



## **The Second Conference of the World Cultural Forum: “Strengthen International Cooperation to Build an Ecological Civilization”**

Hangzhou, China, 18th-19th May, 2013

### ***GUEST SPEECH TO CLOSING CEREMONY.***

“Governance for sustainable cities, with emphasis on energy and land-use”.

By Dr Pierre Laconte,  
President, Foundation for the Urban Environment,  
Honorary Secretary General, International Association of Public Transport – UITP,  
Past Vice-Chairman, European Environment Agency’s Scientific Committee.

Let me first support Ambassador Subrenat in congratulating the World Cultural Forum for this successful two-day conference, and in his wish to see the thoughts expressed by Prime Minister Samaras at the opening, and by speakers from all over the world, being translated into action and results.

It is an imperative of creating an ecological civilization that we escape from a linear urban economy. A linear economy means taking empty land, building on it, leaving it when its value depreciates, and letting others clean up the garbage. By contrast a circular economy means making as much use as possible of land that is already urbanised, building on it, or adapting its buildings to new uses and ultimately ycling them into new secondary materials.

I shall concentrate on energy and land use policies as tools for achieving sustainable cities for our finite planet, that – alas – is moving ever further away from nature.

1. Energy in buildings.

New construction has a high potential for achieving energy savings. Buildings have been called the power houses of the 21st century - as they can tap energy from the level of the underlying water table, and from the walls, the windows and the roof exposed to light.

This huge potential energy rises however the problem of linking it to the general electricity grid. This implies giving alternative energy a right of access to the public grid at a reasonable price, as in Germany.

However new buildings are only a small percentage of the building stock - perhaps 1% per year.

The embodied energy of existing buildings is therefore a major source of energy savings and an incentive to adaptive reuse.

Adaptive reuse for housing can be encouraged by requiring for example the inclusion of vertical shafts from the start, which can be achieved at very little additional cost. Adaptive reuse should be helped by the market, as the depletion of natural resources increases their price.

## 2. The global energy picture.

The forecast oil peak has not taken place, only the cheap oil peak. Oil and gas reserves remain high, but at a high production cost and environmental risk. The potential of shale gas is a game changer for the energy economy. The "Henry Hub" price, which is the main gas reference price, has dropped dramatically. It is now close to the equivalent price of coal per energy unit.

China has a large potential for shale gas-but it comes with high environmental challenges. Nevertheless ecological risks could be reduced if permits to explore and develop would require a deposit corresponding to the maximum financial risk in case of accidents, early departure after unsuccessful exploration or bankruptcy.

The same could apply to oil exploration in fragile ecosystems, such as the Arctic.

## 3. Land use.

What sorts of land use is the most appropriate for an ecological city? Achieving an integrated ecological urban concept could include some of the following policies:

- Decoupling progression in incomes from increases in citizens' fossil energy consumption. Successful experiences of decoupling include Singapore, Denmark, and Switzerland.

- The same applies to saving urban space. Saving urban space means encouraging human-scale clusters relying on non-motorised transport (walking and cycling), thereby reducing the consumption of fossil fuel, while increasing the population density. Space occupied by the automobile can expand to cover two thirds of the total urban area, as in Los Angeles, because parking space has to be added to the space for moving traffic. China has succeeded in building high density cities. Such high densities are ideally adapted to public transport, rather than to automobile traffic. Much more investments could be made in urban railways, metros and light rail, and intermodal transport hubs, instead of building more roads and flyovers that attract more traffic.

- Assessing and disseminating the health benefits of a switch from motorised transport to non-motorised transport, as recommended by the World Health Organisation. Lack of physical exercise has huge negative effects on individuals' health and imposes high costs on the public purse. Air pollution caused by the automobile traffic has the same effect.

## 4. Governance.

How can these ecological achievements be made politically acceptable at local level?

Let me just take two successful examples:

The example of Zurich.

In 1985 Zurich introduced parking stickers to be put on the windscreen, exclusively reserved for residents, in their own neighbourhoods. Others, mainly commuters by car from outside the city are only allowed 90 minutes' parking time. This has been widely popular with Zurich citizens while the commuters from outside could only turn to their own local authorities and ask for a better public transport.

The example of Singapore.

In 1975 Singapore introduced an Area Licensing Scheme compelling solo drivers entering the city to pay \$3 \$ while drivers having three passengers could enter for free. The proceeds helped finance a state-of-the-art driverless metro network. Decoupling of citizens' rising incomes from increases in traffic was achieved by auctioning new license plates. This system was also adopted in Shanghai.

Other examples include Curitiba in Brazil, Copenhagen in Denmark and Bilbao in Spain.

Governance improvements are always triggered by strong leaders or leading teams with a vision, as Margaret Meads has already remarked. The technologies for achieving sustainability are there. The gap is of cultural nature. It was a central feature of the World Cultural Forum ending today.

## **Biography**

Pierre Laconte is an international expert in urban and transport planning, and their links with environmental issues.

He has Doctorates in Laws and in Economics from the Louvain University and is Dr h.c., Edinburgh Napier University. He was one of the three planners in charge of the Louvain University "Groupe Urbanisme Architecture". This team was entrusted in 1969 with the planning and architectural coordination of the new university town of Louvain-la-Neuve, on the model of the historic town of Louvain. The land (ca 1000 ha, bought as agricultural land) remains the property of the university and has been developed through long term leases. It received the Abercrombie Prize of the International Union of Architects – UIC. It is today a major urban growth pole south of Brussels. It includes a new underground railway station and numerous ecological features such as the separation of storm water from sewage, and heating by natural gas. its centre is entirely pedestrian.

Pierre Laconte is the former Vice-chair of the European Environment Agency Scientific Committee, Honorary Secretary General of the International Association of Public Transport - UITP, past-president of the International Society of City and Regional Planners (2006-2009), and President, Foundation for the Urban Environment.

For details of his latest publications (from 2000) see [www.ffue.org](http://www.ffue.org) - publications. His 2011 report "Climate Change Energy Shortage Biodiversity Loss - Overview of Global, European and Local Policies and Practices", published by The Club of Rome's European Support Center and EU Chapter is available in English and Chinese (see [www.ffue.org](http://www.ffue.org) – publications 2011).