A Vision for the European City of the 21st Century

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The ECTP-CEU (European Council of Spatial Planners–Conseil Européen des Urbanistes) is confident that in the 21st century Europe will advance decisively towards the goal of integration. Within this developing framework, ECTP-CEU presents a common and widely shared Vision on the future of European cities (Part A). This is a vision of a network of cities, which will:

- retain their cultural richness and diversity, resulting from their long history, linking the past through the present to the future;
- become connected in a multitude of meaningful and functional networks (this item seems circular since it refers back to “a network of cities”);
- remain creatively competitive whilst striving for complementarity and co-operation;
- contribute decisively to the well-being of their inhabitants and users;
- integrate the man-made and the natural elements of the environment.

Besides the Vision, the New Athens Charter 2003 also includes a framework for implementation (Part B) which consists of:

- a brief summary of the main issues and challenges that affect cities at the beginning of the third millennium;
- the commitments required by spatial planners in realising the Vision.

This 2003 version of the New Charter of Athens is addressed primarily to professional planners working throughout Europe and those concerned with the planning process – to give direction to their actions, for greater coherence in building a meaningful network of cities in Europe connected through time, at all levels and in all sectors.

Spatial planning is vital for the delivery of sustainable development. In particular, it concerns the prudent management of space, a critical natural resource, limited in supply, but with growing demands upon it. It also requires trans-disciplinary teamwork involving different skills at various scales in long-lasting processes. The particular attribute of the planning profession is its ability to take a range of issues into account and to translate them into spatial terms. ECTP-CEU is aware of both the variety and the universality of the planning profession in Europe as it takes into account the rich diversity of its cities and regions.

1. The Vision

1.2. The Connected City

In the second half of the 20th century, many dire predictions about the future of European cities were expressed. They included the lowering of productivity, abandonment and implosion of central areas, rampant crime, heavy pollution and dramatic environmental degradation, as well as loss of identity. Happily, these predictions did not materialise, although today the cities of the Old Continent are far from ideal as they face daunting challenges.

In response, at the dawn of the new millennium, the European Council of Town Planners proposes its vision. Neither a utopia, nor an outlandish projection of technological innovations, it focuses on the Connected City – and is essentially a snapshot of how we would like our cities to be, now and in the future. This vision is a goal towards which we, the planners of Europe, are committed to work and to contribute, to the best of our
professional abilities -- a goal that can be achieved by the combined efforts of all honest stakeholders in the processes of sustainable urban development and management.

The connected city comprises a variety of connective mechanisms acting on different scales. These include tactile and visual connection to the built environment, as well as connections between a diversity of urban functions, infrastructure networks, and information and communication technologies.

Connecting Through Time

Ancient settlements were created to provide shelter and safety for people and to exchange products. They gave rise to organised societies, developed a wide range of skills, became highly productive and grew into powerful centres of civilisation. They were built in carefully selected places, maintaining a clear distinction between the city limits and the surrounding rural and natural areas, even when fortifications became obsolete and were removed.

Compared to urban areas in many other parts of the World, European cities are distinguished by a long history of development, closely reflecting the characteristics of the political, social and economic structures of nations. It is this history and diversity which has made them different.

By contrast, the cities of 21st century Europe are becoming more difficult to distinguish, as human activities, initially located within urban centres, are now spreading widely into the hinterland, consuming rural and natural areas. Transportation and other infrastructure networks, constructed to serve and connect these dispersed activities, actually fragment and degrade space – the major non-renewable natural resource. Slowly, but inexorably, the new complex networks link together small and large cities, so as to create an urban continuum, already evident in many parts of Europe, within which, the classical cities become just a component of the new networks. Inevitably, the effects of this damaging trend must be addressed in any vision on the future of cities.

The future is built at every moment of the present through our actions. The past provides invaluable lessons for the future. In many respects, the city of tomorrow is already with us. There are many features of present city life which we cherish and value, and which we hope to bequeath to future generations. What is the basic problem with our existing cities? In our view, it is the lack of connectivity, not only in physical terms, but also in relation to time, which affects social structures and cultural differences. This does not just mean continuity of character in the built environment, but also continuity in identity, which is in our view an important value to be fostered in a dynamic world. For the future, the notion of the network city needs to be stressed, a series of poly-centric urban networks, many of which transcend national boundaries within the new Europe.

1.2. Social Connectivity

Social balance

The future welfare of humanity requires people to be considered both as individuals, with specific freedoms of choice to be maintained, but also as communities connected to society as a whole. This is an important goal for the connected city, which is responsive to the interests of society as a whole, whilst having regard to the needs, rights, and duties of various cultural groups and of individual citizens.

Facilitating multi-cultural expression and exchanges among different social groups is necessary but not sufficient. There are large economic disparities to be tackled within
the European Union, which are seemingly generated by the present system of free markets, competition, and
globalisation. If these trends continue, they will lead to the rupture of the social and economic fabric. To avert
this, a new approach to governance must emerge, involving all stakeholders, that tackles social problems, such
as unemployment, poverty, exclusion, criminality, and violence. Thus the city which is connected socially will
be able to provide a high degree of security and sense of ease.

Although these noble social objectives go beyond the scope of the planners’ mandate, the connected European
city of the 21st century will also provide a wide range of economic and employment opportunities for all
people living and working within it. At the same time, it will secure for them better access to education, health,
and other social facilities. New forms of social and economic structures will provide the diverse framework
required to eliminate social disruption created by imbalances.

Involvement

Future European cities will be used not only by resident citizens, but also by other consumers of their facilities
and services on a permanent or temporary basis (commuters and visitors). There will be foreign low-skilled
workers, as well as highly educated professionals (residing for long or short periods). Most probably these
two groups will figure prominently in the activities of a number of cities. As a consequence, democratic
institutions will respond to the needs and well-being of all these social groups. Current systems of urban
governance, limited mainly by the votes of permanent residents, will not be able to respond equitably to the
new social conditions, especially in matters relating to urban development. In the connected city, new systems
of representation and participation will be developed, making full use of easier access to information and the
wider involvement of active citizens’ networks, thus giving them all -residents and users- a voice in the future
of their urban environment.

Sufficient time must be built into the decision-making processes relating to spatial planning and development,
so that social links can be established, and positive interactions facilitated. At the same time it must be
acknowledged that in the connected city of the future, many groups of residents, both permanent and temporary,
will be content to make use of urban facilities and services without wanting to be involved in local decision-
making. Nevertheless, these residents will demand quality and will be prepared to pay for the services and
facilities which are provided.

Multi-cultural richness

Due to the growing trend towards European unification, which will have a slow but clear impact on mobility
and employment patterns, European cities will again become truly multi-cultural, as well as multilingual. New
connections will be established, involving a delicate and adaptive balance, so that these cities maintain both
their cultural and historical heritage and character, and encourage each of the groups residing or working within
them to retain their own social and cultural characteristics, and to play a commensurate role in considering
issues relating to their social and physical environment. Sustainability –integrating the economic, ecological
and social dimensions of change, based on participation and involvement – will be a pivotal objective for
making this possible.

Connections between generations

The changing balance between the different age groups of an ageing European population brings the need to
restore the ties of cohesion between generations. This new and growing social challenge must be addressed
not only in social and economic terms, but also in the establishment of adequate city support networks and infrastructure, including new activities for the retired and elderly and public pedestrian spaces for interaction among all age groups.

**Social identity**

The personal identity of citizens is strongly related to the identity of their cities. The dynamics due to immigration in the connected city will contribute to the establishment of newer and stronger urban identities. Each city will develop its own social and cultural mix – a result of both its historical character and emerging developments. As a result, there will continue to be a great diversity in the character and identity of cities and regions in different parts of Europe.

In the connected city, the exchanges among cultures in the urban environment and their communication and gradual fusion will give city life a much greater richness and diversity. This in turn will add to its overall attractiveness, not only as a residential environment, but also as a place for work, education, business, and leisure.

**Movement & Mobility**

In the European cities of the future, citizens will have a varied choice of transportation modes at their disposal, together with accessible and responsive information networks.

In the connected city and its regional hinterland, new technologies will be applied creatively to provide a variety of systems of transportation of persons and materials, and of information flows. At the local scale, technology and traffic management will be deployed to secure a decrease in the reliance on private vehicles. At the strategic scale, linkages between neighbourhoods, cities, and regions will be facilitated by the evolution of the European transportation network, providing rapid, pleasant, sustainable, and economical connections between places of work, living, leisure, and culture. Within city networks, mobility will be improved by interchange facilities between the various modes of transport. These improvements to infrastructure will be balanced with safeguarding peoples’ options to live and work in quiet areas not connected to rapid transportation networks.

The spatial organisation of the connected city will include a full integration of transportation and town planning policies. They will be complemented by more imaginative urban design and easier access to information, thus minimising the need for unnecessary travel. Ease of movement and access will be a critical element of city living, together with greater choice in the mode of transport.

**Facilities and Services**

According to the needs of present and future citizens, housing and services will become increasingly accessible – their provision will be flexibly adjusted to new and emerging patterns of needs. More housing will be provided at affordable prices, in addition to educational, commercial, cultural, and recreational facilities and services. These will be supported by running costs that citizens can afford, and complemented by a strong sense of community identity and security.
1.3. Economic connectivity

European cities of the 21st century will also be strongly connected at the economic level, thus inducing the creation of a closely-knit financial network of great efficiency and productivity, maintaining high levels of employment and ensuring a competitive edge in the global arena, whilst adapting dynamically to changing internal and external conditions.

Globalisation and regionalisation

At present, economic activities are influenced by a combination of two main forces: globalisation and specialisation (local or regional). On the one hand, new economic activities will be more than ever knowledge-based, with both production and services applying innovative technologies. These developments will not necessarily be site-specific, but will be determined on the basis of economic criteria.

On the other hand, there will be an increasing demand for rare and refined products and services associated with particular traditional production methods and typical places of origin. In the first case, their quality/price relationship will play a significant role in development decisions. In the second, qualitative characteristics will be predominant. Thus a balance will have to be found between endogenous and exogenous factors of development, which will become a particularly strategic challenge for European cities and regions. With the opening up of Europe to the East, greater integration will encourage and strengthen the diversity of cultures, which will promote the establishment of new economic, social, and cultural connections.

In such a context, cities will be called upon to make strategic choices about their economic orientation. They will have the option to interpret in local terms the demands and processes of globalisation, with the emphasis on increased diversity of opportunity. They will also be able to cultivate their own economic signature. Local and regional economies will be increasingly connected to the economies of other cities and regions, both nationally and internationally. Enhanced economic connectivity will thus contribute towards full employment and greater prosperity for the citizens of Europe.

Competitive advantages

In the 21st century, the cities that will be economically successful will be those that capitalise upon their competitive advantages. For this purpose, a high degree of multi-level connectivity will prove to be a major asset. Capitalising on the cultural and natural attributes of cities, managing their historical character, and promoting their uniqueness and diversity will be a significant advantage. In addition, providing a pleasant, healthy, and safe living-and-working environment will add considerably to the attractiveness of cities for the demanding economic activities of the future.

A successful city utilises the best of its existing attributes, both endogenous and exogenous, to position itself economically. It constantly learns and adapts so that it maintains its advantages through changing circumstances. Trends must be continuously monitored, and multiple scenarios regularly examined, in order to anticipate both positive and negative forces, and to take appropriate action.
City networking

To increase their competitive advantages, individual cities will be compelled to join various networks, which will function effectively as more or less integral systems, with cities as nodes, connected either physically or virtually or both.

These polycentric urban networks will be of various types, such as:

- networks of similarly specialised cities, which through functional and organisational co-operation reach the visibility, the size, and productivity needed to compete or to develop common goals;
- networks, linking cities with different specialisations in order to supply to each other; specialisation may also guide the allocation of public projects among the same cities;
- networks of cities connected to each other in a flexible system of exchange of goods and services;
- networks of cities sharing common (economic and/or cultural) interests linked together to strengthen their profile and thus their competitive advantage.

The types of connections between the nodes of the different networks will be strongly related to the types of flows, which will move either material goods or information / functional elements.

Such polycentric networks of cities, connected in various ways, will support the distribution, growth, and strength of economic activities throughout Europe. Defining the new networks and positioning individual cities within them will require a considerable involvement of experts who will translate these dynamics into spatial strategies.

Economic diversity

The economic connectivity of European cities will not be to the detriment of their diversity, but will contribute to it, as participation in a collaborative system will encourage specialisation and diversity, based on the competitive advantages of each city. The factors affecting economic activities (cultural and natural heritage, existence of educated and skilled work forces, pleasant environment, strategic location and others) will be combined in different ways in each city, thus contributing to urban variety, and allowing each city to determine its own balance between economic prosperity and quality of life.

1.4. Environmental connectivity

Input-output

As human beings belong to a living species, maintaining a possibility of contact with natural elements is not only a source of well-being, but also a prerequisite for survival. The environmental aspect of sustainability, however, is not only restricted to the maintenance and expansion of natural areas within our cities and their periphery, it involves many other elements.

- Perhaps the major issue in the 21st century will be the wise use of resources, especially natural, non-renewable ones, and primarily space, air, and water.
- A major step will be to protect cities from pollution and degradation, so that they can maintain their usefulness.
- The cities of the new millennium will manage the input and output of resources carefully and economically, by relating them to real needs, and using innovative technologies, and in minimising their consumption by re-using and recycling them to the highest possible degree.
- Energy production and use will be a major concern, with unprecedented levels of efficiency and an increasing use of renewable energy sources.
In addition, the city will cease to export its wastes to the surrounding areas, and will become a self-sufficient connected system, treating and re-using the majority of input resources.

A similar environmentally sensitive approach, involving risk assessment, will be used to minimise the impact of natural disasters. Thus, earthquake damage will be contained by limiting urban development in seismic-prone areas through appropriate zoning. Rivers, torrents, and floodplains will be used, via catchment zone management, to mitigate the effects of floods and other extreme weather phenomena caused by climate change and poor engineering. Forests and green areas in and around the city will be increased, so that they are able to play a major role in improving air quality and stabilising temperatures. These measures will also have positive side-effects, in mitigating the impacts of rampant urbanisation.

Healthy cities

Environmental management and the practical application of the principles of sustainability will lead to a city that will be altogether healthier for human habitation. In the future European city health hazards in food and materials from toxic substances will be largely eliminated. These measures will be complemented by a wide range of health and social services, with an emphasis on prevention, equitably available to all citizens.

Nature, Landscape, and Open Spaces

The opportunity for all to live and work in proximity, connected to well-maintained elements of cultural and natural heritage, such as significant landscapes, archaeological sites, monuments, traditional neighbourhoods, parks, squares, and other open spaces, water bodies (lakes, rivers, wetlands and the sea shore), nature reserves, and rural areas will be carefully preserved and facilitated. Spatial planning will continue to be an effective tool for the protection of these elements of natural and cultural heritage, as well as the vehicle for the creation of new areas of open spaces which connect the urban fabric.

The emotional connection between human beings and their environment – their sense of place - is a fundamental need for successful urban living. The best-loved cities and urban places offer a rich and positive environmental experience. Environmental quality is a major factor in guaranteeing the economic success of a city – it also contributes to social and cultural vitality.

Energy

New forms of energy, obtained from non-polluting and renewable resources, will be used to cover the energy needs of 21st century cities, especially in key sectors, such as transportation and microclimatic control. In addition, energy delivery systems and facilities will become highly efficient through innovative technologies, while energy consumption will be dramatically reduced. These breakthroughs will have very positive side effects in curbing air pollution, greenhouse gases, and climate change.

1.5 Spatial synthesis

The economic, social, and environmental connections described above will have a strong impact on spatial planning.
Spatial linkages

Through careful planning and other appropriate interventions, the spatial networks in and around cities will be enhanced. In the Connected City, the essential functions of city centres and other key nodes will be maintained and improved; communications and transportation networks will serve these efficiently, without allowing the latter to sap their vitality.

At the same time, the natural areas of the Continent will be effectively protected against the extension and multiplication of these urban networks, through a combination of regulatory and stimulatory measures, as well as by promoting awareness of their value and the essential need for conservation and enhancement.

Connecting through character – continuity and quality of life

In parallel to these spatial considerations, the attractiveness of European cities will be maintained and enhanced, thus contributing to an improved quality of urban life for all, since nearly three quarters of the European population lives in cities. Urban design will be a key element of the renaissance of cities, to break down the isolation between parts of the city and to achieve retention and continuity of character, in the face of the impersonal trends of homogenisation. There will be a number of policies, measures and interventions, in which the planner will play a key role. They will include:

- The revival of urban design to protect and enhance streets, squares, footpaths, and other thoroughfares as key linkages in the urban framework.
- Rehabilitation of degraded or inhumanly planned pieces of the urban fabric.
- Measures to facilitate personal contacts and opportunities for leisure and recreation.
- Measures to ensure the individual and collective feeling of security, as it is a key element to guarantee urban well-being.
- Efforts to create memorable urban environments derived from specific genius loci, thus enhancing diversity and character.
- Maintenance and cultivation of a high level of aesthetic excellence in all parts of the urban networks.
- Conservation through planning of all significant elements of natural and cultural heritage, and the protection and expansion of open space networks.

Each of these positive developments will be handled in different ways in each country and in each city, depending on local historical, social, and economic conditions. At the same time, however, cohesion within the expanded European Union will increase, as its administrative and social structures mature, and guidelines on planning matters are gradually incorporated into the acquis communautaire. Through this process, common objectives for the cities of Europe will come to be widely accepted, whilst their diversity and the unique character of each will be highly prized and maintained.

A new model for Europe

In a global community, which is trying to find its common future amongst recurring conflicts and often-flawed political and economic experiments, one of the main contributions of Europe in the 21st century will be the new model of its ancient and modern cities: cities, which are truly connected, which are innovative and productive, creative in science, culture, and ideas, whilst maintaining decent living and working conditions for their people; cities, which will connect the past with the future, through a vital and vibrant present.