

THE NEW CHARTER OF ATHENS 2003

THE EUROPEAN CITY OF THE 21ST CENTURY

In this Special section, FOCUS draws attention to the work of the ECTP-CEU (European Council of Spatial Planners - Conseil Europeen des Urbanistes) and its vision for the European city of the 21st Century, The New Charter of Athens 2003. Originally founded in 1985 as the European Council of Town Planners to bring together planning organizations of countries in the European Community, the ECTP-CEU has since changed its name to the European Council of Spatial Planners to better fit this multi-language endeavor while maintaining its original acronym. The ECTP-CEU represents more than 26,000 planners in 26 countries and works in conjunction with 25 organizations such as the Association of European Schools of Planning.¹

¹ The ECTP-CEU web-address is www.ceu-ectp.org.

² The American Planning Association's International Division is at <http://www.planning.org/divisions/international/index.htm>

Joining the efforts of the American Planning Association's international division², FOCUS understands that both students and US professionals must learn about the work of the ECTP-CEU and similar international organizations given the strong implications of globalization and multiculturalism on contemporary planning practice and education, and the advantages of mutual cooperation. From another perspective, it also is important to consider the New Charter of Athens and the European experience given that much of the inspiration for today's new planning and urban design approaches in the US planning and urban design--such as new urbanism, smart growth, and sustainable urbanism--result from the observation of European cities, models, and experiences.

In a conference held in Athens in 1998, the ECTP-CEU adopted the New Charter of Athens: A Vision for Cities in the 21st Century, and resolved it should be kept under a constant process of revision and updating. It is very symbolic that this happened in Athens, the city where the original Charter was adopted during the International Congress of Modern Architecture in 1933.³ However, in differing from the original Charter of Athens which guided modernism with a very strict perspective of what a city should be and look like, the New Charter represents a drastic change towards a new paradigm of sustainability, integration, participation and collaboration.

³ On the original modernist 1933 Charter of Athens, see for instance, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athens_Charter and <http://www.planum.net/archive/charter.htm>; retrieved on 9/28/09.

Revised during the ECTP-CEU's 2003 General Assembly in Lisbon, the New Charter of Athens promotes a vision for The Connected City: while European cities should remain "creatively competitive" they must function as a network, cooperating and complementing each other, retaining their cultural richness and diversity, promoting social connectivity, and integrating man-made to natural environments. The vision regards spatial planning as "vital for the delivery of sustainable development" and asserts that the "prudent management of space... requires trans-disciplinary teamwork... at various scales in long-lasting processes". The ECTP-CEU believes that the ability to take a range of issues into account and translate them into spatial terms is a particular attribute of the planning profession.

As an introduction to The New Charter of Athens, FOCUS presents the invited commentary by Mario Moutinho and Diogo Mateus, planners and professors of Urbanism at the Universidade Lusofona in Lisbon -with whom Cal Poly's CRP Department has an academic exchange agreement. Following, we transcribe ECTP-CEU's Vision for Cities in the 21st Century, part A of the charter. The whole document also includes a framework for implementation that identifies the main issues and challenges affecting cities at the beginning of the third millennium (part B), and a discussion on the role of spatial planners for implementing the Vision (part C). The document is available from the ECTP-CEU's website at www.ceu-ectp.org.

THE NEW CHARTER OF ATHENS: A COMMENTARY

MÁRIO MOUTINHO AND DIOGO MATEUS

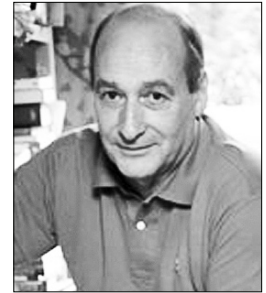
The New Charter of Athens published by the European Council of Spatial Planners (ECTP-CEU) comes at a time when Europe, and to some extent the entire world, is debating urban issues in light of the effects of urban pressure and the necessary implications regarding how we think and organize urban areas. The New Charter of Athens attempts to update the vision of how cities should grow. In the Charter's first part (Part A), the ECTP-CEU has taken on an eminently political role, while in the second part (Part B) - more concurrently with its mission - ECTP-CEU defines the principles that should be followed by town planners in this new way of thinking about the global city or the city of connectivity.

It is important, however, to place the New Charter of Athens within the context of European policy. Ever since the 1970s, the European Union (EU)¹ and the Council of Europe (CE)² have been debating issues related to urban space, namely political aspects, but throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and in the 21st century ECTP-CEU has produced a set of documents aiming to establish specific criteria regarding the issues of urban and territorial planning. Between 1980 and 1982, the CE promoted a debate on cities through the Urban Renaissance Conferences, and in 1983 it published the European Regional/Spatial Planning Charter (DGOT, 1988). This document points out that spatial planning is an important tool for the evolution of European society, where international cooperation becomes essential and all European citizens should have the possibility to participate, within an adequate institutional framework, in the introduction and implementation of spatial planning measures. This Charter took on a political spirit but points to a set of methodologies to be followed for ordered and coherent spatial use.

In the 1990s, the CE issued the European Urban Charter (see CLRAE, 1992; 2002; 2004; 2007), a document fashioned like a Charter of Citizens' Rights, where a set of methodologies for the improvement of the quality of living in European cities is laid out. Following the Lisbon Strategy³, which defined guidelines for European policy at the dawn of the 21st century, and the document Towards an Urban Agenda in the European Union (EU, 1997), negotiations among members of the European Union led to the adoption of a Territorial Agenda in 2007 (EU, 2007). In this Agenda, the European regional policy is taken as a comprehensive strategy, and territory is understood as a network. The studies promoted by the EU and by the CE in the 1990s greatly contributed to this political position which was upheld by both institutions.

The ECTP-CEU's New Charter of Athens -which final version was approved in 2003- goes beyond the definition of a vision for the European city of the 21st century, by also defining the role that spatial planners must play in assisting the harmonious development of the globally-considered European territory, where community participation is crucial. So, as a technical document, the New Charter of Athens signals to spatial planners the path they should follow in the development of their professional activities based on the ECTP-CEU's vision. The document's Part B develops along four main axes that reflect the organization's understanding of the social and political, economic and technological, environmental, and urban changes that are affecting European cities. The document discusses the trends, issues, and challenges of each of these axes of change, and defines a set of commitments and roles for spatial planners in different fields: as scientists, designers, political advisors, or urban managers - this reflects a global vision where spatial planners, whatever their function, may find paths to contribute to a better European City.

However, it is important that the New Charter of Athens be understood as a document that points to a path, in what is a revision of the philosophy behind the original Athens Charter and its adaptation to the present day



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without entirely following its model (see Corbusier 1957/1942). The New Charter is not an update but rather a new vision upon which the future of cities and the practices to be followed by spatial planners should be grounded. As with any guiding document, it is crucial to relate the positions assumed in it with the specificities of the territories where action must be taken.

It is important to emphasize the need to shed light on the role of the spatial planner as an independent technician who, after studying the territory, puts forward a set of measures that will be capable of developing the territory at the same time that the measures ensure the quality of living of the territory's populations, working with them in the sustainable spirit of enhancing existing resources. ECTP-CEU's New Charter of Athens points to a path to be followed which, after the due adaptations to local specificities, may constitute the basis for an ethical and responsible technical attitude. For this vision to happen, it is fundamental that politicians in charge define the goals and strategies for the territory together with the technicians, the participation of stakeholders, and the general population, so that spatial planners may do their job properly.⁴

End Notes

¹ The European Union was established in 1957 in Rome, by a treaty signed by representatives of six countries, Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg and Holland, to set the foundations of an increasingly closer union between the European peoples, ensuring, through common action, the economic and social progress of these countries by eliminating the barriers that divided Europe. In 1973, the founding countries were joined by Denmark, Ireland, and the United Kingdom; in 1981 by Greece; in 1986 by Spain and Portugal; in 1995 by Austria, Finland, and Sweden; in 2004 by Cyprus, Slovakia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland and the Czech Republic; and in 2007 by Bulgaria and Romania. In 2009, there was a total of 27 countries in the European Union.

² Today The Council of Europe, which was founded in 1949, with its seat in Strasbourg, gathers 47 Member States. Its main mission is to strive for a closer union between its members. Its main activities take place around human rights, democratic principles, education, culture and heritage, and social cohesion. It is a separate organization from the European Union, but all the European Union's Members are members of the Council of Europe. Its structures are a Committee of Ministers – the decision-making body – and a Parliamentary Assembly with representatives from all 47 Member States. Aspects related to Spatial Planning are dealt with at the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, which gathers the local and regional authorities of the member states.

³ The Lisbon strategy is a political plan, adopted by the European Union in a conference in March 2000 at Lisbon. It aimed to achieve a competitive economy by 2010, based on social and environmental values. For more information see <http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/lisbon_strategy_en.htm>

⁴ In order to better understand the New Charter of Athens, we recommend the following documents:

From the Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe [CLRAE]

European Urban Charter, European Council - 1992, 2004 and 2007