDAs are not limited to areas with an extensive mix of usage. Complex problems can even arise in mono-structured areas. Nevertheless, in its further work the LUDA project will concentrate on heterogeneous and multifunctional areas.

***Variety and interrelation of problems***

LUDAs are characterised by a negative situation or development in relation to the city as a whole. They suffer from a combination of manifold economic, ecological, social as well as urban structural problems. However a certain aspect of distress might be predominant and of course there are differences in types and intensities of problems from one LUDA to another. It also does not mean that all problems have to be applied for a respective LUDA (cf. 1.3 Key Problems).

***Perception of LUDA from inside and outside***

The perception of what LUDA is can be assessed differently by the inhabitants both from inside as well as from outside of a LUDA. From outside not much attention is paid to the differentiated situation within the LUDA but on the whole, it might be considered as a burden for the city. Inside of a LUDA the inhabitants recognise a heterogeneous and differentiated situation and judge it according to its effects on their daily life, seeking for an improvement of their quality of life by a variety of different approaches.

***Stakeholder groups and interests***

Further dimensions of the complexity of problems in LUDAs are the conflicting interests and undefined responsibilities of a variety of public and private stakeholders, such as municipal actors, private companies (commercial, industrial, service), investors, housing companies, NGOs and citizens.

***Complexity of Intervention***

The complex situation of problems within LUDAs as well as the large dimension also appears in the fact that it cannot be improved by a single development approach or a single group of actors. Improvement can also not be guaranteed only from activities within the area. Insofar solutions require holistic and long term strategic action including participation and co-

operation of a multitude of different interests. This stresses the need for new forms of governance for the rehabilitation of LUDAs.

The complexity of urban issues and urban deprivation is likely to cause “a paralysis of action” which might only be resolved by deconstructing the urban problems and resolving them step by step.

### **3) Uncertainty of future development**

LUDAs are characterised by uncertainty concerning future development of the area and a lack of visions concerning development options. This mainly results from the complexity of problems as well as the large dimension making future structural and functional changes in LUDAs almost unpredictable. The uncertainty in LUDAs also arises from a lack of suitable:

- ***Actual interests and ideas for further development***
  - problematic civic involvement due to a lack of social cohesion,
  - absence of appropriate data for prognosis,
  - lack of visions and scenarios for the future of the area,
  - lack of strategies, plans and projects.
- ***Methodologies and tools***
  - lack of suitable instruments to handle the complexity of problems and the large dimension, e.g. due to restrictions by administrative boundaries,
  - absence of suitable rehabilitation programmes,
  - incorrect application of instruments for prognosis.
- ***Resources and investment strategies***
  - lack of private and public investments as well as lack of funds due to uncertainty,
  - unknown resources and opportunities in the area,
  - unknown orientation of economic development in the regional and metropolitan area.

Further uncertainty arises from the unforeseen effects of urban rehabilitation measures. Due to the high complexity it is uncertain how the use of particular tools and methods will effect the situation within LUDAs.