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## **Statements**

### **Beyond the technologies of sustainability**

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We have often said that sustainable development cannot be reached exclusively through increasingly sophisticated technological advances, or engineering and organisational solutions. It must be understood as a value to be built up socially, with individuals, societies and their institutions, first by giving them the means and then by their accepting the responsibilities. Even more comprehensively, it is a way of thinking and of acting "suited to collectively imagining the world of tomorrow. It is a movement of ideas, comparable to 18<sup>th</sup> century enlightenment, to which anyone could sign on," thus Bidou has defined it in his recent book "Le Développement Durable. Intelligence du XXI siècle", reviewed by Angrilli in this issue of EcoWebTown. This wider meaning of sustainability invites a reformulation of the variety of urban plan and project strategies, including for example the management of urban wastes, a sector which has generally been overlooked by traditional city planning. One must not think that the waste issue can be solved by simply perfecting technology or the organisational processes of the agency carrying out the service. Such a complex problem requires a new social perception of the relationship between individuals and the environment in which they live, a concept of citizenship inspired by a will to reduce waste, restore value to what is held in common, treat public property with care and participate actively in the fight against climate change. It is where waste management is organised on the basis of Paul Connett's four virtuous R's (Reduce, Reuse, Recover energy and Recycle).

The contribution of city planning to this new culture can be relevant: by selecting the most suitable sites, by contributing to identifying the most appropriate collection and management models for the area, ascertaining environmental compatibility, pointing out how to best insert the structures into the landscape, by improving the morphological, functional and figurative qualities of equipment, promoting virtuous solutions by offering incentives or useful compensation measures to indemnify penalised residential neighbourhoods. And further, it can contribute by re-interpreting the form of the city as combinations of a multiplicity of self-contained ecological relations on a local scale, that allow in- and out-flows to be metabolised for a specific territory, saving non-replaceable resources and reducing to as close to zero as possible the waste which is to be incinerated.

But even in a city which has been built with zero-waste eco-districts, results might be unsatisfactory, without a positive convergence of the many management strategies of the flows that generate waste, and above all without the sensitisation and active participation of local communities, which must move beyond the use-it/throw-it-away culture and an indifference toward public property. In the absence of an adequate cultural

revolution, waste disposal crises will continue to loom. In many Italian cities waste crises are a reality (Naples, Palermo, Catania, but also Rome, Pescara, ...). Vain will be the efforts to improve cities or landscapes, if attention is not extended to include the life cycles of the resources on which an urban metabolism functions and the consequent waste it generates i.e. unless a holistic concept of the functioning of a city's systems and their interdependence is adopted with an integrated and transversal vision with one of the programmatic approaches set out by modern city planners, at least in their most advanced statements. All this comes to mind when one looks at France's experience with eco-neighbourhoods, a policy the State has promoted for some time now, the objective is to favour the new building methods for cities with sustainability in mind. French eco-neighbourhoods are a clear embodiment of the will to encourage new sustainable city-planning, based on valorising local resources; natural, urban, human and environmental. Eco-neighbourhoods were conceived as pilot operations of the "Plan for Sustainable Cities", launched by the Ministry of Environment, Développement durable et Aménagement du territoire, with the express desire of promoting avant-garde projects for sustainable cities, offering at the same time opportunities to start setting up production lines and also to start organising coordination.

In fact, as Cynia Emelianoff has stated, these new neighbourhoods have served as a proving ground for advanced solutions in the areas of "energy efficiency, the reduction of greenhouse gases, an intensification of the relations between nature and the city, of conciliation of urban density with environmental well-being, and for those which were conceived by their inhabitants, of common effort, sharing and cooperation", so far however they have created only symbolically important interventions rather than reaching the wide spread hopes of a better life within cities.

This is not the place to evaluate the success of this experience: Has it been a success? Are eco-neighbourhoods capable of satisfying overall demand for local housing or are they above all aimed at the higher social classes? Can sustainable city policy really be reduced to the making sample neighbourhoods into eco-neighbourhoods? Do their ideas regarding the concept of a city configure appreciable innovations over tradition? These are some of the questions the authors in this important edition of the ETW review, who are among the most authoritative protagonists of the experiments being carried out in France, will attempt to answer.

I wish only to observe that the entire French experience seems to be developing in open contrast with the search for high-tech ecology solutions. Claiming the complexity of an urban project, the eco-neighbourhoods involved in on-going experiments in a hundred or so French cities seem rather a search for mediation between environmental worries and the more comprehensive objectives of urban quality, projecting the themes of functionality, settlement morphology in the perspective of a new life styles which will be needed to bring about those changes that will carry us toward a sustainable world.

In this sense, strongly (perhaps too strongly) anchored to the roots of city planning and architecture, the French eco-neighbourhoods seem to us rather to be attempting to set up "culturalist city planning" which is trying to integrate the new ideas in sustainability with the traditional concept of urban quality. Results may seem debatable, but they certainly offer more opportunities for interesting reflection than those that are emerging from the Italian situation, where sustainability is still tackled only on the scale of single buildings and answers are excessively technological.

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