



Bundesministerium
für Verkehr, Bau
und Stadtentwicklung



Bundesamt
für Bauwesen und
Raumordnung



NATIONALE
STADT
ENTWICKLUNGS
POLITIK

Towards a national Urban Development Policy in Germany

Memorandum



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National Urban Development Policies in Neighbouring European Countries.

Mobility.

Interview with Pierre Laconte, President of the International Society of City and Regional Planners – ISOCARP and Member of the EEA Scientific Committee, by Peter Zlonicky

In your opinion, what are the most important challenges that cities face in Europe?

First of all to find ways to cope with the increasing cost of energy: therefore cities in the 21st century will have to develop in ways very different from the 20th century. In the 20th century cities have adopted strategies derived from the American way of life: expansion of the public infrastructure for private car traffic, urban sprawl and low-density settlements that cannot support public transport. As a result local public transport in the USA accounts in average for a mere one per cent of the total motorised traffic.



The reversal of these policies requires a policies coordination covering all spatial aspects of activities. This will mean for instance – as already initiated by the German government – the end of subsidising commuter travel between the home and place of work. It also means the end of subsidising new estates outside of cities. This would put spatial development back on sound economic foundations. It would enable people to make realistic decisions about their residential location. This, in turn, would increase the urban density in cities, but would also significantly reduce energy consumption and lower infrastructure costs. A study in Belgium has found that the cost of suburbanisation is eight times that of integrated development within cities: just think of the costs for access, electricity, telephone and other cable connections, supply and waste disposal services, social infrastructure for schools or hospitals – there is a manifold increase in infrastructure costs if they are scattered across the country. Consequently, the first challenge for a national urban development policy is to foster an effective re-urbanisation. As a result of industry exodus there is more and more space available for new developments within cities. This is not only true for the redundant industrial and port areas, the disused military and railway sites but also for obsolescent large-scale office developments, all of which constitute a vast potential for new development. New developments do not require the complex wiring installations found under the ceilings of old office buildings, wireless connections being provided by blue tooth and similar devices, insofar data protection is ensured. Regression in demand for offices sector is already today's reality and will be a major challenge of tomorrow.

New developments will have to take into account the additional housing space required for home based computer activity, i.e. the computer space for work and study for each occupant, including children, not to forget the

space required by the “recomposed” families’ lifestyle.

The kind of housing that meets these new requirements can most easily be supported financially in urban locations allowing a reduction in energy-costly motorised daily travel and favouring environmentally-friendly means of transport – predominantly bicycle or walking.

The energy policy, which is being revisited at European level, should be clearly linked with land-use and housing policy, through integrated approaches aimed at reducing energy consuming transport modes.

This is still far from being a European reality. According to a Report of the European environment Agency (3/2007), the EU subsidies to transport represent 280 billion EUR, of which 140 to the road, in addition to all national and local subsidies.

This figure might still increase as a result of the coming subsidies to agro-fuels, as part of the alternative fuels policy. These new subsidies are advocated by both the agro-business and oil industry interests.

Which national urban development policies in Europe can provide inspiration for national energy conscious urban development policy?

Let us take the national level first.

The Scandinavian countries, especially Denmark on the one hand and Switzerland on the other hand, developed sustainable urban development policies and measures. Denmark is interesting in that it decouples economic growth from the increase in mobility. Austria as well, which – like Germany – taxes transit costs for goods traffic on roads. In fact, due to the subsidisation indicated above, the traffic volume increases much faster than the development of the entire economy. This means that mobility develops independently, even though its development should be derived from the activities. Regrettably, the public

still perceives mobility as a positive element – promoted by advertising and the media. This has never been the case at any time in history. Transport was always paid for by its users. England had in the early nineteenth Century 30.000 km of toll roads. The railways developed through private financial instruments, as did the Paris, London or Budapest metros.

The urban sprawl in Europe is following more or less the patterns of the US with some delay in time, as the same forces are at work. This has been studied in depth by the European Environment Agency. This Agency has made a report called “Urban Sprawl in Europe – the hidden Challenge” (10/2006), which demonstrated that strategies and instruments to control sprawl strongly depend on today’s realities of multiple and interacting levels of governance, from local to European.



Urban sprawl is however an issue to be considered worldwide. As an example the 2008 congress of the International Society of City and Regional Planners - ISOCARP, to be held in China, is taking as theme „Urban Growth without Sprawl - A Way Towards Sustainable Urbanization“ (www.isocarp.org)

The local level is equally important.

Most urban innovations are the result of local policies and initiatives. There are plenty of good examples in Europe. One of them is surely the City of Zurich, which developed an integrated set of measures to successfully shape the process of re-urbanisation. The influx of cars to the city is not controlled through congestion charges (as is done in London), but through parking charges: time-limited, free or cheap parking is available for shoppers in the city. Long-term parking for commuters is very expensive, while cheap for residents. The aim is to encourage the return of inhabitants to the city and the use of local public transport. This has a great influence on the development of the city: people move



back into the city, the city is more vibrant, urban living conditions are appreciated again, pollution from cars is reduced and all in all the city's financial balance is favourably affected by the new urban dwellers. The successful tramway system of Zurich has been influential in the boom of new tramways networks all over Europe.

Another positive example is the City of Copenhagen. Here, the "Finger Plan" which concentrated development in a radial pattern with open spaces in between has proven successful. Urban densification around the stops of the radial metro lines is stringently pursued. This allows green landscape areas to be retained right into the city. Additionally, local connections are extended with the metro to the airport and even – thanks to a new rail trans-Baltic connection – to Malmö: this means Malmö is today only 20 minutes away from the Copenhagen airport and the centre of Copenhagen. This land-use and transport policy has resulted in a clearly favourable energy and environmental balance.



Another positive example is the city of Bilbao, which in the early 90's has redeveloped an industrial area of 30 ha just next to the business centre, along the old industrial waterway, by building cultural anchors at both ends of the area and filling the intermediate space with private investments in housing, office, commercial and other service activities. The huge added value generated by this operation has allowed the construction of a new tramway line along the Canal and the rehabilitation of other deprived areas of the city. Bilbao is thus both an example of urban rehabilitation and of transit oriented development. More recently, Valencia has followed the same path, with an emphasis on science and technology, taking advantage of the America Cup.

In a larger scale context, Barcelona is an example of compact city, because of the fact that it is surrounded by mountains and because the late policy of the city is to protect the slopes of the mountains from development, in order to keep the compact urban development within the ring road.

In the UK, the renewal of Manchester and Birmingham are considered as outstanding. The development of Manchester in particular has been made around a new light-rail system, that was put in service in 1992 and which has triggered the renewal of the city centre. Both cities encouraged housing development along the canals after their cleaning and restoration.

Finally among the local sustainability policies and measures one should mention the massive rental bicycle fleets privately introduced in Barcelona, Lyons and more recently in Paris. Previous experiences failed because of their limited supply. In Paris the available fleet of some 20.000 rental bicycles is considered by the citizens – together with the reserved lanes for buses and bicycles - as a revolution in their lifestyle and the model of similar developments to take place in other European cities.

