ARTICLES

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CITIES AND INNOVATIONS IN EUROPE: CHALLENGES AND VISIONS

Abstract: The paper presents the first results of the European Overview of Urban Innovations, undertaken by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. The identified projects have been chosen from among projects which improve the urban metabolism, carry a collective sense, resist time, favour local democracy and participation at the conception, decision and execution phases, produce culture and projects whose models are transferable to different places, respecting the difference. Projects concerned with urban environmental auditing or favouring social justice in cities are extremely important as they lead to a new art of planning for the achievement of the European sustainable city.

Key words: urban development, environmental planning.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE EUROPEAN URBAN LANDSCAPE

Urbanity is an essential dimension of Europe. The city cannot exist without a social body and economic activity. Each city is individual and unique and its future is impacted by the myriad of decisions taken by people and enterprises within it. According to the Commission's *Green Paper on the urban environment*, as we move towards the 21st century, cities will continue to be the main centres of economic activity, innovation and culture (CEC, 1990). Cities emerge on the European scene stronger and they compete more (BARROZZI and TAGLIAVENTI, 1992a). They all want to win the battle of sustainable development and to become more attractive to people and capital (BURTENSHAW et al., 1991).

Recent documents and works of the European Communities (CEC, 1991a 1991b, 1992a, 1992b, 1993a) identify the following trends for European cities:

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– there is a more balanced European urban system, in terms of growth, and an increasing potential for medium-sized and smaller cities (VERNON, 1993);

– there is increased competition and an alternative to this is the strengthening of complementarities and the establishment of co-operation networks;

– cities will be affected by the development of new physical linkages;

– a worrying urban trend is an increasing social exclusion and segregation of certain segments of the population; migration pressures might exacerbate these problems;

– cities have to meet important challenges concerning their environment (CEC, 1993b);

– many cities try to develop a strategic vision to meet the increasing social, economic and environmental challenges and the synergy amongst public and private actors has been central in this process.

The question of sustainable city has been a challenging one after the universal debate on sustainable development. The concept of the sustainable city might be a contradiction in terms, as many scientists suggest that the only sustainable pattern for Earth is the equal distribution of its population on its surface (OECD, 1993; UN, ECE, 1992). Beyond these remarks there is a wide recognition that the sustainable city is the city with an improved, non-negotiable environment, social cohesion and economic efficiency (MEGA, 1992a, 1992c). The EU Commissioner on Environment highlighted recently that sustainable is a challenge for social change (CEC, 1993b). Enterprise plays an extremely important role for strengthening all dimensions of urban sustainability. The functioning of the city itself is often compared to the functioning of an enterprise, which has to be more environment friendly, participatory and efficient, etc. It could not possibly be too arbitrary to compare the city with a semi-public enterprise, aiming at public usefulness, economic efficiency and optimal environmental performance.

This paper highlights some innovative projects we identified in Europe, conducive to (and necessary for) urban sustainability. They have been identified and included in the European Overview of Urban Innovations undertaken recently by European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (European Foundation, 1993a). The overview focused on projects carrying a collective sense, a significance for a city, projects resisting time and favouring local democracy and participation, decision and executive phase, projects introducing new materials, techniques, methods and conditions and, last but not least, projects that produce culture and are cultural products.

Many urban polices have failed, but failure is the birth of a new world. The projects are witnesses of the strategic visions that cities try to develop, in order to meet the increasing social, economic and environmental challenges, and of the synergy with enterprises and citizens.

2. MEETING ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES AND VISIONS

The awareness of environmental quality is being increasingly regarded as a civic value and different urban actions are undertaken for the change of environmental behaviour patterns. However, 'Green City' does not simply mean green spaces, grass roofs, timber frame constructions, improved energy systems and water cycles (ELKIN and MC LAREN, 1991). A whole cultural reform is needed to give meaning to all technical achievements. A wide urban consensus is a necessary precondition. New environment-friendly lifestyles cannot be imposed, they are developed through innovative partnerships rooted in the local culture. Industry is becoming more co-operative. In a recent conference (European Foundation, 1992a) organised by the Foundation, the relevant working group was unanimous in suggesting the changing of the well-known 'Polluter pays pollution' principle, to 'Potential polluter pays the prevention of the pollution'. Prevention, awareness, proaction and environmental culture seem essential for the art of building the sustainable city.

Leicester was the first British city to be given the status of Environment City and is trying to become a national and international model of excellence. Leicester Environment City is assisted by the 'Business Sector Network' to bring together ideas from the city's commercial sector and provide assistance to businesses, while 'Environ', a non-profit-making company, has been set up to provide local organisations with access to environmental audits and advice.

More and more cities recognise the need for proactive policies leading to the conception of new systems of production and consumption. Waste is starting to be considered as a resource. Self-efficiency seems more and more important for European cities and many innovative actions are being taken for the prevention of industrial waste and the avoidance, re-use and recycling of domestic waste. In Parma plastic waste is being transformed into building material and in Rimini organic waste from hotels into agricultural compost. Each citizen contributing to the latter highly environmental process is rewarded with a plant. The Municipality of Oeiras in the metropolitan area of Lisbon set up a backyard composting of organic waste programme. The project, very innovative in the Portuguese context, aims at reducing dramatically the amount of waste the municipal services collect, transport, treat and dispose of, giving inhabitants the possibility to produce by themselves a high quality fertiliser for their gardens and increasing people's awareness of urban environmental problems.

During the last decade, there has been increasing awareness in Germany that priorities of economic growth had led to the destruction of valuable natural resources. This awareness led to the adoption of more sustainable policies, first and foremost in the cities which have been the scene of many socio-political transformation processes. With the challenges of the unification in the city of Berlin, the ecological restructuring concept, introduced as early as 1984, came

to prominence. It consisted of four elements, a set of guidelines, a model of field of action, the concept of ecological neighbourhood development and the concept of eco-stations. Citizen participation is a must at all levels and stages. The concept advocates a new sustainable symbiosis between economy and ecology in the urban context and puts emphasis on environmental preventive policies to tackle anthropological origins of problems (HAHN, 1992).

Berlin, the 'recycled city', offers various ecological restructuring applications. Berlin 'Block 103' is an interesting example. Former squatters of the block have been given the opportunity to own the spaces they occupied and, at the same time, they have been trained in converting the houses into ecological modern buildings. Special emphasis has been given to energy, water, green spaces and new material and techniques. Another complex, 'Block 6', has been the field of innovation for alternative water system. The systems are based on a combination of cleaning techniques for the water depending on its origin, previous use and destination use. The project emphasises the learning and communication process. The system allows 50% savings in water, while the society of inhabitants participates in the technological monitoring (GELFORT, 1992).

Leipzig has been a very active city in the time of change. With the revolution, many non-governmental organisations, together with the city government and the citizens, started environmental projects to overcome the really degraded living conditions. Ecology has been used as a means for socio-economic change. The ecological restructuring of the eastern part of Leipzig is a very good example of ecological restructuring of the whole, starting from several ecological projects and the establishment of sustainable links between city and country. Many of the projects are already implemented. Transport and traffic conditions have improved and attractive green passages link natural spaces inside and outside the city.

Industrial, technological and business parks throughout Europe provide some examples of public-private partnerships for turning areas of blight into areas of positive environmental and economic profit. Stockley Park, a former derelict rubbish tip, within the Greenbelt to the west of London, gives an inspiring example. A partnership has been created between the developer, the local authority and the University, in order to build an international business park and public parkland including recreational facilities. In exchange for the right to construct a business park over 36 hectares, the developer guaranteed the reclamation of the whole site (140 hectares), removal of groundwater pollution, environmental enhancement and landscaping. At all stages of the construction of Stockley, local residents were involved in the process through extensive community consultation.

In Germany, the IBA Emscher Park has been an important pole for urban development and ecological renewal within the northern Ruhr district. Experts from 10 European cities, together with the cities and industries of the Emscher

region, work for the modernisation of coal mining settlements and the creation of new housing; the development of fallow land and the valorisation of attractive locations for industry and services; the preservation and re-use of industrial monuments; the landscaping of the Emscher area into a park; the ecological restructuring of the Emscher river and the protection of the water environment. New dwellings have been created on fallow land and with new environment-friendly material. High quality locations for industry and services have been given value. Contaminated areas are insulated and re-used. 'Working in the park' is possible through the enhancement of the quality and attractiveness of the area.

3. FOR A MORE SUSTAINABLE URBAN MOBILITY

Environmental problems in metropolitan areas do not mainly come from production; they come from consumption and mainly from traffic. The dialectic interaction and synergy between cities, enterprises and citizens are essential for favouring public transport and the bicycle over the private car and giving priority to the pedestrian (UITP, 1991). The restriction of the private car is still creating conflict (Seville, Toledo), but in many cases conflict generates new forms of collaboration and partnership. In a referendum organised in 1984 by the city of Bologna, the population opted in favour of the pedestrianisation of the historic centre and a global project has been carried out, comprising the rehabilitation of the historic fabric, improvements in the nearest suburbs, pedestrian and bicycle networks, public transport and parking spaces. Many Italian cities followed (INDOVINA, 1993).

In La Rochelle, a new multi-optional concept (Autoplus) has been introduced through a partnership between municipalities, the semi-public company for public transport, taxi owners, two private bus owners, one ship owner, hotel owners and a bank. The limitation of the private car comes as a consequence of many information and consultation campaigns. Clean, silent and fast tramways gain acceptance in European cities. Nantes, Grenoble, Strasbourg each build on the other cities' experience to provide an improved system. In Toulouse, the city, the semi-public enterprise for public transport and the society which has created the smart-pass work together for the readjustment of the transport services to people's needs.

The social values linked to the provision of public transport (Conseil National des Transports, 1990), pedestrian streets and bicycle paths are re-emerging in many European cities. When the main street, Stroget, was pedestrianised in 1962 (as one of the very early such systems in Europe) there was a heated discussion. Many believed that the scheme was contrary to Nordic

mentality and culture, however, it became a great success almost right away. Pedestrianisation continued over a period of 30 years and the downtown parking policy aimed to remove 2–3% of the parking space per year, as a very gradual process. With the improvement of the public system and the enlargement of the bicycle network, more and more space has been taken away from traffic and given to people (RAUTSI, 1993).

In Perugia, the telebus service, introduced in 1985, runs along a principal route, with additional collateral routes, which are served only by request. This is done by means of a magnetic card distributed to the user and a communication centre. The system has proved very efficient (22% savings) and it is particularly interesting in areas with sparse settlement. Increased flexibility in the organisation of collective transport operators permits the better adaptation of supply to the changing pattern of user demand. Moreover this type of system provides access to transport for people with reduced mobility (European Foundation, 1992c).

A research study undertaken by the Commission of the European Communities on *The city without car* is suggesting the reconception of a city in pedestrian terms. A city without cars could be composed of various small units, accessible on foot from one end to the other, separated by green spaces and united by high-speed public transport. A city without cars seems to be not only ecologically efficient, but even economically efficient, as it seems to be 2 to 5 times less costly. In such a city, enterprise has new local challenges to meet, as job creation is essential for the self-efficiency and sustainability of each small urban unit (CEC, 1992c).

4. SOCIAL VISIONS, CHALLENGES AND URBAN INNOVATIONS
TOWARDS THE SUSTAINABLE CITY

The role of cities has often been stressed as a stimulating and exciting maelstrom of cultural conflict and change, "a giant scene where many discourses are co-presented, where otherness is often unassimilated". Beyond environmental considerations, social justice is a main criterion to challenge the overall qualities of the city as a social system. However, there are as many competing theories of social justice as competing groups and it is important to look at the ways a particular urban society produced such variations in concepts. Egalitarian views may also be wrong, as "there is nothing more unequal as the equal treatment of unequals" (HARVEY, 1983).

Does urban social justice have environmental dimensions? Even in the most prosperous European cities there are urban islands where environmental

degradation and social exclusion go hand in hand. They are more or less extended zones in run-down city centres or chaotic peripheral zones. They are places of functional impoverishment, with poor housing and insufficient equipment and facilities. Is it a coincidence that the social features of these areas are: poverty, delinquency and crime, high unemployment, low mobility, little access to information, education and training? (JACQUIER, 1991).

The creation of new economic, environment-friendly, urban activities is emerging as a major factor of social integration and an important field of co-operation between city and enterprise. Offering disadvantaged groups access to projects and income is giving them new opportunities for creativity and self-esteem. In all European cities, new environmental jobs (recycling business, water cleansing, etc.), totally unknown 10 years before, are being created. Orienting those people most affected by an unhealthy environment can have considerable results in the dual fight of exclusion and environmental deterioration (European Foundation, 1992b).

It is not a coincidence that the innovative actions on job creation we included in the overview of innovative projects come from the countries with the highest unemployment in the EC. The Dublin inner city partnership represents a local area-based response to long-term unemployment. The 'Argilan' employment, guidance and training projects in Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain, has three specific objectives: regeneration of the economic web of the city through new professions; qualification and requalification of the labour force, adapting it to the requirements of demand; prevention of social exclusion. 'The Big Issue' in London gave new opportunities to the homeless and unemployed. Launched in 1991, with the support of 'The Body Shop', 'The Big Issue' quickly became London's fastest growing publication with a circulation of 80,000 copies per issue and 1,000 vendors. It is now self-financing and expanding in many British and European cities.

Improving the social environment is being closely linked to the prevention of crime and delinquency (DIV, 1990). Transport enterprises are the ones most concerned with crime prevention, as transportation spaces and mobile elements are main targets for juvenile delinquency. Graffiti attacks, not related to any form of artistic expression, seem to be the modern way of attacking public spaces and property. RATP in Paris set up a specific service for the prevention of graffiti attacks through research on the attackers and for the investigation of more efficient ways of repairing damage (RATP, UITP, 1992). Cities have set up innovative direct or indirect crime prevention plans (DIV, 1990). Danish cities are experimenting with a series of action plans, focusing lately on the strengthening of area consciousness through the inhabitant' involvement in the creation of a better physical residential environment.

An innovative integrated approach to fighting graffiti in public spaces has been developed in Maastricht. The project includes extra means to trace the

offenders, education programmes to improve the skills of the graffiti 'artists' and an anti-graffiti bus with formally unemployed people specialised in removing graffiti. The city made a wall available to the graffiti artists in training where they can express their feelings. Within two years the damage caused by graffiti pollution decreased considerably (80–90% at the railway station). The result of prevention is always hard to prove, but it is clear that graffiti has decreased considerably in Maastricht. Tracing and conditional or alternative punishment have a noticeable effect on preventing recidivism, while there are ex-offenders, who, after their artistic training, have become famous artists.

Innovations in social housing proved to be an essential factor of social integration (CECODHAS, 1990; TSIOMIS, 1991; STEWART and CAREW--WOOD, 1991; MEGA 1992b). Mass housing often created social tensions on the urban fringe. It has often been paternalistic, large, remote, uniform, collective, reactive, anonymous, devoid of management and it failed. In many European cities it is now beginning to be self-regulated, local, personal, individualised, proactive, with corporate neighbourhood space and responsive local management. It has to make proof of vitality of work and enterprise and to allow personal identification. Vibrant local communities are replacing void neighbourhoods. The present energetic and environmental requirements create new needs for landscaping and energy efficiency. There is a need for intelligent buildings and home environments. The Social Housing Association in Greece created an innovative residential village for low income households, called the Solar Village. The design and planning of the area constitute an environmental experiment, as it exploits sunlight to the maximum and provides many environmental benefits.

The renewal of the Holly Street Estate in the UK provides an interesting case. The estate was constructed during the 1960s and 1970s as a series of slab and tower blocks, as part of a national slum clearance and social housing pro-gramme. Replacing the traditional two-storey east London row houses, the es-tate, comprising 1,187 dwellings, became notorious for its state of deprivation, crime and delinquency. The Borough Council recognised that the only means of dealing with the problems of Holly Street is through its demolition and recon-struction. The renewal project was initiated in response to the British Govern-ment's Comprehensive Estates Initiative, making funding available for the rede-velopment of social housing estates whose physical and social decay is so se-vere that refurbishment is not viable. This is an effort to maximise every oppor-tunity for community and economic development through the redevelopment process and to help break the cycle of welfare dependency and poverty.

An analogous project in Alicante, the renewal of the 'Quarter of 1,000 housing units', is transforming a degraded social environment into a functional, friendly space. Unemployed inhabitants have been engaged in the renewal works, while all citizens gave their views for the design of the new quarter. The

renewal of the Mascagni area in Reggio Emilia is also a good example. It created a multifunctional urban space out of a rigid series of anonymous buildings, a functional combination of old and new with integrated public services and links to the natural environment.

The Danish co-housing concept offers an innovative approach reconciling the need for new forms of housing with the demand for sustainable development. There are about 30 co-housing communities in Denmark, each comprising 20–50 households. They consist of individual and owner-occupied houses, each one of them designed by the owner himself. A communal house, in the middle, includes a communal dining room and various workshops and facilities, from a playground to an organic garden and a couple of wind turbines producing electricity.

The good results of the partnership approach for urban economic regeneration and housing improvement are evident in the case Glasgow, the city which refused to die. Social housing makes up 60% of the housing stock of the city and there are many rehabilitation projects, undertaken by housing associations. During the late 1980s, housing co-operatives have been set up in Glasgow's peripheral estates, where high-rise housing schemes were created in the 1960s and perceived then to offer better living conditions. Twenty years later, areas such as Drumchapel, Blackhill, Easterhouse and Castelmilk were synonymous with marginalised people, poor housing, drug abuse and crime. Housing associations undertook the physical improvement of the estates and Govan became a model. Improvement of housing conditions is achieved by a mix of rehabilitation, selective demolition and newly-built houses, with residents taking responsibility for the development and management of their homes.

5. THE ART OF PLANNING THE SUSTAINABLE EUROPEAN CITY

Many urban schemes and concepts advocate for the renaissance, the revitalisation and the regeneration of the European city. Making a multiple place, with mix and diversity, reflecting its pluricultural past and offering choices and options for the future seems the main vision and challenge. The urban village, introduced by Léon Krier, includes any of these concepts. Urban functions and services necessary for daily life and ensuring the art of living in cities should be found within every urban quarter, where every resident should also be able to find work. According to Léon Krier, zoning led to an anti-urban labyrinth, which broke traditional structures, centrality and urbanity. Megalopoles should grow by multiplication and not by over-expansion and consist of a number of urban villages of optimum dimensions. Large cities should redis-

cover the small scale and short distance. Mix of urban functions and uses is at the very centre of many Europeaṅ dialogues (Études Foncières, 1991).

In our overview we identified various urban renewal and regeneration projects start with corporate approaches to the economic and physical restructuring of vulnerable areas. In Dublin, the designation of under-used and derelict areas and the introduction of incentives for attracting private development into these areas has already produced some interesting results. Dublin Corporation also set up a 'Living Over the Shop' project team to encourage and assist property owners to convert their upper floors into residential areas. On a smaller 'site' scale, in Galway, residential developments above the main shopping centre and other shopping and office sites led to the creation of housing estates on the second or third floor.

Public spaces, the noble connective tissue of the cities, start to be given special attention (Council of Europe, 1990, 1992). The Brussels region launched a programme on the quality of their public spaces. For almost 40 years, huge investments in road building led to the excessive standardisation of Brussels' public spaces. Brussels-Capital region prepared the *Manual of Brussels public spaces* aimed at setting up qualitative recommendations for the functional, environmental, cultural and aesthetic character of the spaces. Roads and pavements, roadside plantations and public lighting are being given considerable importance in achieving coherence and identity of the public spaces. The image of the urban district is an added-value to the image of an enterprise. And it is not simply a question of a visual picture. It has to do with the everyday quality of life and work.

Many cities have to manage the 'after event', the space they created for a 'once in a lifetime' celebration. Barcelona provides an example and a model (HENRI, 1992). The city has lived for centuries with its back to the sea. The creation of a new sea-front has been one of the challenges met with the celebration of the 1992 Olympic Games. The contact with the sea has been the common denominator of the three major interventions: the creation of the Olympic Village, the remodelling of the industrial port and the renovation of the Diagonal Mar area. The private sector has been very active in carrying out these three major interventions, bringing a radical change in the perception and use of the urban space by the citizens. The Olympic village is being converted into an attractive residential area with office spaces and green zones leading to the sea-front. The renovation of the old port is under way and the Diagonal Mar action will develop in a period of 7 to 10 years. The 1992 Olympic Games have been a starting and not a concluding point for future perspectives.

In Seville the island of Cartuja, seat of the Universal Exhibition of 1992, now welcomes new activities. A thematic park opened just eight months after the closure of EXPO and has already become third in the world, from its number of visitors. A technological and business park occupies the rest of the space of

the EXPO. The Confederation of Andalusian Employers was the first to establish its seat there, an example followed by many firms which brought remaining pavilions and plan new activities there.

A common denominator for most urban revitalisation projects is the involvement of citizens. The approximation between citizens and administration is already an irreversible trend in European cities. No more major decisions concerning the future of cities are taken without a well-defined civil consensus. In Barcelona more than 160 city associations participate in the preparation of the economic and social strategic plan, basic instrument for urban change. In Brussels, the consultation procedures for planning introduce new concepts. In Reggio Emilia, citizens participate in the compiling of the city budget, with the use of new technologies. In Valencia, citizens participate in the tracing of the new metro lines. The European city becomes an ongoing referendum.

Since the fall of the Berlin wall, the geography of Europe is changing dramatically (MASSER et al., 1992). Europe is increasingly a dynamic pluricultural space of variable geometry. It tends to be a network of urban regions or regional cities, which articulates the economic and socio-cultural system, such as the Dutch *Randstad*. New visions and challenges emerged with the birth of the European Union. However, there is awareness that the abolition of national frontiers does not automatically give birth to an integrated Europe. The 'united' Europe cannot be an isotropic territory; it may be a Europe of territories in competition. Cities are in the lead of competing territories. They try to become more intelligent (CEC, 1992a; DIV, OECD, URBA 2000, 1990; HALL et al., 1991), more flexible (European Foundation, 1993b), more efficient, they all want to be the cities of tomorrow (IFHP, 1993). Most of them believe that creating a better and more equitable environment is an asset for their future. They all agree that the renaissance of European cities is essential for the renaissance of Europe.

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