

DEFINITIONS

Ecodistrict:

An ecodistrict is an urban district designed according to sustainable development principles and aiming at minimizing its environmental impact. Consequently, it covers a wide range of environmental stakes through high building and planning standards.

Ecodistricts are part of a local sustainable development logic and can be integrated into a local Agenda 21. Their objective is to promote eco-civility locally by introducing new environmental behaviours. Ideally, the concept should not only be an urban planning/technological showcase, but also an efficient tool to change lifestyles (Mirenowicz, Emelianoff).

Pioneer and famous examples are Freiburg's Rieselfeld and Vauban ecodistricts, and London's Beddington Zero Energy Development (BedZED) district.

Sustainable city:

The phrase "sustainable city" designates an urban entity that has been designed according to the principles of sustainable development and ecological urban planning. Thus, a sustainable city needs to take into account social, economic and environmental aspects of urban planning for and with the inhabitants.

In Europe, the concept is materialized by several conferences and declarations, the most famous being the Aalborg Charter and the Leipzig Charter. Making or keeping a city sustainable implies more than mere ecological concerns and aims at integrating social impacts of ecological degradations. The concept calls for a transformation of production and consumption patterns and lifestyles (Emelianoff).

Ecodistrict does not necessarily go hand in hand with sustainable city: indeed, some ecodistricts can be built and put forward in a showcase perspective without being linked to a comprehensive local urban policy. In other cases, though, ecodistricts are specific visible actions integrated into an urban policy respecting sustainable development principles.

SHORT HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

- **19th century:** Development of hygienist urban planning
- **1933:** Athens Charter paving the way for modern urban planning
- **1990:** Green paper on urban environment at the request of Environment Commissioner Carlo Ripa Di Meana
- **1991:** The European Council officially approved the conclusions of the Green paper and the creation of an experts group on urban environment
- **1992:** Rio conference organized by the United Nations
- **1994:** 1st European conference of sustainable cities in Aalborg; attending local authorities signed the Aalborg Charter to promote sustainable urban development
- **1996:** 2nd European conference of European sustainable cities in Lisbon to translate the principles of the Aalborg Charter by setting out practical measures (Lisbon Action Plan); publication of the final report "Sustainable European cities" by the experts group on urban environment
- **1997:** "Urban audit" launched by the European Commission to assess and measure quality of life in European cities

- **1998-1999:** Complementing the general scope of the Aalborg Charter and the Lisbon Action Plan, 4 region-specific conferences were held for North Turku Conference 1998, East Sofia Conference 1998, South Sevilla Conference 1999 and West Den Haag Conference 1999 of Europe. Statements released from these conferences outlined the differing needs of each area.
- **2000:** 3rd European conference of sustainable cities in Hannover to assess progress towards achieving sustainable cities and towns
- **2004:** 4th European conference of sustainable cities resulting in the “Aalborg +10” declaration
- **2007:** The Leipzig charter on sustainable European cities enhanced the necessity of “integrated strategies and coordinated action”

From Athens to Aalborg: major evolutions in urban planning

<u>Athens Charter (1933)</u>	<u>Aalborg Charter (1994)</u>
Tabula rasa principle	Preservation of legacy
Architecture disconnected from the local context	Use existing buildings and enhance them ; integrate buildings into a multidimensional environment
International design	Architectural diversity
Zoning	Functional diversity and cross-cutting policies
Make circulation flow lighter Separation of circulations	Reduction of constrained mobility Re-conquest of public roads by all transport modes
Elite urban planning Geometry and rationalization of cities	Participatory urban planning Singularity of responses

Source: « Les villes européennes face au développement durable : une floraison d’initiatives sur fond de désengagement politique » Cyria Emelianoff

MAIN STAKES AND THEMES

The main stakes of ecodistricts are:

- Reducing the ecological imprint, which is a tool to compare human demand with Earth’s ecological capacity to regenerate. In this respect, housing and mobility are significant contributors to the footprint and must be taken into account to reverse current tendencies. Other environmental concerns are at stake, e.g. innovative waste management and recycling, high energy efficiency, minimization of water use etc.
- Reducing social and environmental inequalities, which are deeply connected in the various areas composing cities. In most deprived neighbourhoods, social vulnerability cannot be reduced to economic plight since it also encompasses urban problems (e.g. neglected neighbourhoods with less efficient public services, housing and public spaces in acute need for regeneration). Social sustainability requires not only to improve access to a quality environment of all population groups, but also to guarantee long-term social cohesion.
- Fostering local economic development in several ways. First, massive investments in eco-construction/renovation can boost the construction sector and develop competitive advantages in the field. Also, the conception of ecodistricts calls for a reflection on how money is spent and how the creation of economic activities can be put at the service of human needs. For instance, the implementation of shops, cultural activities and businesses in the same district can generate fruitful economic results.

In short, ecodistricts represent a fundamental cultural change since the environment is no more dissociated from urban planning projects or social-economic orientations of cities. This vision relies on a long-term development perspective focused on the local scale but conceived through a cross-cutting approach.

Most ecodistricts aim at:

- Reducing energy consumption and the improvement of energy efficiency (e.g. zero-energy building)
- Improving public transport system and an increase in pedestrian spaces
- Minimizing water use and waste production
- Improving air and water quality
- Increasing visual attractiveness and surface dedicated to green spaces
- Integrating inhabitants in the planning process through a good governance principle
- Fostering social and generational diversity
- Fostering functional diversity

LIMITS

- First of all, no clear definition of sustainable cities exists for the time being; as a consequence, many cities put forward their supposedly “sustainable” character without achieving really significant targets. The absence of binding tools makes sustainable development a widespread and consensual but little operative discourse in practical terms.

- Also, many cities consider sustainable development as a territorial marketing argument likely to increase their competitive advantages. Improving quality of life is often perceived as a way to enhance and rebrand the image of cities, but critics point out that ecodistricts remain very specific actions that do not suffice to meet sustainability needs (the renovation of already existing building constitutes the most important part of the issue). A stronger commitment is needed to respond to current challenges, and it is most of the time lacking.

- Finally, ecodistricts tend to focus mainly on the environmental dimension of sustainable development, which is the most consensual and visible one. Social and economic measures are thus less important, both quantitatively and qualitatively. For instance, how to guarantee the presence of lower-income classes in state-of-the-art housing? How to make sure that ecodistricts do not constitute new gated communities designed for high-income classes? Similarly, involving inhabitants is at the core of the concept, but what is their effective input in final planning decisions? Indeed, there is a huge difference between mere information and active participation in the planning process; inhabitants rarely have their say in final decisions.

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"Ecoquartiers et urbanisme durable", in *URBIA* n°4 June 2007

Useful links

Les Ateliers de maîtrise d'œuvre urbaine de Cergy-Pontoise
<http://www.ateliers.org/>

ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability
<http://www.iclei.org/>

IDDRI – Institut du développement durable et des relations internationales – Urban Fabric
<http://www.iddri.org/Themes/Urban-Fabric/>

European Commission, DG REGIO – Urban Development
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/themes/urban/index_en.htm

Metropolis International Institute

<http://www.metropolis.org/metropolis/en/node/15>

UN-Habitat

<http://www.unhabitat.org/categories.asp?catid=10>

European Urban Knowledge Network

<http://www.eukn.org/eukn/>

Quotations – Food for thought¹

Sustainable Communities:

Pierre Calame : « "Penser localement pour agir globalement" (...) comme les crises du modèle actuel de développement sont des crises de relations, c'est à partir des territoires, là où l'on peut comprendre et repenser ces relations, que peuvent s'inventer des modèles de développement durable. (...) C'est en se reliant entre elles, dans des réseaux internationaux de réflexion et d'action ; c'est en confrontant leurs réponses innovantes aux défis de la société d'aujourd'hui que les villes et les territoires sont en mesure de contribuer à répondre aux défis du monde contemporain. »

J. Mirenowicz, La Revue Durable, n°28 : « L'écoquartier (...) à la fois vitrine et symbole d'une évolution positive en profondeur de la société, (...) est l'expression tangible d'une politique intelligente de la ville et, en même temps, une faire-valoir pour ses promoteurs »

Cyria Emelianoff : « L'enjeu {des écoquartiers} est de réfléchir à la manière d'encourager des modes de vie durables, sans se contenter d'une approche architecturale. L'écoquartier n'est pas une question d'habitable, de coque, mais au contraire, il peut servir de levier à un changement de mode de vie, qui lui-même engage une autre perception des solidarités. Il reflète aussi un changement culturel profond »

Sustainable Cities :

Pierre Calame : « Une grande agglomération moderne, en France par exemple, connaît infiniment moins bien le système de relations en son sein et avec le monde extérieur que ne le connaissait il y a mille ans un village chinois. (...) comme tout se convertit en valeur monétaire et tout s'échange sur un marché devenu mondial, la valeur monétaire devient la mesure de toute chose et la connaissance des relations concrètes s'estompe. Une ville française, par exemple, connaît mal ses consommations d'énergie, connaît mal les flux d'échange de biens et de services avec l'extérieur, connaît mal les flux d'échange ou la circulation des savoirs au sein de son propre territoire. »

Pierre Calame : « La gestion publique loin de valoriser les relations contribue à les ignorer et les faire disparaître. Cette segmentation s'observe sur trois plans :

- la séparation entre les niveaux de gouvernance (...)
- la séparation entre domaines de la gestion locale (...)
- la séparation entre la gestion publique et le reste de la société (...). »

Antonio Da Cunha : « L'urbanisme durable exprime une prise de conscience des risques sociaux et environnementaux qui pèsent sur l'espace urbain. (...) L'urbanisme durable constitue aujourd'hui un champ nécessitant de confronter et croiser les disciplines. (...) Sa mise en œuvre nous engage à concevoir des projets urbains novateurs, décliné et articulés aux différentes échelles, du quartier à l'agglomération »

Cyria Emelianoff : « La notion de ville durable est plus large que celle de ville écologique, elle pense les impacts sociaux des dégradations écologiques et engage une transformation des modes de production, de consommation et de vie. Elle appelle la construction d'un vivre ensemble sur terre. »

« (...) une nouvelle génération de politiques urbaines, moins sectorielles, qui tentent d'intégrer les impacts du

¹ Quotations are in their original French version but they will be translated later.

développement sur l'environnement à court, moyen et long terme, compris dans une dimension écologique et sociale (l'environnement quotidien). »

« (...) le refus de faire appel à des outils contraignants, que ce soit en termes de planification, de réglementation ou de fiscalité, tend à en faire {du développement durable} un discours consensuel mais très peu opératoire. »

« Beaucoup considèrent le développement durable comme un argument de marketing territorial, susceptible d'accroître l'avantage compétitif d'une collectivité. L'amélioration de la qualité de vie valorise l'image et le rayonnement de la ville, participant d'un verdissement de bonne augure, mais n'est pas à la mesure des enjeux. Les approches plus exigeantes reposent presque toujours sur l'engagement de quelques personnes au sein de l'administration publique, ou du monde associatif. »