

# Executive summary of the evaluation of the Urban Development Research Program (UDRP)

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The UDRP (Urban Development Research Program) is financed by the Priority Solidarity Fund (PSF) for urban development research covering the entire Priority Solidarity Zone (PSZ). Launched by the vice-directorate for research at the end of 2000, the program became operational in 2001 and came into full swing in early 2002.

It gave rise to a call for research proposals structured around two major research axes:

- > on the one hand, interventions relating to the city (linked to such themes as "metropolization", the environment and the heritage, the establishment of urban infrastructures and services, the installation of collective equipment);
- > on the other hand, the approaches and strategies of the various players who make and manage the city (governance issues, decentralization, local democracy; the function of scientific expertise in the confrontation with professional know-how and urban cultures).

The evaluation of the UDRP was conducted between November 2005 and February 2006, as a retrospective undertaking meant to lay the groundwork for strategic reflection. Indeed, it focused on the assessment of actions pursued as part of the program in order to ensure that both it and similar programs respond more effectively to the objectives they have set themselves.

The program, which throughout was accompanied by various scientific activities (calls for proposals, regional meetings, etc.) allowed for the implementation of 30 research projects. Thus, several different levels of analysis had to be considered:

- > the program as a whole, i.e. the theme identification phase, the call for proposals, mid-time project evaluation, the holding of regional meetings, the organization of the final colloquium, the administrative, financial and scientific follow-up of all studies;
- > the 30 geographically very far-flung projects, implemented in the Priority Solidarity Zone (PSZ) according to several thematic research axes.

The evaluation required a methodology able to cope with this complexity. To this end, the evaluation team defined a number of hypotheses:

- > hypothesis 1: the importance of the global funds granted by the UPRD reinforces scientific competencies in France and in the other countries of the North and the South that took part in the program;
- > hypothesis 2: the project selection and follow-up instruments (international calls for tenders, North-South partnership, a Scientific Committee of international renown) enable an objective selection of the most outstanding scientific teams in North and South (both in purely scientific terms and in terms of institutional management)
- > hypothesis 3: the thematic and geographic diversity of the selected projects is a fundamental criterion for the extension of knowledge of urban issues in developing countries, and the blossoming of innovative themes and methods at international level;
- > hypothesis 4: the modest funds granted to individual teams and the unitary structure of the program (limited to one 3-year research phase) slow down the establishment of

sustainable international partnerships and the transfer between the research process and the set-up of development projects by local and national players in the countries of the South;

> hypothesis 5: the 3-year duration of the program counteracts initial intentions aiming for scientific sustainability and the individual and institutional empowerment of the teams in the South.

Qualitative and quantitative indicators were established to test these hypotheses (based on the evaluation's reference terms and the documents that defined the program) and reach an objective assessment. Different sources were used: program documents, case studies by local researchers (in PSZ countries), questionnaires addressed to research teams (16 out of 30 responded), interviews with the program's main promoters. These elements are the foundation of the present report.

In a first step, it provides a thorough presentation of the program (context and objectives, program players, intervention and implementation modalities, chronogram, URDP budget) and introduces the methodology used by the program, prior to refuting or confirming the hypotheses. These are subsequently discussed in order to arrive at a global assessment and recommendations.

The first hypothesis gave us the opportunity to examine the commitment of young researchers, the notion of North/South partnership and program valorization.

It became apparent that one of the UDRP's innovations is to have highlighted the level of involvement by young researchers (dealt with only informally by previous programs), thus valorizing their integration in research dynamics and project execution in France and the PSZ.

Concerning partnership, we have seen that researchers from the South are well represented; the notion of partnership between research institutions in the North and South evolved as the program unfolded. A semantic shift occurred during the UDRP's implementation phase, with the notion of mixity progressively replacing that of partnership. Thus, the vast majority of research teams are based on French scientific institutions which integrate researchers from the South. One-off and strictly individual cooperation with researchers from developing countries was an additional possibility; but inter-institutional partnerships failed to emerge as a main path for research teams involved in UDRP.

Finally, whereas we can say that the funds generated by the UDRP have strengthened scientific competencies in France, in other countries in the North and in the countries of the South associated with the program, it appears that the products and forms of exchange generated throughout the program were not put to satisfactory use. UDRP valorization and follow-up need to be developed further. Thus, the program closes on a somewhat paradoxical note. Having fulfilled the totality of its tasks, it is certainly a success. Nonetheless, it was not possible to valorize and spread certain research

results within the time frame allotted to the overall operation.

The second hypothesis addressed the quality of the program teams, both in terms of program management (the operators) and selected research teams. The GEMDEV-ISTED tandem made it possible to take research out of a laboratory environment by instituting emulation via calls for proposals. This method proved effective in that it disconnected researchers in charge of scientific tasks (preselection, half-time evaluation, definition of themes for regional meetings, back-up for teams) and technical operators mainly dealing with administrative and financial issues. This showed that those in charge of the program (GEMDEV, scientific group and ISTED, institutional operator) pursued a rigorous and scientific course in spite of a tight timeframe. The problem of time management was also apparent in the program activities (newsletters, regional meetings, valorization of results). Participation in the regional meetings and the generated products were highly unequal. In our opinion it would have been useful to specify the mode of organization of these events more precisely. The meetings doubtless represented an immense effort but failed to produce results corresponding to investments in human and financial terms. It is also regrettable that the complementary "in tandem" nature of the team that directed the program did not allow for a stronger link between research and urban operators. The relations between research and action were diffuse and not used to full advantage in projects and overall program results.

The third hypothesis enabled us to assess the program's thematic and geographic diversity. In order to examine the content of the studies we had to put the program into the perspective of the urbanization process in developing countries, using elements generated by GEMDEV. A brief introduction gives us a fair understanding of the comparative method implemented by the UDRP while reproducing the geographic framework (Priority Solidarity Zone) in which it unfolded. The research program dealt with PSZ countries as defined by French authorities, without accounting for:

- > the areas of scientific interest represented by certain countries located outside this zone (such as emerging Asian countries, notably China and India, and Latin America);
- > long-term relations established by French researchers with colleagues and scientific institutions in emerging and developing countries;
- > strategies devised by the French government, the European Union and international development cooperation organizations to open up to all developing countries as part of exchange globalization.

At the thematic level, and in opposition to the geographic level, it appears that the program's promoters allowed participating teams to overstep the two research axes. Initially, these were intended to shed light on the complexity of urban issues and the multiplication of players who intervene in territorial organization and urban management; what the program's promoters rightly called "governing the city". The analysis of these issues is by no means finished after three years of UDRP operation; no

wonder when one considers that the initial objective was to launch a dynamic that everyone hoped would continue.

However, if the work's initial aims could well conform to the main and secondary axes of the working hypotheses, the studies themselves demonstrated that "scientific veracity" could not be thus limited. The final set of issues is always the outcome of the research and not its presupposition. Therefore, one of the tasks of the evaluation was to group the 30 projects under headings that seem to determine each study:

- > public/private relations, with sub-themes relative to urban services management mechanisms and public urban policies;
- > participation, with decentralization and municipalization, and the coupling of technical and political aspects as sub-themes;
- > the mutations of urban phenomena, again focusing on issues relative to metropolization and the notion of cities in conflict/rehabilitation;
- > urban players;
- > land property;
- > the social costs of urban projects.

In parallel, statements by members of the Scientific Committee and research documents showed that throughout the program participants needed to fine-tune definitions in order to generate a vocabulary shared by all.

Dealing with two closely linked subjects, the last two hypotheses were treated simultaneously: program duration and budget. The decision to distribute available resources to a large number

of teams (30 at the end) with relatively modest budgets (an average 50 000 euros for a 3-year period) poses the problem whether one can generate "new researchers", "new partnerships", "new teams" in France or elsewhere, capable of tackling this area of research under such budgetary conditions and within such a short timeframe.

Budgetary distribution among a relatively large number of teams meant that relatively small sums were shared among a large number of researchers in the North and South. This certainly opened the door to new researchers (via a larger selection of teams); however, it did not facilitate institutional consolidation, particularly in the South, where needs relative to research funding are constant. It may also have encouraged the recycling of older projects (or themes) instead of encouraging the emergence of innovative projects offering original responses to the program's stated objectives.

Most programs aiming to strengthen links between scientific institutions at international level, particularly with developing countries, unfold over 3 to 5 years, with projects that are often renewable via procedures involving calls for tenders and evaluations. With reference to scientific development cooperation, only such measures will enable France to reach the goals it set itself at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002:

- > to go from an approach based on individual support to a team-support based approach;
- > to go from a knowledge-transfer based approach to an approach based on the transfer of competencies;
- > to act in the long term;

> to open this policy to a large network of scientific cooperation and scientific players.

Moreover, we observed that activities often took longer to execute than initially planned, indicating possible difficulties in managing a demanding project, or hesitations concerning its implementation. It is by no means sure that ISTED participation in program management was put to full advantage, notably as concerns the transfer of information to urban issue specialists in France and its partner countries.

The analysis of the hypotheses and criteria selected for the evaluation gives rise to a globally positive assessment of the UDRP. The program “boosted urban research” by introducing significant dynamics at research team level. Unfortunately this effect was curtailed by the program’s unitary character and uncertainty concerning the prolongation, by whatever institution, of the studies launched within the UDRP framework.

By identifying new queries or defining new ways of formulating urban issues, the UDRP has certainly met its objectives. The number of proposals submitted, the quality of projects selected, as well as the number of projects which finalized their work (30 out of 32 selected) bear witness to the fact that the UDRP answered a long-standing need among French researchers working on urban issues in the countries of the South. The subjects treated cast light on the main urban cooperation axes as defined by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Considering available resources and the efforts deployed by the

principal scientific and technical instigators of the program (GEMDEV and ISTED, Executive Committee), the program made effective use of the 260 researchers active in projects in 33 countries and 46 cities, generating an exceptional wealth of information and analyses. That said, we also gathered from the spoken or written statements by persons contacted for this evaluation, both promoters and researchers, that the UDRP did not keep all its promises. Certain regrets and worries were voiced concerning the valorization of the studies, the completion of the educational programs of young participating researchers, the establishment of research team networks – to put things in a nutshell, concerning the program’s continuation or renewal.

The future of urban research within North-South cooperation is still uncertain. We sincerely hope that this evaluation report, banking on the UDRP’s successes and the lessons we may learn from them, will guide decision-makers towards positions that allow them to pursue and expand other innovative programs.

We also feel that this hope authorizes us to voice a certain number of recommendations to the institutions that managed the UDRP and ensured its funding and follow-up. These focus upon a strategy fostering the replication of a **new** scientific program which should encourage:

- > more effective international partnership;
- > a longer term perspective to warrant the sustainability of research activity;
- > interaction targeting urban and international cooperation players;

>better academic and institutional integration of young researchers.

This strategy would definitely require:

- > the valorization of the UDRP's scientific and operational results;
- >the launch of a similar new program in the future.

Its implementation calls for:

> **improved program management via the consolidation of the follow-up team and more effective use of each partner's know-how** (both scientific and technical operators). The know-how of each player will have to be put to better in order to ensure that while complying fully with the criteria of scientific rigor and excellence, the program focuses on application and interaction with social, technical and institutional urban players.

Scientific management will have to be consolidated via the constitution of a small team of researchers and communicators endowed with the human and financial resources they will need to put their full efforts into the realization of the program's objectives, the follow-up of its general design and progress, and the guidance dispensed to project teams.

> **improved program structuring** (in three stages: establishment, realization, valorization) and increased duration (including a phasing out period): the new program with its 3 constitutive phases will have to last longer than the timeframe established for the UDRP. The final valorization phase of 12 to 24

months will enable better capitalization of the program's scientific results and will define its reproduction mechanisms in the short and medium term.

> **stricter definition of partnership:** true partnership implies effective cooperation from project conception onward, between teams in North and South, fostering transparency, sharing, and a coherent distribution of tasks putting the competencies of each participant to use. Only this will enable a true consolidation of institutional research capacities in the South, creating a working environment for young researchers. Effective cooperation between teams from the North and the South should be required from all candidates as of the call for proposals. It will require the equitable allocation of project budgets among the different scientific partners, who will have to cooperate to submit a proposal, realize the project and valorize its results.

> **scaling down the number of studies** in order to concentrate on projects of optimal quality. Even if this were to mean a reduction in the number of beneficiary projects, the budgets allotted to the projects will have to be increased and funds distributed more equitably between institutions in the North and in the South. The main focus will have to be on projects with the most original approach, the greatest scientific potential and the most innovative capacities for urban players.

> **the program will have to be expanded both geographically and thematically.** We recommend a future urban research program

that is not limited to PSZ countries, but covers all emerging and developing countries with which France and Europe have strategic links. This would open the geographic field of intervention and base the program more firmly on pre-existing partnerships between French scientific institutions and their foreign counterparts.

At thematic level, three complementary research pathways could hook up with the analytic effort pursued by the new program; first, a critical examination of the “objectives of sustainable development”, as defined by the international community, and the adaptation of these objectives to the urban context in order to generate direct contributions to the debate on sustainable urban development and the measures taken to ensure it; second, a more directly economic perspective, highlighting the different dimensions of the urban economy in developing countries, from the formal to the informal, in an interface between the local and the international level via the new dynamics born of globalized economic, social and technological exchange, and the repositioning of cities in this context; third, an interdisciplinary pathway reflecting upon the technological aspects of urban development in the countries of the South, integrating external researchers from other areas than the social sciences and urbanism in the project teams, while redefining urban phenomena by means of an objective reflection on the technological innovations that foster new mechanisms for the planning and construction of cities in the South.

> **program valorization** at two levels: during its start-up and during its final phase.

During the program’s realization, better promotion will have to be ensured by:

> a specific and readily accessible Internet site (which is presently not the case) with information in the languages of the countries concerned (English, Spanish, French). All documents relative to the program’s initial stages, reference texts documenting the years of its realization, and the final reports will have to be translated into these languages. The credit line allotted to translation purposes in the UDRP was too small, making it impossible to solve these problems.

> regional meetings, which offer an effective framework for exchange and incentive program activities, ought also to be valorized. To this end we suggest that their objectives be more targeted and clearly stated, linked to the program’s progress and based on regional problems or key research issues. They should also be spaced at regular intervals as the program unfolds. Finally, enough time should be allotted to their preparation so as to open them up to external urban management partners (local and national) and to representatives of national and international cooperation organizations. A credit line for the participation in these regional meetings of researchers from both North and South will be earmarked in the budget of each project selected by the program.

Program realization should foster networking between teams from the North and the South

along regional or thematic lines. During the final phase this ought to stimulate:

- > scientific publications;
- > the creation of competence centers in promising areas or for specific regions;
- > the scientific and institutional strengthening of partners in the South integrated within international networks.

> **operational research:** stronger interaction with concerned professionals and development cooperation players should be stimulated during the execution phase and lead to the popularization of results and their application as training, decision-making and advisory instruments for urban players during the finalization stage.

The summary table (see following pages) gives a global overview of the elements of the evaluation and pathways for improvement.



**Figure:** Summary table of evaluation results

Criteria		Assessment	Paths to improvement
<b>Pertinence</b>	Examine the program's pertinence in view of the objectives and issues determined at the outset.	The program is fully justified by its objectives and issues which were not dealt with by any other program.	Continue the program so as to ensure updating of knowledge.
	Examine its pertinence in view of the needs and demands of the operators and users of urban research results in developing countries (in the North and South).	The project fully meets the demands of researchers in the North. Demands from the South can only take place via the North.	Recommend to French and other European teams to set up real partnerships with teams in the South for the conception and set-up of projects. Allow time for the partnership and conception of research projects to develop.
		Research users were unable to benefit from the program results owing to their poor valorization.	Establish a phasing-out period: a 24 month post-research phase to popularize and spread results.
<b>Coherence</b>	Assess the conformity of the program (its contents, objectives and means) with the Ministry's guidelines for scientific cooperation with developing countries, particularly those in the PSZ (internal coherence).	The studies highlight the main axes of urban cooperation as defined by the MFA: <i>"Lessons learnt from past experience confronting the stakes of urbanization over the coming decades for the countries of the South, confirm the permanence of the strategic axes of France's urban cooperation: to ensure the sustainable functioning of cities and improve citizens' living conditions. But they should also lead to the adaptation of the priorities of its assistance to the challenges of efficient and socially equitable decentralized urban management"</i> .	
		The idea of valorized partnership is difficult to implement (semantic shift) in projects with only 3 years duration.	Require teams to cooperate with institutions in the South.
	Assess agreement with interventions by local partners and other financial backers or development players (external coherence).	The program is truly innovative: the urban phenomenon concerns 50% of the world population and receives only 10% of international cooperation aid. This incentive action appears to be an additional instrument to understand the main issues in the South.	

Criteria		Assessment	Paths to improvement
<b>Effectiveness</b>	Report the real situation of conducted activities (notably: degree of realization of the action, level of budget execution, compliance with deadlines and the chronogram; quality of follow-up and unforeseen elements, identify possible elements of additional costs and their causes).	All actions included in the program were executed within a time-span that significantly overstepped the initial deadline. The complementary character of the team in charge of follow-up was both a strength and a weakness.	
<b>Efficiency</b>	Examine the costs to results ratio (notably compare, using pertinent reference elements, costs per research project and researcher, management costs, costs of activities and scientific follow-up, personnel and operating costs, with the overall research budget ... ).	Means were modest in view of the objectives: the costs to results ratio for research is excellent (small amount of money per person for numerous results).	Conduct fewer projects with bigger means for each.
		Means allocated to follow-up and activities are too large in comparison to results (real impact of regional meetings in terms of publications, opening to the operational world, poor visibility of the Internet site).	Reconsider budget allocation by refocusing funding on projects and program valorization.
	Analyze possible modalities that would make it possible to obtain the same results with smaller means or different execution modalities (e.g. in comparison to equivalent actions by other financial backers or operators).	Regional meeting management costs could have been cut with better preparation (choice of stronger regional themes).	

Criteria		Assessment	Paths to improvement	
<b>Efficiency, impact and lastingness</b>	Assess the degree to which program objectives were realized, as well unexpected effects (positive or negative).	All objectives were not reached: principally concerning the transfer of results to the operational level, weak scientific popularization and inadequate dynamics of emerging research in participating institutions.		
		Considering its duration, resources and the geographic spread of the studies the program was overly ambitious.	Conduct fewer projects with more means for each. Reduce the number of regional meetings and increase their impact.	
	Evaluate the program's immediate effects and if possible its foreseeable effects in the medium and long term (the "efficiency, impact and lastingness» criteria will have to localize, identify and assess the beginning or launch of dynamics likely to produce certain effects rather than evaluate these effects themselves).	Examine also whether the action has generated structures (teams, institutions, networks ...) or practices capable of prolonging the program (notably in terms of stronger research and expertise.	Embryonic networks were generated, but the duration of the program and its geographic distribution were serious obstacles. Certain researchers increased their operational expertise capacities.	
		For the valorization and use of research results (in operational areas but also for higher learning): identifying structures for debate and exchange, networking, partnerships between researchers and urban management professionals, interest shown by local authorities ...and possible institutional changes (and urban governance practices) generated by the program and its results (or likely to be in the short or medium term).	Contacts between UDRP members for one-off cooperation were possible.	
			Valorization is inadequate in view of the extent of problems dealt with by the studies.	Update the UDRP web site, incorporating all available scientific reports and publications. Translate the records of the closing colloquium into English. At a later date, publish a review of case studies highlighting the principal lessons of the UDRP.