



Improving the quality of life in Large Urban Distressed Areas

Ballymun, Dublin, Ireland

E-Compendium: Good Practice Case Studies



Introduction

The purpose of the e-compendium case studies is to provide information about the experiences of large urban distressed areas in Europe. All of the case studies are linked to the LUDA project, either as partner cities or as reference cities. This case study focuses on Ballymun in Dublin. Dublin is one of the twelve reference cities in the LUDA project, and Ballymun has been engaged in a process of change and regeneration for several years.

This case study gives a brief outline of the area's history; the challenges it faces and the potential it has for redevelopment. The case study then discusses the current approach to regeneration in Ballymun, and gives a detailed account of one part of the process. In this case, this covers the use of a visioning method to develop a set of community indicators.

The e-compendium is designed to be used online. The text includes interactive links which allow you to move around the document, to link to other handbooks, or to open websites. Links are shown as **coloured text**. You can also find the links by looking for icons in the page margins, as shown here.



If you prefer to read this handbook like a normal book, then you can print it out. Please note that all of the handbooks are designed for double-sided printing.

Acknowledgements

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The cover photo shows some of the new housing constructed in Ballymun, with examples of the older blocks and towers in the background. Supplied by Aleksandra Kolpak, University of Salzburg.

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Flats in Ballymun. Photo: Aleksandra Kolpak, University of Salzburg

I. Overview

Ballymun lies four miles to the north of Dublin city centre, on the northern fringe of Dublin's suburbs. It covers an area of around 269 hectares and is home to 16,566 inhabitants (1996 figures). The population at that time had declined by 11% in 10 years. The area is predominantly residential and comprises: high rise flats and 1 and 2-storey housing, schools, churches, limited community facilities, a health centre, shopping centre and open space. The land was acquired by Dublin's municipal authorities under compulsory purchase order as a response to housing requirements in the 1960s. The major part is still in public (city) ownership. Table I [below] gives an indication of the extent of land uses, both existing and proposed (in hectares).

Table I. Landuses in Ballymun

	EXISTING	PROPOSED
Residential	125	158
Neighbourhood Centres	0	1.5
Town Centre	6.5	22.5
Major Open Spaces	43	26.5
Institutional and Community	20.5	25.5
Industry and Enterprise	33	35
Agricultural and Residual Land	41	0

Source: Environmental Appraisal of Ballymun Masterplan

2. History & Background

The existing development is of tower, spine blocks and 2-storey houses, placed at random in grass-covered open space with limited planting or landscaping. This environment is generally perceived as bleak and visually sterile, both from within and outside the Ballymun area. The comprehensive development of Ballymun in the 1960s and 1970s created little of architectural

interest. The development has largely been seen as a social failure, the area's dislocation from the rest of Dublin and lack of work, social and recreational facilities have all added to a sense of marginalisation for residents. This has been compounded by social problems including high rates of crime, drug abuse and family breakdowns when compared with national statistics.



A shop in a container. Photo: Aleksandra Kolpak, University of Salzburg

3. Challenges

Social

- High levels of social exclusion as evidenced by the overall rate of welfare dependency (70% in 1996) and the high incidence of lone parenthood (32.4% of households).
- Lone parenthood is primarily female, reflected by the fact that in 1996 women represented two thirds of the population in the age cohort 25-29.
- The reproduction of educational disadvantage - 57% of the population had left school at 15 or younger compared with 34% nationally in 1996.

Economic

- The significant problem of long term unemployment - 50% of the economically active were unemployed on the live register of which 61% were unemployed over three years.
- A study undertaken by GAMMA Limited in 1995 showed all of Ballymun's four electoral districts to be within the 1% of most disadvantaged in the Republic of Ireland.

Environmental

All of the open spaces in Ballymun are highly modified habitats which are of low ecological value. Owing also to the lack of trees and wild fauna in the area, redevelopment is unlikely to harm the local natural environment. Moreover, new parklands' construction and the environ-

mental aspects to the development (e.g. reduced energy use homes, recycling facilities, environmental education, etc) all add to the opportunity for environmental regeneration.

4. Potential

Social

Dublin City University (DCU) is located in the area and is currently expanding, creating synergies for related employment, cultural and social development.

Economic

Funding: Ballymun's regeneration has secured a record (over) €1.8 billion in public and private funds.

Environmental & Physical

- Only 4 miles from Dublin city centre.
- On all major transport nodes:
 - Road: Ballymun is located within the Dublin-Belfast economic corridor, within easy reach of the M50 and M11 motorways, and close to the proposed entrance to the Dublin Port Tunnel link.
 - Light rail: The proposed light rail line will run along Ballymun road into Dublin city centre with a possible extension to the airport.
 - Air: Ballymun is 1.5km from Dublin's Airport, the busiest in the country.
- Potential development land to the north: To the north of the city/county boundary and south of the M50 are lands which are undeveloped but could be viewed as part of Ballymun's natural hinterland. The Santry Demesne lands have been earmarked for a combination of amenity, residential and industrial/technology development and the lands to the north of St. Margaret's Road are designated within the Masterplan as Science/Technology Park. These developments can be viewed as having a high degree of integration and synergy with the proposals within the Dublin Corporation area in terms of job creation, amenities, the promotion of social balance and the presentation of a dynamic and developing image for Ballymun.

5. Approach

A public owned company, Ballymun Regeneration Ltd (BRL), was set up to organise the regeneration project. The general approach has been supportive of the public participation principle. With the help of local residents, BRL developed the aims of the masterplan to include:

- The creation of five distinctive neighbourhoods that are pleasant places to live, shop, work,

learn and play.

- The creation of a 'Town Centre' that will become the focal point for the Ballymun community.
- The demolition of the tower and spine blocks and the 4-storey walk-ups. These will be replaced with 1 to 4-storey housing. Existing housing in the area is to be improved and a greater social balance encouraged. The needs of groups such as the homeless and the travellers are also to be addressed.
- Overcome the unattractive environment of Ballymun and to create a hierarchy of recognisable public places - to have 'places' rather than just 'spaces'- to provide pitches, changing facilities, leisure centres and areas for children to play.
- Provide a safer road network and to make the areas permeable and interconnected with vehicle links, cycleways and safe pedestrian paths.
- Improve job prospects and prosperity for the people of Ballymun.
- Overcome the sense of isolation and social exclusion felt in Ballymun and integrate the area fully into North Dublin.



Demolition underway in Ballymun. Photo: www.brl.ie

The development of ideas and proposals through public participation sought to build strong local consensus in support of the masterplan. The techniques involved included:

Open Public Meetings were held to present ideas and proposals to the wider community and obtain feedback.

Area Forum Workshops with elected resident representatives in the five neighbourhoods to consider local issues, develop solutions and thereby derive input for the masterplan.

Focus Groups were set up to consider six key social themes which required specific consideration in developing the masterplan. Representatives from over 100 existing local community groups were invited to participate in the six groups:

Children and Youth,

Training and Education,
Employment and Economic Development,
Advice Support and Community Development,
Leisure Sport and Recreation; and'
Health and Physical Environment.

Information Drop-Ins were held at Ballymun Shopping Centre.

Newsletters are distributed to every household in Ballymun.

Questionnaires were sent to all voluntary/community groups. Children were also consulted in this way about their needs in relation to play.

Public Exhibitions: The first exhibition was held in November 1997 in a unit in Ballymun Shopping Centre and was used to test ideas and establish community concerns and problems.

Working Groups have been developed out of the six Focus Groups investigating aspects of the key areas of: *Education and Training, Economic Development and Housing.*

The Design Group which had representatives from the Area Forums, Ballymun Housing Task Force, the E.H.B. and local community groups.

Ballymun Housing Task Force held weekly liaison meetings with BRL to monitor and direct the consultation.

Stakeholder Meetings have been held with homeowners from adjoining residential areas.

A Community Consultative Panel has been set up.

Forum Design Committees have been set up by each Forum.

6. Tools & methods

The visioning project presented here represents only one of a range of activities conducted within the regeneration programme for Ballymun, Dublin. It was undertaken as part of the European Project 'It-Takes-Two'. The activity was conducted by Ballymun Regeneration Limited (BRL) in association with Global Action Plan (GAP Ballymun) and illustrates the role that visioning can play in participatory planning and community development. The primary aim of the project was to implement two workshops to develop a set of community indicators that would be used to monitor the progress of Ballymun towards a sustainable future by:

- identifying the wishes and fears of the community regarding the future of Ballymun;
- creating a shared vision of the future; and
- engaging local citizens in the process of change.

Two separate one-day workshops were undertaken as part of the visioning project. Participants of both workshops included: GAP Action Teams, Dublin City Council, Ballymun Regeneration Ltd and local community groups and organisations.

Visioning is one of the most popular futures methods used to create images of the future, and is based on the hypothesis that visions can be used to influence our present behaviour, steer our choices, and therefore affect our decisions. The process of visioning aims at developing and considering alternative and desirable futures and is widely used for the construction of shared images for groups, organisations, and communities. During the visioning process, communities envision the future they desire, consider possible actions, and define strategies and plans for implementation. These visions can then be transformed into a manageable and feasible set of community goals and action plans. Wide public involvement enables the identification of communal aims, core values and wishes for the future.

The decision to develop community indicators as part of the Ballymun visioning project arose from the recognised need to assess the community's values and preferences, to encourage and involve the residents of Ballymun in building a sustainable society, and to create a feeling of responsibility for change towards a better future. The indicators could be used to monitor the progress of the town towards sustainability. Indicators are important tools for measuring the present state or situation, change and the distance from the point we want to achieve. The role of an indicator is to provide information and to alert about problems before they reach a severe stage. Indicators have been increasingly used in recent years as they provide a useful feedback mechanism on current trends and also in underlining relations between issues. Indicators also serve as an important source of feedback on policy performance. The involvement of local communities in the process of selecting indicators can help decision-makers to assess local value systems, and thus, help build the feeling of responsibility among residents by enabling the creation of a platform for discussion between policy-makers and the local community.

Developing future visions and community indicators for Ballymun took the form of two workshops, both with the participation of local residents.

First Workshop:

The first workshop was held under the name 'Visioning Day'. The purpose of the workshop was to build a shared, common vision of the future for Ballymun arising from individual wishes and fears. The vision would contain goals and targets for the future that could then be worked towards. To achieve this, the participants were asked to write down their ideas about what Ballymun would be like in twenty years time. The ideas were collected and grouped and resulted in the emergence of five themes. Following this, the 'idea clusters' were developed into five future scenarios, namely:

- Characterless Suburb
- Learning Centre
- Successful Small-business Centre
- Great Community Spirit
- Common Goals, Safe Place

Four out of the five visions contained mainly positive aspects, only one - Characterless Suburb - was negative. This scenario was a reaction to the fear that the strong community spirit existing today in Ballymun might be lost during the regeneration process. The remaining four scenarios presented positive visions of the town, where people would like to live and work. Com-

mon goals on how to avoid an unwanted future and how to build a desirable one arose out of the scenarios. The use of the visioning process enabled the creation of alternative images of the area's future and helped to identify specific goals, which the community was willing to work on so as to create the most desired future. The identification of key benchmarks within each scenario was the next step to help indicate whether Ballymun was heading towards the envisioned future. These benchmarks then became the foundation for establishing the list of initial community indicators.

Second Workshop:

The purpose of the second workshop was to bring the participants of the first workshop together again to formulate a list of indicators under the following headings: social, environmental and economic.

The scenarios developed during the first workshop were firstly presented to the participants in the form of a future local newspaper. The articles in the 'local paper' illustrated the trends that emerged in the scenarios and showed what Ballymun could be like in the year 2017. Following this, the indicator idea was presented to the participants, who worked in groups to propose three indicators for each of the sub-headings outlined in Table 2 [below].

Table 2. Categories for Ballymun Indicators

ENVIRONMENTAL	SOCIAL	ECONOMIC
Water	Participation & Local Democracy	Building
Waste	Community Safety	Local Jobs
Transport	Health	Social Economy
Energy	Education	Housing

For each sub-heading, one indicator was chosen from the list. Each participant had a chance to indicate his/her preference by awarding points; the indicators with the highest number of points were selected.

The range of indicators selected by the workshop participants clearly illustrated the issues most important to the residents of Ballymun and the areas they deemed in need of improvement. The discussions that followed indicated that social issues were an absolute priority for the community and were common concerns of almost all residents of the area. Table 3 [overleaf] presents the indicators chosen by the participants.

It is widely recognised that partnership between local authorities, the private sector and citizens is crucial for the successful accomplishment of any regeneration programme. Encouraging active participation of different players, especially citizens, and building a platform for dialogue between different actors enables a better understanding of the existing situation and allows causes, rather than symptoms to be addressed. A range of methods can be used to raise public involvement in planning and decision-making processes, visioning workshops being just one. The visioning project carried out within the regeneration programme for Ballymun demonstrates one way to encourage co-operation between local authorities and local communities and shows how visioning can be applied in order to build a shared vision for the future of a town and its inhabitants based on local values, fears and wishes. Work is on-going and further steps are being undertaken towards implementing

the vision and using the indicators productively. The next stage concerns planning what actions need to be taken to direct Ballymun along the path to sustainability. Further workshops are being planned and prepared for to target all bodies responsible for change, to revise approaches of monitoring and communication, and to set up goals, which should be achieved in the future.

Table 3. Indicators for Ballymun

ECONOMIC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of childcare places and jobs with liveable wage • Development of improved management and maintenance arrangements and the role of residents and local organisations • Number of jobs (with liveable wages) available in the area • Number of sites available for economic/social use and take up of that
SOCIAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in school attendance • Percentage of pupils completing Post Primary Cycle • Reduction in anti-social behaviour measured by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • number of broken trees • number of broken street lamps • number of fires started • number of dumped furniture/appliances • number of incidents of graffiti • number of animals abandoned • Number of people voting in local and national elections
ENVIRONMENTAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of people buying eco-products • Number of facilities available for recycling (including composting) in Ballymun • Number of homes with better insulation features • Improved energy conservation awareness • Ease of access to key services, e.g. number of public transport routes that run in Ballymun and link Ballymun to the rest of the city.

7. Innovation/unusual features

One of the most innovative features in the regeneration of Ballymun has been the integration of sustainable development ideas into the process. This has been carried out through the design process and on the ground. Participative schemes like the Ballymun Global Action Plan (GAP) raise environmental awareness in order to bring about lifestyle changes. In May 2001, GAP Ballymun was set up with the support of Ballymun Regeneration Ltd. Dublin City Council supported the programme as part of a Local Agenda 21 objective to engage and encourage

communities to grow in more economically, socially and environmentally sustainable directions. GAP's core adult community programme is the 'Environmental Action Team'. Action Teams consist of people working and living in the local community, with around 12 people per Action Team. With the support of trained Action Team leaders, participants learn about lifestyle sustainability in the areas of waste, shopping, energy, transport and water. Environmental pledges are taken to encourage Action Team members to live more sustainable lifestyles. No formal education is needed to take part in an Action Team, just life experience. Participation is claimed to give a strong sense of community spirit and personal achievement. GAP also runs gardening workshops, after school clubs for children, a community composting service, the 'bounty hunter' project (where children collect recyclable litter for prizes) and various awareness raising events.

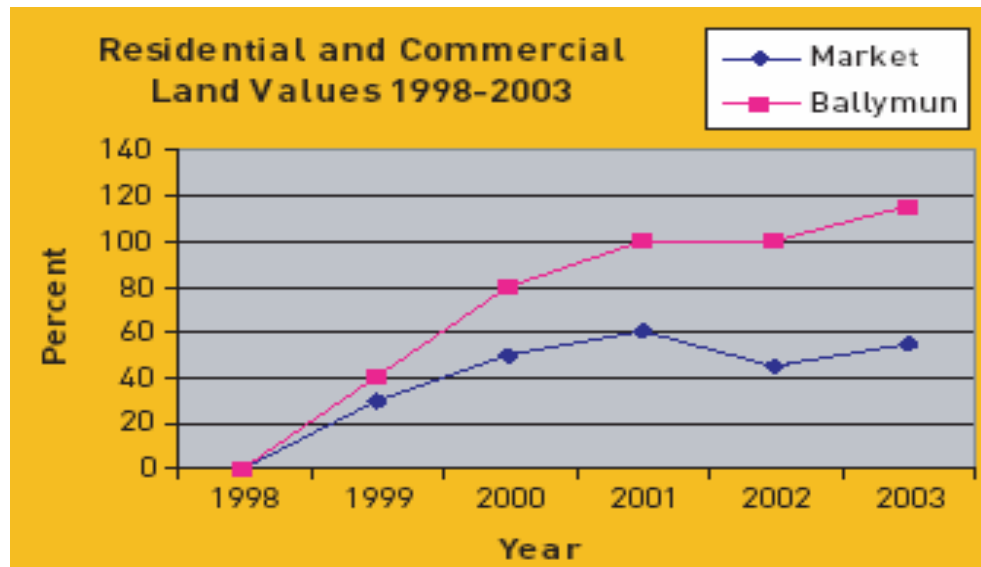


New family housing—and residents—in Ballymun. Photos: Aleksandra Kolpak, University of Salzburg

8. Results

The Ballymun regeneration project is at an advanced stage. By November 2005 more than 2000 homes will have been built, and a further 3,553 will be at preconstruction stage. Land and property values have also greatly increased, as shown in Figure 2 [overleaf].

Figure 2. Residential and Commercial Land Values 1998 – 2003

Source: www.brl.ie

The Town Centre Sports Centre has opened, as has the AXIS cultural centre, which hosts theatre and art programmes. Ballymun's first new park, including a playground for children, opened in December 2004. There are plans for IKEA to construct a store in the near future, with the creation of 500 permanent jobs. Construction has not yet started on the business park.

A reduction of 27.5% in unemployment has been achieved during the regeneration process from 2,173 in 1997 to 1,575 in 2002, and FÁS have also reported a high uptake of education and skills courses by Ballymun's unemployed. The problem of drug abuse still, however, remains an issue: research carried out for the National Advisory Committee on Drugs in 2003 indicated that there are over 600 known opiate users with Ballymun addresses (inclusive of those in treatment).

9. Further information & links

If you would like more information about the Ballymun story, then the following references will help you.

web link



BRL (1998) Masterplan for the new Ballymun, Dublin: BRL www.brl.ie

Krawczyk, E. (2003) 'Creative Communities: An application of the visioning method for the development of community indicators in Ballymun (Ireland)', The Futures Academy, Dublin Institute of Technology, Dublin.

Scully F. (2002) 'The development of sustainability indicators for Ballymun', Paper presented at European Summer Course, 9-14 June, Delft, Netherlands

If you are interested in finding out more about Ballymun, you can contact Ballymun Regeneration Ltd (www.brl.ie) or the Ballymun Partnership (<http://www.ballymun.org/>)

web link



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