**Alba Iulia, Romania**

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

| **PROJECT TITLE** | *Legături între regenerarea urbană şi planificarea spaţială – NODUS (NODUS Alba Iulia)*  
Linking Urban Renewal and Regional Spatial Planning – NODUS  
Case study title: Gaining consent for change |
| **Beneficiary** | AIDA – The Alba Iulia Association for Intercommunity Development,  
a registered NGO of public utility, representing the interests of 3 urban communities, 8 rural communities and Alba County Council (http://www.albaiulia-aida.ro/) |
| **Duration of project** | 21/04/2008 – 25/05/2010; duration: 24 months |
| **Member State** | Romania, Centre Region (NUTS 2), Alba County (NUTS 3) |
| **Geographic size** | Alba Iulia Municipality: 72 000 (MUA); 66 000 (ESPON); 66 000 (Alba Iulia Municipality); the project area was Cetate (Citadel) Neighbourhood (Platoul Romanilor) located in the west part of Alba Iulia close to the historical city centre, with a population of circa 9 700 inhabitants and an area of 94.14 ha |
| **Funding** | Total budget of NODUS Alba Iulia: €30 000 (1st phase: €6 000, 2nd phase: €24 000), of which:  
- ERDF: 85%  
- National budget: 13% (as approved by the Managing Authority)  
- Private contribution: 2% (provided by the local budget of Alba Iulia Municipality) |
| **Operational Programme** | ROP Regional Operational Programme, Romania  
Priority axis 1: Support to sustainable development of urban growth poles;  
Priority axis 3: Improvement of social infrastructure  
CCI nr : 2007RO161PO001 |
| **Managing Authority** | The Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism (http://www.mdrlp.ro)  
– National System of First Level Control¹ – acted as Managing Authority in coordination with the Centre Regional Development Agency (www.adrcenr.ro) |
| **Cohesion Policy Objective:** | Convergence |
| **Main reason for Highlighting this case** | The case concerns 22 blocks of flats called Cetate (Citadel) neighbourhood within the NODUS URBACT II project. It was the first time in Romania in which a detailed, complex survey had been applied on a neighbourhood scale. |

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It was the first time that an action plan had been implemented which was based on clear rules and procedures that had been publicly debated and agreed by the beneficiaries, including Roma people. The project involved target groups in the identification of problems and possible solutions in a pre-determined deprived area. Thus, citizens directly participated in the public decision-making process affecting their area, bringing concrete benefits and visible results to their neighbourhood – a more liveable, cleaner, better maintained and safer area, including a playground and less car parking. The project also improved the city’s image, and may lead to the dissemination in Romania of the "Alba Iulia – NODUS method". AIDA – Alba Iulia Association for Intercommunity Development – also used this project to define key aspects that link urban regeneration with aspects of spatial planning that can reduce spatial segregation in the area.

### Key contact person

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### Keywords/Tags

- Regional governance
- Spatial and strategic planning
- Urban regeneration
- Community participation
- Roma community

### 1. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

**Overall objective / goals**

The Alba Iulia case study was part of the larger URBACT II project **NODUS – Linking Urban Renewal and Regional Spatial Planning**, which involved seven European partners (3 cities and 4 regions). NODUS proposes a perspective and a method to link spatial and strategic planning with interventions in marginalised, deprived areas so as to influence regional development and fight spatial segregation. NODUS's main goal was to develop a series of recommendations to improve the coordination of area-based urban regeneration policies with regional or metropolitan planning. It takes into account the relationships between urban regeneration and those sectorial policies that have a spatial impact and are designed at regional or metropolitan level, such as housing or transport infrastructure, and the fact that these different policy elements
are defined by different agencies often belonging to different administrative levels. The NODUS project’s specific objectives were:

- To clarify the particular needs or concerns of the city in relation to the URBAN working group;
- To identify, mobilise and validate what the city really had to offer to the project in the form of good practice, existing tools, site visits, policies and other experience;
- To ensure that this knowledge was reflected in the NODUS baseline study during the development phase and in the Local Action Plan produced during the NODUS implementation phase;
- To disseminate the findings of the project to a wider local audience;
- To mobilise the political and institutional support required to ensure that the Local Action Plan leads to real change.

Alba Iulia’s general objectives in NODUS were:

- To elaborate a medium and long-term Local Action Plan for a selected deprived area, namely the Cetate neighbourhood, in order to strengthen social cohesion locally;
- To support the coordination of urban regeneration policies with spatial planning ones;
- To stimulate and “regenerate” the attitude and mentality of citizens regarding the life of the city they are part of;
- To stimulate the citizens to participate actively in public decisions and urban regeneration processes.

The specific objectives defined, based on a sociological study of the selected deprived area, were:

- To improve knowledge regarding the quality of life to form a basis for local residential policies;
- To identify a participatory model for data collection at the neighbourhood level in deprived areas, with the help of statisticians, sociologists and volunteers;
- To stimulate the involvement of the tenants in the management and maintenance of common (condominium) spaces;
- To identify measures for intervention in segregated residential areas by minimising the negative aspects and maximising the positive effects.

### Description of activities

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<th>I. Project definition and application (pre-approval period)</th>
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<td>Development of the project’s documentation about Alba Iulia and the Cetate neighbourhood, including:</td>
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<td>- Pre-identification of the problems facing the area and the challenges to be analysed and finding possible solutions – management of a poor community situated in the vicinity of the city’s most valuable heritage asset</td>
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<td>- The relationship with local policies, especially the reorganisation of the urban planning system and the involvement of inhabitants in decisions regarding their areas;</td>
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<td>- Willingness to define, adopt and implement a local action plan for the targeted area</td>
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<td>- Expected learning from the project</td>
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<td>strategic/spatial planning and local urban regeneration areas and policies. Activities of Phase I included the establishment of the working group, followed by the development and application of a framework and a methodology, respecting the project philosophy and the diversity of the seven partners (representatives of 3</td>
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regions and 4 cities).

Alba Iulia participated as a working group member in the following activities:

- Collecting relevant experience and literature;
- Agreeing to the project outline and completing questionnaires on delimiting supra-local areas, defining the concept of “deprived area”;
- Elaborating the “four-stage approach” methodology, linking the supra-local spatial strategic planning with the local area-based intervention activities of the public sector, as a framework for the implementation phase. The four stages are:
  - **Stage 1**: exploring a multi-actor governance model for larger urban areas to organise the policies and strategic responses for the different types of deprived areas;
  - **Stage 2**: identifying and selecting deprived areas, according to the aims and strategic approach towards urban renewal, based on territorial analysis across the larger urban area, building bridges between the deprived areas and the dynamic ones;
  - **Stage 3**: identifying renewal interventions supporting effective social inclusion in the perspective of urban integrated regeneration
  - **Stage 4**: monitoring the external effects of the interventions and determining how their effects could be handled on the regional level, promoting territorial balance.


The NODUS Alba Iulia project included the following activities:

- Establishment of the Alba Iulia URBACT Local Support Group (ULSG), consisting of 23 people including elected officials such as Alba Iulia’s Mayor, a group a eight volunteers from the deprived area, the nearby neighbourhood owners’ associations, the local police, representatives of the schools frequented by the “ghetto” children, the specialised education centre, the local electricity company ENEL, independent sociologists and UNICEF volunteers;
- Identification and selection of the deprived area in Alba Iulia was done through a subjective approximation, based on the opinions of specialists, local stakeholders and the ULSG. The small deprived area (Cetate neighbourhood) includes a restricted community of citizens (living in 22 blocks of flats, among which is G2 “Turtledove”, which is social housing belonging to the municipality and is perceived as a Roma minority “ghetto”. This was considered a pilot zone having a significant impact on the development of the city and on the other micro areas in the neighbourhood, which is centrally located in the vicinity of the historical citadel Alba Carolina.
- Elaboration of a sociological study (using a community-based process). The data collection was organised in three steps: research to collect data at the apartment level; data from the inhabitants based on a questionnaire and focus groups; and interviews with the institutional representatives. The research included the following steps /activities:
  - Gathering information from the owners’ associations and elaboration of a database on the socio-demographic

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2 Turtledove (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Turtle_Dove) nickname given to the G2 estate tenants coming from the symbol of the migration, as the Roma minority is considered “non-settled”.
characteristics of the residents;
  o Quantitative research: 240 questionnaires (of which 120 applied in the G2 building and the others applied on a representative sample);
  o Qualitative research, in accordance with the differences observed after the quantitative research: 9 interviews with institutional representatives and 3 focus groups, among which 2 with inhabitants of G2 and 1 with the presidents of the other buildings’ owners’ associations;
  o Elaboration of the social map for the spatial analysis of the deprived area;
  o Elaboration of the written document of the sociological study;
  o Presentation and the debate of the sociological report with the ULSG.
- Elaboration of the Local Action Plan, focused on one building, G2
- Organisation of periodic debates and information meetings with key stakeholders in situ (media representatives were invited to attend a number of meetings)

**Recipients**

- The local community of the Cetate neighbourhood, representing about 9,700 inhabitants (of whom 1,478 children under 18 years old) living in 4,873 apartments in 107 buildings (blocks of flats built before 1989)
- The Roma minority living in G2 (about 324 people, among whom 100 children under 18 years old living in 105 one-room apartments).

**Mainstreaming of gender equality and non-discrimination**

From the very beginning the NODUS project envisaged a strong emphasis on non-discrimination, anti-segregation and effective participation, as well as gender equality, given that vulnerable groups generally and especially Roma are reticent and not involved in public debates. The participation approach was inclusive, aiming to collect data, to identify the problems and propose solutions with them, not for them! During the implementation of the NODUS “4-step methodology” special attention was given to single mothers living in the G2 building and to schoolchildren.

**Intended outputs and results (as foreseen by the project when it was first approved)**

The definition and adoption of a local action plan (*Master Plan for Intercommunity Transport for the Next 7-10 Years*)

To set up an URBACT Local Support Group (ULSG), to draft a Local Action Plan with the participation of several local stakeholders.

The city of Alba Iulia expected the following final results from its participation in the URBACT network:

- Transfer of relevant best practices learned from other project partners in urban planning into Alba Iulia’s integrated strategy;
- How to plan and to arrange a poorly-organised area from a transport system point of view at a county level;
- How to organise and keep an accurate database with relevant social and demographic indicators;
- How to exploit the cultural and historic heritage to the advantage of the whole region designated by AIDA members;
- How to combine and meet the needs of workers with the needs of entrepreneurs and the educational system.

**2. POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT**

**National and regional framework for implementing**

In Romania the EU approach to integrated development plans has been well received. However, at the local level there have been strenuous attempts and serious initiatives to shift from the area-based and
### ERDF-funded urban development projects

Integrated approach to more infrastructure-related schemes.

Linking the ERDF Regional Operational Programme (ROP) **Priority axis I: Support of sustainable development of growth poles** to other projects and initiatives represented an opportunity to engage with a number of local authorities to ensure that the needs of disadvantaged people and deprived areas are considered in the development of integrated urban development plans to be supported in the 2007-2013 programming period. For example, the PHARE Project **Strengthening Capacity and Partnership Building to Improve the Roma Condition and Perception** (part of the Multiannual PHARE Programme 2004-2006) and its implementing authority, the Romanian Government General Secretariat, aimed to promote the social inclusion of the Roma minority by strengthening the capacity and competency of public institutions at the national, regional, county and municipality level to work with Roma representatives to solve specific problems faced by Roma communities.

The cross-cutting issue was to ensure that EU Structural Funds available for Romania are accessed and effectively used by the relevant local authorities to address the Roma groups’ needs, at the same time influencing strategic/spatial planning and local urban regeneration policies.

### The planning context

**The spatial planning framework** in Romania refers to the national, regional and local spatial policies governed by Law no. 350/2001 on Territorial and Urban Planning.

At national level, the Romanian central government establishes priority programmes, national directives and sectorial policies. The specialised authority within the government is the Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism (MDRT).

The national territorial planning framework is the National Spatial Territorial Plan (PATN), including six approved sections: Section I – Transportation Networks, Section II – Water, Section III – Protected Areas, Section IV – Settlement Network, Section V – Natural Risk Areas, Section VI – Touristic areas. Section VII – Education Infrastructure and Section VIII – Rural Areas are currently under approval.

For specific areas such as metropolitan, intercommunity (such as AIDA) and regional zones (comprising parts or entire administrative units: communes, towns or counties) – a Zonal Spatial Territorial Plan (PATZ) should be elaborated for the entire area and approved by the respective commune, town or county in order to be formally adopted.

In Romania the 8 regions (NUTS II level, including several counties) are only statistic units, not administrative ones.

At the county level (NUTS III) there is the County Spatial Territorial Plan (PATJ).

At the local level, local councils coordinate and are responsible for the spatial urban planning carried out at the administrative-territorial unit area. This should be coordinated with the documents approved at national, county and zonal level, as well as with other sectorial strategies whenever the case. Documentation elaborated at local level includes:

- The General Urban Plan (PUG) is the main spatial planning document at the administrative unit level, being the legal base for all the spatial development programmes and in line with the local development strategy (socio-economic). It has to be updated every 5-10 years.

- The Zonal Urban Plan (PUZ) ensures the correlation between urban development and the General Urban Plan for a defined area, and is compulsory for the central and protected areas.

- The Detailed Urban Plan (PUD) is elaborated for smaller areas, respecting the provisions of the adopted PUG and PUZ.
The PATN is financed from the national budget. The PATZs, PATJs and PUGs are financed from local budgets. PUZs and PUDs could be financed by public authorities or by private actors interested in a specific areas development.

**The local /regional planning context.** In the last decade the political and administrative efforts to create a legislative framework dedicated to urban renewal have had limited results, among which there is legislation in force to build new housing for young people (under 35 years) and to sustain investment in energy-efficient buildings (involving the creation of partnerships between interested local administrations and owners’ associations).

Since January 2007, as an EU Member State, Romania has promoted spatial and urban reorganisation. In this respect, the 2007-2013 ERDF ROP for Romania provides for projects under *Priority axis 1: Support of sustainable development of growth poles.* This axis is the linear descendant of the URBAN I and URBAN II programmes of the 1994-9 and 2000-6 rounds of the EU Structural Funds. Capital cities with a growth potential elaborate geographically integrated urban development plans covering three areas of intervention:

- a) Rehabilitation of the public urban infrastructure and improvement of urban services, including urban transport;
- b) Development of a sustainable business environment;
- c) Rehabilitation of social infrastructure, including social housing and improvement of social services

The programming documents point out as a must the participation of citizens and local actors in the elaboration of the integrated plans. Moreover, they emphasise the need to address the social inclusion of ethnic minorities, with particular emphasis on the Roma.

All administrative territorial units, especially the smallest ones, are challenged by attracting funds for urban renewal (physical regeneration and physical infrastructure investments). This is particularly difficult as there is no national strategy for the regeneration of deprived urban areas, for two main reasons: it is hard to find cofinancing without national support and implies new local taxes on each household.

In order to access supranational funding (i.e. European Structural Funds, international programmes and donors) for urban renewal and local integrated development, groups of territorial administrative units establish inter-municipal cooperation. This is the case in small cities (e.g. AIDA), and also in metropolitan areas, as is the case of the potential growth poles.

### 3. IMPLEMENTATION

#### 3.1. PROJECT DESIGN AND PLANNING

**NODUS Alba Iulia Project start and main idea**

The AIDA territorial units discussed a series of medium and long-term interventions in the deprived areas in order to improve the quality of life of their inhabitants, to increase accessibility and to better socially connect with the local development centres / areas in the framework of a strategic development plan at the intercommunity level. The Municipality of Alba Iulia was designated as an urban action area. The document analysis highlights spatial and social segregation as one of the main problems faced by Alba Iulia.

In order to stem rising urban insecurity, AIDA – Alba Iulia Association for Intercommunity Development – a partner in the URBACT NODUS project, chose to lead a pilot project in one deprived neighbourhood of Alba Iulia, carrying out a detailed sociological and statistical study that was followed by initiatives defined jointly with inhabitants.

As in other Romanian cities, post-1990s urban development valorised
peri-urban areas, which led progressively to the rise of two extremes, with rich residential areas alongside zones with very insecure living conditions. Alba Iulia lacked an essential element needed to find solutions to the rising impoverishment of certain neighbourhoods: reliable and targeted data about these neighbourhoods. As part of the URBACT NODUS project, which focused on multi-territorial development, AIDA Alba Iulia decided to make the problem of spatial segregation a priority and to involve in a participatory process the local, deprived community, collecting data and proposing concrete solutions.

**NODUS Alba Iulia needs assessment research and analysis**

The Municipality of Alba Iulia opted for a sociological study of the quality of life and the degree of satisfaction of its inhabitants, which would help the local community to identify its problems in the perspective of renewal, and would further three specific objectives:

- increasing the degree of satisfaction of inhabitants towards their neighbourhood
- improving the quality of life standards of children and women
- improving community relations with the local administration and other authorities’ representatives

The three-month sociological survey was carried out by a mixed team of experts in urban sociology from the Quality of Life Research Institute (part of the Romanian Academy from Bucharest) and professional statisticians who worked together with the pilot area’s inhabitants to collect concrete indicators, to identify the community’s problems and to propose possible solutions.

**Project selection**

AIDA Alba Iulia was one of the four initial partners of the URBACT NODUS project, together with Generalitat de Catalunya, Spain (the lead partner), Regione Emilia Romagna, Italy and Samorzad Województwa Mazowieckiego (Self-government of Mazovia Region), Poland.

The URBACT NODUS project was submitted to the URBACT Secretariat and selected in a regular call for proposals on the basis of the formal proposal on content quality and compliance with the overall strategy and specific aims of the URBACT II operational programme.

The municipality selected Cetate as the target area, as it contained one of the concentrations of Roma in block G2, a block of flats built in the 1970s in a social housing estate, with about 325 inhabitants. Cetate is part of a mixed community close to the historical citadel. It is important to mention that on the estate’s external boundaries, the ground floors of the blocks are given over to shops, banks and other commercial uses suited to a town centre. G2 is located in the middle of the area.

**Risks considered in the design and selection process**

During the quality check of the URBACT NODUS project, no risks were identified. Challenges were however identified regarding the diversity of the seven partners’ systems and spatial planning approaches.

The main risks regarding the selection of Cetate related to the ethnic mix and cohabitation/segregation problems as well as to maintaining common space. Another risk related to the different social statuses of inhabitants (most Romanians, even poor ones, own their apartments and keep the public space cleaner). These issues were live throughout the project implementation and were carefully considered by the project team.

**Project sustainability, exploitation of results and transferability**

The project’s theoretical framework integrates sustainability into all the spatial plans: every single proposal must take its external effects into
consideration and must assess all its impacts whenever they occur. As regards transferability, the NODUS Alba Iulia area-based intervention method, as developed within the project, is considered viable for use in similar deprived areas in Romania, and perhaps elsewhere. One of these areas, the Lumea Noua (New World) neighbourhood, houses the largest concentration of Roma in Alba Iulia (1,200 out of a total of 1,500 inhabitants). This, the main Roma community in Alba Iulia, lives in a “rural type”, poor, single-storey housing area. Another URBACT project, CoNet, is under way in this area.


EU support and the added value for the project in being supported by ERDF
Without the EU financial support and the exchange of experiences among the European partners, NODUS Alba Iulia’s visible outcomes would not have been possible.

Involvement of other EU funds
The NODUS Alba Iulia project was financed by the ERDF and national/local budgets. There was no funding from other EU sources.

3.2. MANAGEMENT, MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEM

Management system and management process of the project
Upon the approval of the URBACT NODUS project, Alba Iulia set up a small management system. It mainly involved coordination between the AIDA’s NODUS project manager and Alba Iulia Municipality’s Head of Community Projects Service.

Selection of the project manager
The project manager was appointed by AIDA. She has had significant experience in previous European projects implemented by AIDA.

Management structure and task attribution
The project manager ensured that the provisions and perspectives of the association’s strategic planning document were taken into consideration. She now manages the CoNet community project in the Lumea Noua neighbourhood.

Alba Iulia Municipality’s Head of Community Projects Service ensured the support, involvement and commitment of the municipality throughout the project’s implementation.

Steering process
The project was steered by the AIDA project manager together with the Municipality’s Head of Community Projects Service. Both were in regular contact with the Centre Region Development Agency and the central Managing Authority.

NODUS Alba Iulia also benefitted from an URBACT Local Support Group (URBACT LSG) comprising elected officials, including the mayor of Alba Iulia, a group of eight G2 volunteers, the nearby neighbourhood owners’ associations, the local police, representatives of the schools frequented by G2 children, the specialised education centre, the local electricity company ENEL, independent sociologists and UNICEF volunteers.

The URBACT LSG took part in various meetings organised during the project’s implementation, and acted as an extended project steering group.

Monitoring process
The project involved the establishment of a Monitoring Committee, composed of the following members:
- representatives of the G2 community
- representatives of the G2 impact area owners’ associations
- representatives of the Local Community Police
- representatives of School No. 6, which is in the area, and of the other schools in Alba Iulia providing inclusive education. These schools’ strategy is to build inclusive communities through special projects, in-school and after-school activities involving parents and continuous vocational training (http://scspecalanba.scoli.edu.ro/)

Their role was to monitor the project’s implementation in relation to the development process in the selected deprived area.

As regards the entire NODUS Alba Iulia project, a number of reports (five in total during the project’s implementation) were submitted to the Centre Regional Development Agency and the central Managing Authority.

These reports, showing the financial and quantitative progress of the project’s implementation, were mandatory for interim payments.

**Evaluation process**

At URBACT NODUS project level an ex-post evaluation is envisaged.

At NODUS Alba Iulia project level an evaluation procedure was carried out by the Centre Regional Development Agency.

As regards the Cetate neighbourhood including the G2 target area, there were several evaluation sessions, carried out by the Coordination Committee (URBACT LSG) and independent evaluators. These were more informal and participatory, involving citizens as well as other local interested actors (the school, the electricity company, etc.), but located outside the intervention area.

Monthly evaluation sessions were conducted by the team of sociologists between December 2009 and May 2010, when the project ended. Prior to each meeting, evaluation forms (identifying common space maintenance issues and each apartment’s payments for rent, expenses and electricity) were filled for all G2 apartments with the help of trained operators. During the evaluation meetings, findings were debated with the participants, and responsibilities were discussed. Monthly meetings of the project team discussed documents and tracked the achievement of the planned activities.

So far (almost two years after the project’s formal end), the initial results still persist, owing also to external efforts and support to the local community. However without another external project to continue NODUS, it is very likely that community participation and commitment will be lost, in the opinion of the AIDA Manager, and the team of sociologists.

**Project continuation challenges**

The management system of NODUS Alba Iulia project is still present in community and tries to involve different community members in other initiatives, such as the ROMA-RE targeted employment project, to keep the impetus alive, but the community does not participate in these as “a unit”.

One reason is the tensions between the few (15) flat owners in block G2 and the majority (90) of tenants, who have different approaches vis-à-vis the common spaces and condominium maintenance, which are much more visible since the project ended.

**EU funds cooperation**

As previously mentioned, no other EU funds were involved in the NODUS project, so the issue of management team organisation and cooperation of funds is not relevant.

3.3 GOVERNANCE: PARTNERSHIP, Partnership composition and functioning

The NODUS project partnership involved three levels of co-ordination, as
Level 1. The **Coordination Committee** (the URBACT LSG) comprising:
- the mayor of Alba Iulia
- eight community volunteers from block G2
- the G2 neighbourhood owners' associations
- representatives of the schools frequented by G2 children
- representatives of School No. 6 and of schools providing inclusive education (specialised education centre)
- the local electricity company ENEL
- independent sociologists and UNICEF volunteers of the G2 impact area owners’ associations
- representatives of the local community police

Level 2. The **Monitoring Committee** comprising:
- representatives of the community of the G2 block of flats
- representatives of the G2 impact area owners’ associations
- representatives of the local community police
- representatives of School No. 6 and of schools providing inclusive education

Level 3. Three **Working Groups** for specific concrete activities such as
sanitisation of the G2 block of flats, cleanliness, etc.

Despite their different roles each of the three levels were directly interested in improving the situation in the area. Below some “primary interests” of the various actors:
- The municipality, as the owner of block G2 and the co-financing body, played the coordination and leadership role. It also had an interest in the revitalisation and urban regeneration process as part of the local development strategy;
- ENEL, the local energy company, was interested in solving the problem of historical debts (under the project umbrella part of the G2 inhabitants debts was written off and the remainder re-scheduled) and in gaining the cooperation of G2 tenants;
- The neighbouring owners associations was interested in reducing criminality and improving the cleanliness of the entire area;
- The schools and the police were interested as local community agents;
- The independent experts and UNICEF were interested in applying / contributing to a real local laboratory and practice.

To sum up the tasks and co-responsibilities in the urban regeneration process of the G2 area, the monitoring committee was the initiator of the participatory process from the community side.
The coordination committee (URBACT LSG), the monitoring committee and the working groups implemented the participatory process. The monitoring committee and the independent evaluators were responsible for the post-implementation evaluation.

Practice and many studies have revealed that participation in community development initiatives depends largely on the trust that people have in the municipality and urban services (schools, police, energy companies, local and community police, etc.). From this perspective, NODUS Alba Iulia built a number of interconnected bridges among the G2 community and public and there is no doubt that the most important actors were the G2 residents and tenants. The eight G2 volunteers participated throughout the sociological study, collecting data, animating and providing the required information. In the second phase, they participated in the elaboration of the Local Action Plan and got the agreement of the all the inhabitants to implement it. After the NODUS project, they were equally involved in implementing the local plan and monitoring related activities.

The participatory approach of the project was to work with the G2 residents as a unitary group in order to increase the group’s relevance. This was eventually beneficial, and it was perceived as a strong and unique voice of the community. However, during the process, particular aspects of the involvement, motivation(s), participation(s) and linkages of different groups were identified, as presented below.

Children were approached both at schools and in the G2 area (as family members and near the block of flats, in their playground), by teachers and sociologists. They were very receptive and eager to participate, providing information as necessary. The potential benefits played an important role in attracting them, but as there were too few places at the summer camp, a contest was organised to identify the finalists. Teachers evaluated the schoolchildren’s behaviour based on marks and attendance. Monthly scorecards were made out for each G2 schoolchild. At the end of the school year the teachers themselves received recommendations for their pedagogic grades from the Alba Iulia Education Territorial Inspectorate. One young teacher is also taking part in the summer camp on the Black Sea.

Single mothers living in block G2 were most interested in the “promotion” of their children, besides the improvement of the living standards of their apartments, so their participation was continuous and sustained at all meetings, and they collected data, took part in the working groups and verified their children’s school reviews. They were in contact with the teachers and took part in school activities after classes. As almost all these women have only studied till the 4th class and are unemployed, they were also interested in completing at least 8 classes and benefiting from better opportunities. They were encouraged to join the “second chance” and “continuous training” programmes implemented by the inclusive schools and the Alba Iulia Local Employment Agency. Another programme that the NODUS team believes should be further developed is one on family planning, to continue the work of the Roma health mediators.

G2 residents were known as “electricity stealers”, and the Energy Company ENEL collaborated with the municipality, project team and residents to cut their debt by half and introduce a payment schedule for each apartment. Alleviating this burden gave a boost to the entire community, and since then all apartments have provided accurate electricity meter readings. The eight volunteers also regularly check the information and track the electricity bills and payments.

The Local Support Group (URBACT LSG) played a crucial role in coordinating and conducting the community process. The community representatives were very proud of the direct involvement of the mayor, Mr Mircea Hava (Vice-president of the Democrat Liberal Party), who took part
in all meetings and local activities like the other members of the working group, at least once a week. The LSG worked both with the community and with the other local actors, capitalising and coordinating the community’s work in the elaboration and implementation of the Local Action Plan, of the condominium rules and of all community activities.

**Community volunteers and the independent groups and UNICEF volunteers** acted as an information network.

Alba Iulia Municipality was present and contributed to all activities. Moreover, when the G2 tenants asked for a special contribution to the cleaning of the block’s cellars as a guarantee of the goodwill of the municipality, it provided the means in due time, and thus was able to keep the impetus and catch the moment, laying the cornerstone of the participatory process in the Cetate neighbourhood.

Alba Iulia Municipality together with AIDA, led and steered the process. After the experts in charge of the sociological research became involved, they joined with the municipality and intercommunity association in accelerating the process. Also the team of experts could more easily join the local inhabitants, as they were perceived as not from the authorities. In later stages of the project, all actors felt more comfortable working and planning together.

### 4. INNOVATIVE ELEMENTS AND NOVEL APPROACHES

#### 4.1 INNOVATION

Through the NODUS project, Alba Iulia Municipality identified both from the statistical and the sociological points of view the detailed characteristics of the deprived area and the community that lives there. It was the first time in Romania that such a detailed, complex survey had been applied at a neighbourhood scale, rather than at the level of the entire city. Moreover, although in Romania problematic communities with a large Roma population can be identified, it was the first time that an action plan based on clear rules and procedures, publicly debated and agreed by the beneficiaries, had been implemented. All the actions in the renewal plan are based on the participation of the target community, which took responsibility for all the successes and failures.

#### 4.2. KEY IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES AND PROBLEM-SOLVING PRACTICES

Alba Iulia did not have access to any local social data. This lack of information is not uncommon in countries where the regional level of administration is weak or has only a short history. Thus, while the national administrative level takes bigger territorial units into consideration when producing statistical data, local authorities (or, at least, those interested in producing these data) focus on those variables based on their interest and use the quantitative units in terms of their own convenience, making it very difficult to adapt these for use at a supra-local level.

AIDA Alba Iulia initiated the NODUS approach in the selected area and the sociologists added a friendly interface and community instruments in achieving the process.

As compared to previous practices, the NODUS approach included as a novelty the prevention of potential conflicts – ethnic, community, social and public authority / decision makers – deprived and vulnerable groups.

As an organic part of the “new generation” of integrated, strategic urban renewal programmes, the approach developed and applied by NODUS aims to improve deprived areas through complex and interlinked multi-sectorial interventions. The novelty of this approach compared to the previous ones is the emphasis on cooperation on different levels: **horizontal** (among neighbouring municipalities, among neighbourhoods and more isolated communities of the city), **vertical** (among different layers of the government structure) and **transversal** (among policy areas and among different types of planning). Such an approach...
combines spatial/strategic planning with urban renewal and allows for supra-local level planning. If external effects across the city boundaries necessitate it, the integrated approach should be extended to the city-region level, while areas for intervention should be selected within this broader perspective.

Another aspect highlighted by NODUS Alba Iulia regards the relations between the groups/communities – in this case the G2 community, its impact zone and the Cetate neighbourhood. Among all these actors there are historical as well as new conflicts and animosities. The sociological study revealed the different problems and conflicts at the project area level (parking areas, green areas, safety, noise and difficulties finding a job), at the block of flats level (weak community, apartments abandoned by people migrating abroad, street dogs, noisy neighbours and children, inappropriate garbage collection) and at the G2 and household level (atomised and poor community, unclear legal status of some apartments, lack of interest in maintenance of public space, precarious and hazardous living conditions, cleanliness). A “Citizens’ Agenda” of Cetate neighbourhood was developed on this basis, with the aim of building cohesion and participation in the community and jointly fighting the problems identified, targeting two main aspects:

- What should be changed from the population’s perspective, and
- The citizens’ potential to participate and expectations regarding the municipality

This agenda was followed by 11 recommendations, related to: focused and balanced actions at the whole area level, diversification of the action instruments, clear rules and procedures, monitoring and evaluation, non-discrimination, community participation and partnership, good practices and visibility.

The URBACT LSG adopted the study recommendations and the Local Action Plan developed with the participation of the G2 community and volunteers (only for the G2 block of flats) focused on six specific objectives, implemented by the responsible actors as identified. Despite the participative process and concerted actions and a much cleaner environment, protest demonstrations against the Roma minority still occur. Problems were also reported related to crime (one man was arrested for troubling public order and there was a “potential suicide of a 14-year-old girl” both living in G2). Also, until similar projects are implemented, each month the evaluation records of the G2 apartments are more and more difficult to complete. Children are still very active, mainly at school.

Furthermore NGOs and population groups should be involved in the area programmes and the outcomes should be monitored. This means a “second integration”: local area based actions become integral parts of larger scale, regional development strategies. These “next generation” integrated policies will also enable the more sophisticated and controlled use of social mix ideas in urban renewal.

If we are speaking of new approaches used to communicate and disseminate the project’s on-going work and results to the community involved in the pilot project, yes, there are relevant ones, because they adapt the “sophisticated renewal planning techniques” to very “unskilled” people / vulnerable groups with visible results, even taking a short perspective.

Techniques of mainstreaming and wider application to urban renewal and local planning had already been used by this project’s actors in other projects and initiatives.

All project activities carried out within the selected deprived area were
challenging. It is not only in problematic and vulnerable communities that the availability of relevant data constituted a huge challenge, if not a problem. The G2 community as well as the other owners' associations involved understood that providing information and contributing would help them in justifying their requests to the municipality. A negative impact of the community’s transparent participation could, no doubt, jeopardize the entire organisational construction and support. Also a fake participation of the municipal leaders and the mayor, or failure to keep their promises, could stop the project at any time, if it was the case. Finally, the lack of transparency could lead to mistrust and wrong interpretations.

One finding in the case of NODUS Alba Iulia is that without real participation the process may lose its effectiveness in the long term. Another is that partners should be real, representative actors, and the negotiation process should be carried out throughout the implementation.

A final finding refers to the need for external, neutral and objective facilitation (in the case of NODUS Alba Iulia this was carried out by the team of sociologists). Without this, despite the local proximity, the cooperation and participation bridges could not have been build.

4.3. THEMATIC FOCUS

Local empowerment and public participation

The project shows the validity and benefits of empowerment and public participation in urban planning, local development and neighbourhood regeneration. Its potential transcends the local sectors and communities and impacts on the quality of the strategic planning and urban regeneration, and should be reflected at the regional level (more competitive regions in a longer perspective).

At the community participation level, spatial and strategic planning can be real and not theoretical for most people. Despite operating with different concepts and instruments, participation can effectively improve the “degree of citizenship” and compliance with agreed rules.

In this context, the realism and concreteness of the Local Action Plan (elaboration, adoption and enforcement) targeting six simple specific objectives stating clear actions, was easy to understand and implement by each person responsible:

1. Electricity supply and payment
2. Information and monitoring
3. Cleanliness and changing the environment
4. Maintenance and toolkit
5. Clarification of the legal status of all apartments
6. Activities for improving children’s lives

All objectives are short-term ones (2010) and reflect the participation and agreement of the G2 community. All proposed actions are quantifiable and identify responsibilities, resources, deadlines and success indicators. The Action Local Plan was achieved almost 100%.

As a general rule, the municipality provided the material resources whenever required, participated in the implementation together with the G2 and other responsible local actors. The monitoring committee verified and reported to the URBACT LSG. UNICEF volunteers also took part according to their tasks together with the school, local police, ENEL and social services. After all activities were finalised, a press release was issued and disseminated via the media and public meetings at the city hall and in the community with the participation of all actors.

The condition of effective and continuous support is a must. That is why
It is a key objective of the Municipality of Alba Iulia to continue with a follow-up project at the community level. Demotivation could lead to a situation that is even worse than at the start.

### 5. FUNDING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total budget: €30 000 (1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; phase: €6 000, 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; phase: €24 000), of which:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- ERDF: 85%</td>
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<tr>
<td>- National budget: 13% (as approved by the Managing Authority)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Private contribution: 2% (provided by the local budget of Alba Iulia Municipality)</td>
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### 6. PROJECT ASSESSMENT

#### 6.1. FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

AIDA and Alba Iulia Municipality showed a strong commitment in continuing the NODUS approach and outcomes. Besides submitting another URBACT project in March 2012, isolated follow-ups were implemented, albeit mainly at the city level, not for the G2 neighbourhood. However, the team of sociologists and UNICEF volunteers managed to continue the links with the community by providing incentives to the G2 tenants until September 2011, targeting the whole community and actors, not only certain groups of people.

The community views continuation as critical as without the support of the local authorities, the partnership will eventually collapse.

#### 6.2. TRANSFERABILITY

Not as yet.

The project financed only the URBACT NODUS umbrella. This included:

- Participation in the three working meetings organised by other partners (in Barcelona and Amsterdam in 2008 and in Bologna in April 2010)
- Organisation of a meeting with all working group members in Alba Iulia (January 2010)

The partnership approach as developed under the URBACT NODUS project is effective and transferable to many situations, where critical factors and critical mass aspects are relevant. Also, a key factor for “guaranteeing” its best practices is the careful selection of the intervention area, of the partners (too many could represent an important danger and too few are not representative at a territory level, being a small community, neighbourhood or city).

The time factor is of major importance, as the participatory approach is time-consuming. As a consequence this approach cannot be applied to crises, despite having a conflict-preventing element.

To a certain degree, this approach was transferred to other potential recipient areas within the AIDA territory.

#### 6.3 ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

1. At the municipality / AIDA Intercommunity Association level:

Cities like Alba Iulia do not have access to any data at all. This lack of information should not be seen as strange in Romania, where the regional
administrative level has a weak and short existence. Thus, while the national administrative level takes bigger territorial units into consideration when producing statistical data, local authorities (or, at least, those interested in producing these data) focus on those variables based on their interest and use the quantitative units in terms of their own convenience, making it very difficult to adapt these for use at a supra-local level.

2 At the intervention area level:
Not all residents, inhabitants and tenants have the same community-orientated interests. For some, receiving other benefits or leaving the partnership might be an option. For instance the proximity of the area to the historical citadel is irrelevant for many of them, and the interest of the municipality in its restoration and the allocation of funds to it harm the decision-makers’ credibility.

3 At partnership level:
The Jensen Tuckman theory (1966) of forming, storming, norming and performing stages applies here as well. For the purposes of this pilot project, the partners only initiated a potential partnership, but each interested actor should understand that the exercise should be understood and equally applied by all partners, otherwise there is only formal and short-term activity.

All three issues mentioned were only partially solved during the project implementation, and showed their potential, but none was 100% overcome.

6.4 PROJECT OUTPUTS & RESULTS

The main outputs of the URBACT NODUS project were Local Action Plans, good practices and policy recommendations, based on the methodology developed with all seven partners’ involvement.

Through the NODUS project, Alba Iulia municipality identified both from the statistical and the sociological points of view the detailed characteristics of the deprived area and the community that lives there. It is the first time in Romania that such a detailed, complex survey has been applied at neighbourhood scale, and not at city level. Moreover, although problematic communities, with a large Roma population can be identified in Romania, this is the first time an action plan based on clear rules and procedures, publically debated and agreed by the beneficiaries, has been implemented. All the actions in the renewal plan are based on the participation of the target community, who assumed responsibility for all the successes and failures

The Local Action Plan proposes integrated urban regeneration through community participation. The urban regeneration project is defined as “a collective project, which correlates multiple aspects of urban development and different scales of intervention, conducted at several levels of intervention: punctual, in the neighbourhood with problems, related to logic overall development of the city and many areas of intervention – economic, social, environmental and regional policy”. The Alba-Iulia Local Action Plan will focus on renewing the governance of the regeneration area (Cetate neighbourhood), highlighting the roles of the population involved in the project, and of the local authorities.

7. CONCLUSIONS: KEY SUCCESS FACTORS AND LESSONS LEARNED

- The approach of the NODUS project can bring about real changes even in the most deprived and vulnerable communities;
- The community implementation phase developed a series of innovative instruments which are beneficial for the community itself, as well as for scientific research, such as: (a) the “block association fiche”, a synthesis of the monthly apartment evaluation forms, agreed by all G2 households, which states the situation regarding improvements and participation, and is
completed, verified and kept by the community actors; and (b) a system of rewards and penalties in the implementation and monitoring of Local Action Plan activities, which was proposed and implemented by the community. According to this system, the rewards were public thanks at the local meetings and penalties meant the withdrawal of the coordination task;

- Local public authorities, despite their leading roles, are partners and should act as such, transparently, as was the case in the NODUS Alba Iulia project, where the responsible people from AIDA and Alba Iulia Municipality were present on the spot, participating and answering questions throughout the process. The community reacted positively to seeing the Mayor and other officials working “shoulder to shoulder” with them;

- The structures established under NODUS aiming to support, implement and monitor the project activities (URBACT LSG / Coordination Committee, Monitoring Committee and the Working Groups) should be enforced and publicly promoted;

- Intervention areas / pilot areas / communities should have not only problems, but also potentials, in order to be successful and overcome problems;

- As in the case of NODUS, facilitators should be present, to understand the actors and their needs, without identifying and/or proposing solutions. Many of the community participation projects/activities do not include enough resources for the external, objective facilitation of the internal process;

- The central/regional level (as applicable) should identify, support, cofinance and “market” local successes.

8. FURTHER INFORMATION

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Manuela Stanculescu, Coordinator of CERME (Centre for Economic Modelling) http://www.cerme.ro/, and Scientific Senior Researcher,
| Name of expert | Simona Pascaru |

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Alba Iulia, Romania

Gaining consent for change

A turning point involving concrete participation, commitment and community strategic development involving a Roma neighbourhood, Alba Iulia municipality and other key local actors and specialists was made possible through an EU-funded project, NODUS, in the period 2008-2010. It put the Roma issue on the agenda of urban regeneration projects in Romania. The challenge of this activity was not simply to bring consolidated standards into the Romanian context but rather to experiment with a new, successful approach, complementing the top-down and the bottom-up approaches.

Gaining consent for change

NODUS Alba Iulia was part of a larger project of that name in URBACT II subtitled Linking Urban Renewal and Regional Spatial Planning,1 which involved seven European partners. NODUS developed a perspective and a method to link spatial and strategic planning with interventions in marginalised, deprived areas so as to influence regional development and fight spatial segregation. The project’s main goal was to develop a series of recommendations for the better coordination of area-based urban regeneration policies with regional or metropolitan planning. It took into account the relationships between urban regeneration and those sectorial policies with a spatial impact designed at regional or metropolitan level, such as housing or transport, and the fact that these different policy elements are defined by different agencies often belonging to different administrative levels.

‘Local empowerment and public participation’ was not only the theme of this project, but its working method in overcoming the challenges posed by attempts to shift from the area-based and integrated approach to more infrastructure-related schemes. It also enabled the project effectively address Roma groups’ needs, at the same time influencing strategic, spatial planning and local urban regeneration policies.

Through the NODUS project, Alba Iulia municipality identified both from the statistical and the sociological points of view the detailed characteristics of the deprived area and the community that lives there. It was the first time in Romania that such a detailed, complex survey was applied at a specific neighbourhood scale, and not at the entire city level. Moreover, while problematic communities with a significant Roma population can be identified in Romania, it is the first time an action plan based on clear rules and procedures, publicly debated and agreed by the beneficiaries, has been implemented. All the actions were based on the target community’s participation and organisation, and they took responsibility for both successes and failures, hoping that the project would be continued and followed up. Needless to say, while implementing the NODUS project, participants broadened their horizons, and discovered new perspectives as well as new challenges for the city and the community. Above everything, NODUS is about people and their lives, and about empowerment and building political will.

Gaining consent for change

Alba Iulia, in central Romania, is rich in history. It is where the national assembly met to declare the Great Union of 1st December 1918, which is now celebrated as Romania’s national day.

The images above show Alba Iulia plan and the Google map, marking the intervention area location, as well as the aerial view of the city and the citadel.

In a municipality of about 66,000 inhabitants, the Roma population of Alba Iulia numbers about 1,500, of whom about 1,200 live in a rural-type neighbourhood called the New World and 324 in Cetate (‘Citadel’) which was selected as the project area. As shown on the above map with a blue circle, Cetate is in the western part of the city, close to the historical citadel of Alba Carolina, a Vauban-type fortification. The citadel is the pride of the city’s heritage and a famous tourist attraction. The Cetate neighbourhood has a population of 9,700 and covers 94 hectares. It was considered a pilot zone having a significant impact on the development of the city and on the other micro-areas in the neighbourhood.

The area includes a community of citizens living in 22 blocks of flats, one of which – G2 ‘Turtledove’ – contains municipal social housing and is perceived as a Roma minority ‘ghetto’. (The turtle dove is migratory and the nickname implies that the residents are not considered to be permanently settled.) The area is home to 1,500 children under 18 years old. The Roma minority live in the block numbered ‘G2’, which houses about 324 people, among whom 100 children

under 18 years old, living in 105 one-room apartments). The intervention area and the G2 impact zone are shown in the small map below.

![Map showing the intervention area and G2 impact zone](image-url)

**A 4-stage approach, a sociological study and a local action plan**

NODUS Alba Iulia was financed by the Regional Operational Programme (ROP) for Romania, Priority Axis 1: Support to sustainable development of urban growth poles and Priority Axis 3: Improvement of social infrastructure. Its budget was €30 000, of which the ERDF provided 85%, the national budget 13% and the municipality 2%.

In the project’s first five months (April–August 2008), a first general inception phase meant the elaboration of a state of the art analysis by all seven partners. It included the establishment of a working group (WG), followed by the development and application of a framework and a methodology for the whole project philosophy, taking account of the diversity among the seven European partners. The Alba Iulia partner participated as a working group member by collecting the relevant experience and literature as required. It agreed to the project outline and completed questionnaires on delimiting supra-local areas, defining the concept of ‘deprived area’ and elaborating a four-stage methodology to link strategic supra-local spatial planning with local area-based intervention activities by the public sector, as the framework for the implementation phase. These four stages are:

- **Stage 1**: exploring a multi-actor governance model for larger urban areas to organise the policies and strategic responses for the different types of deprived areas;
- **Stage 2**: identifying and selecting deprived areas, according to the aims and strategic approach towards urban renewal, based on territorial analysis across the larger urban area, building bridges between the deprived areas and the dynamic ones;
- **Stage 3**: identifying renewal interventions supporting effective social inclusion in the perspective of urban integrated regeneration;
- **Stage 4**: monitoring the external effects of the interventions and determining how their effects could be handled on the regional level, promoting territorial balance.

During the second phase (September 2008–June 2010) work was more locally oriented. NODUS Alba Iulia set up the 23-strong Alba Iulia URBACT Local Support Group (ULSG), which brought together elected officials, including the Alba Iulia’s mayor, eight volunteers from the deprived area, the nearby neighbourhood owners’ associations, the local police, representatives of the schools frequented by the ‘ghetto’ children, the specialised education centre, the local
electricity company ENEL, independent sociologists and UNICEF volunteers. It also identified and selected the deprived area in Alba Iulia where the project would intervene, based on the opinions of specialists, local stakeholders and the Alba Iulia ULSG. It then carried out a sociological study, based on a community process.

The study revealed the different problems and conflicts at the project area level (parking areas, green areas, safety, noise and difficulties finding a job), at the block of flats level (weak community, apartments abandoned by people migrating abroad, street dogs, noisy neighbours and children, inappropriate garbage collection) and at the G2 and household level (atomised and poor community, unclear legal status of some apartments, lack of interest in maintenance of public space, precarious and hazardous living conditions, cleanliness). A ‘Citizens’ Agenda’ for the Cetate neighbourhood was developed on this basis, with the aim of building cohesion and participation in the community and jointly fighting the problems identified, targeting two main aspects:

- what should be changed from the population’s perspective, and
- the citizens’ potential to participate and expectations regarding the municipality

This agenda was followed by 11 recommendations, related to focused and balanced actions at the whole area level, diversification of the action instruments, clear rules and procedures, monitoring and evaluation, non-discrimination, community participation and partnership, good practices and visibility.

The ULSG adopted the study recommendations and a Local Action Plan was developed, focusing on block G2. It had six quantified and verifiable objectives, with the responsible actors identified, concerning:

- electricity supply and payment
- information and monitoring
- cleanliness and changing the environment
- maintenance and toolkit
- clarification of the legal status of all apartments
- activities to improve the children’s lives

The realism and concreteness of these objectives meant that the Action Local Plan was achieved almost 100%.

Finally it organised periodic debates and information meetings with key stakeholders in situ. Media representatives were invited to attend a number of meetings.

**Generating participation in the local community**

NODUS Alba Iulia identified a common objective for all the area’s inhabitants – the improvement of the quality of life – and used most appropriate instruments to achieve it through participation and empowerment, to which was added another factor which enabled change. This was the dedicated work of a team of sociologists, who were able to talk to all the local actors on their own language and provide a basis for real participation. No unrealistic promises were made to bring people together; there were and still are lots of suspicions and obstacles, but NODUS was a real achievement in building bridges among the local actors. In this perspective a great change was the tasks the local actors assumed, the roles they played and the way participation was organised during the project’s implementation.

The sociologists coordinated and monitored the working groups, ensuring they had clear and achievable tasks and responsibilities which matched with needs. They discussed their findings in public or smaller groups, and proposed and implemented a short local action plan. They were able to bring other external resources (people and money) which enlarged the project’s impact. Roma representatives actively participated in all groups. Although the neighbourhood’s public image has so far only improved slightly, the change is real and well-known in Alba Iulia, owing to the links and networks among local people and a series of local agencies, schools, economic agents, volunteers, local authorities and independent experts.
Discussion and negotiation became common practice, and brought the concrete benefits of participation, such as the cleaning of the basement of block G2, which the local people asked for and the Town Hall provided as a starting point. But the neighbourhood still faces police-related problems, especially in block G2, and a low level of collaboration and trust between the Roma and Romanian groups. Local people and in particular most of the Roma minority know that a threshold was overcome and their participation, their monitoring and their responses were visible.

There is not a unanimous chorus of local voices praising the achievements, even among those who have actively participating to NODUS, as each individual, when they talk about their participation, sees it through his or her own lens, and asks ‘What’s in it for me?’ The Roma people see it in very diverse ways. Children, especially, are very positive and want to revive the trip to a summer camp on the Black Sea, which 20 of them won as result of participation and good marks in class. The mothers involved are enthusiastic too, as they are enabled to take part in a ‘second chance’ programme and other initiatives, but they are also very proud of their children’s achievements. The eight volunteer members of the Alba Iulia URBACT Local Support Group (ULSG) have become more aware of their strengths and try to keep people together, but it is difficult, as the project has ended and, despite promises, no other project has (yet) been signed to continue NODUS. The other residents enjoy the cleaner and more pleasant environment, but remain reluctant as long as their income does not increase and they are still perceived as thieves.

There are also a number of problematic families, which according to City Hall and equally according to the G2 tenants will be evicted in September 2012 because of their anti-social behaviour. This is an issue that should be solved otherwise than by eviction, possibly through social support and ad hoc projects.

Generally, G2’s neighbours and people from Alba Iulia lump this experience with the two decades of efforts by City Hall to recuperate the Citadel and tidy up the area for tourists and especially for Alba Iulia’s citizens.
Revival of the historic Citadel, pride of Alba Iulia

For some, allocating time and resources was considered simply ‘another useless project dedicated to Roma people’ and a waste of money, as there is still considerable racism against Roma.

The local administration publicly informed the city and other local and external actors about NODUS in relation to the urban renewal plan. It mentions the need for accurate information gathering, a sound dialogue with a problematic and different community as well as getting increased local support as each task and responsibility undertaken, each resource promised and the participation of key decision-makers was respected. The Mayor, Mircea Hava, even advertised the Alba Iulia NODUS approach in Bulgaria, and praised its benefits as best practice, highlighting its transferability. AIDA Alba Iulia Intercommunity Association strengthened its working collaboration in the intercommunity territory.

The other local actors involved, such as schools, local agencies and companies, police, are positive and include this approach among the instruments to work with in the long run.

The external experts (especially the team of sociologists), volunteers and other independent actors acted as process facilitators and activators, mediators and negotiators. They were perceived as non-aggressive from the very beginning and during the project implementation they built a good working relation and dialogue, being seen as objective, and helping to build bridges at critical moments.

Despite a sound project organisation, the community factor – especially regarding the Roma minority and its involvement – might have produced huge challenges if it not been appropriately understood and managed, for various reasons. Of paramount importance are the traditional stereotypes and perceptions deriving from the different concepts of living, working, social status and relationships between Roma and the majority Romanian population, all of which are reflected in the way public space is occupied and segregated. Most of people and families living in Cetate did not exactly choose the area. Until 1990, most of the Romanian families were blue collar workers who rented their apartments through their workplace, a common system in those days. After 1990 most of these tenants became owners and saw their properties’ values reduced by having the G2 Roma block of flats inside their area. Nor did the poor Roma people exercise an independent choice of where to live, as their rented one-room apartments were also assigned by the local housing office during the 1980s. Most of them remain tenants today. The two communities – Roma and non-Roma – fundamentally distrust each other and rarely communicate. The communist experiment of mixing did not automatically create new diverse and inclusive communities, but on the contrary built invisible walls, if not real, concrete barriers. The initial mistrust grew year by year, sporadically inflamed by incidents involving civil servants or the police.

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**What was different?**

There were undoubtedly good experiences before NODUS, involving Roma and other problematic, deprived communities and mixed communities. However this project was strong enough to provide a platform which could evolve organically and freely, based on input and participation from the local actors, and especially the Roma inhabitants of block G2.

The intention was to elaborate the Local Action Plan and implement it with and for the selected poor community. And it started out as such, but it evolved into a continuous negotiation game, regenerating itself. The local authority and the local community were equal partners and negotiators throughout the project’s implementation, building together, through participation and commitment, a common frame and ‘enlarging the pie’ to produce ‘win-win’ solutions. The role of other local inhabitants, institutions and organisations was also key, as they understand the potential of this approach in solving other problems of public space and urban segregation.

This was new and, unless the project is continued, will be lost. Moreover, non-continuation will lead to demotivation, especially among the Roma minority, who will again feel that they have been the subjects of another experiment.

A further novelty was the sociologist team taking the leadership role for a short period of time during the participatory process (with AIDA’s and City Hall’s agreement), as they best understood the potential of the project, actors and approach.

**Lessons learned**

The NODUS project has a number of lessons. The most vital is that real changes may happen even in the most deprived and vulnerable communities following the proposed approach of the NODUS project – on condition that there is a basic mix of elements, including the existence of local potential. In this perspective, ‘difficult communities’ must identify not only ‘problems’, but also ‘potentials’ in order to be successful and overcome challenges. An area without any potential to change – develop – faces structural problems that are even more difficult to address, as no basic capital for change has been identified.

Secondly, the right tools should be at hand. The community implementation phase of the NODUS Alba Iulia project developed a series of innovative instruments that are beneficial for the community itself, as well as for scientific research, such as the ‘block association fiche’, a synthesis of the monthly apartment evaluation forms, agreed by all G2 households, which is elaborated, verified and kept by the community actors. Also, a system of rewards and penalties in the implementation and monitoring of Local Action Plan activities was proposed and implemented by the community itself, according to which people were rewarded with public thanks at meetings or penalised by the withdrawal of a coordination task.

Thirdly, obvious and genuine commitment is its own reward. The local authorities, despite their leading role, were project partners and acted as such, transparently. In the NODUS Alba Iulia project, the representatives of the AIDA intercommunity association and the municipality were present on the spot, participating and answering questions throughout the process. The community reacted positively when they the mayor and other officials working ‘shoulder to shoulder’ with them.

Fourthly, such a project requires good governance. The structures established under NODUS to support, implement and monitor the project activities (the URBACT LSG, the Coordination Committee, the Monitoring Committee and the Working Groups) should be strengthened and publicly promoted. As in the case of NODUS, facilitators should be part of the process and continue their work in the long run, seeking to understand the actors and their needs, but without proposing solutions. Many community participation activities do not include enough resources for the external and objective facilitation of the internal process. The central / regional level (when applicable) should identify, support, cofinance and ‘market’ the local successes.
The challenges for the future

It is not realistic to hope that all good lessons are immediately translated into common practice, especially if there are breaks in the rhythm of involvement and activities. So, what should be done to capitalise this project? How can this momentum and impetus be made part of a day-to-day life?

For one thing, the project’s approach is already included in the design and planning of community participation in Alba Iulia as regards gathering information and acting as local ‘change agents’. A more difficult step is to provide resources to keep the community interested, and in this respect both AIDA and the Alba Iulia municipality started new initiatives and are both participating in submitting proposals to other URBACT and Structural Funds projects, for the Cetate neighbourhood as well as for other potential intervention areas. It is even more difficult to provide external help for community facilitation without projects specifically including this in their budgets. Most difficult of all is to keep the community working groups alive when they have no concrete, clear prospects.

So far, NODUS Alba Iulia has been a very good experiment and example: a real turning point, through which all the actors were able to see that change is possible. Real and sustainable success remains to be defined and achieved from now on.
AEIDL has been contracted by the European Commission in 2012 in order to provide examples of learning practice in urban development supported by the European Regional Development Fund during the 2007-2013 programming period (contract reference 2011.CE.16.0.AT.035). The views expressed by AEIDL remain informal and should not under any circumstance be regarded as the official position of the European Commission.