



Both images: Reinhard Henke

A change in culture

Above and right: A network of scenic trails have been developed along the HoheStraße, Frankfurt, following the historic trade route between Frankfurt and Leipzig. This ancient high road, so important to the city's trade in the middle ages, had been largely forgotten until a partnership project, under SAUL, transformed it into a popular cycle and pedestrian route, with a series of built-in rest stations and features

A CHILL EAST wind of economic change is blowing across north west Europe. Coming all the way from China and the Indian sub-continent, we are seeing its many reverberations throughout the city-regions that make up the economic powerhouse of the European Union (EU): in rising unemployment levels in countries like Germany and France that are used to a high standard of living; in fears about immigration; in pressures for political change, and in the backlash against a new EU constitution.

As in some parts of the UK, globally uncompetitive labour markets across Europe are leading to high rates of unemployment and a breakdown in social cohesion, undermining existing planning systems. If Europe is to hold its own against external global competition from a cocktail of rapid growth, low labour costs, available land and often indifferent environmental standards, it will have to invest in

its strengths – and these include the diversity of its populations and the quality of its environment.

EU Governments have recently revisited the Lisbon Agenda (originally launched in 2000 as a way in which to achieve the goal of becoming 'the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world' by 2010), emphasising jobs and economic development, and recognising that Europe's citizens hold the key to making that strategy work. But it is surprising how little recognition there is, so far, of the role spatial planning will have to play. Have these Governments forgotten they signed the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) in 1999, precisely because it creates a framework for spatial (rather than just land-use) planning in which economic growth, environmental quality and social cohesion are integrated in sustainable development?

THE UK IS ON ITS WAY TO MAKING SOME FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES IN PLANNING CULTURE, BUT EUROPE AS A WHOLE NEEDS TO FOLLOW SUIT EXPLAINS **CLIVE FOX** OF GROUNDWORK UK

Towards a new planning culture

Economic restructuring has brought far-reaching physical change to metropolitan regions over recent decades, with dramatic impacts on traditional urban landscapes. Just at the point when its potential benefits to high-density living, and citizens' well-being, health and social cohesion are most needed, open space is facing increasing pressure from housing growth and new commerce.

Globalisation is bringing not just economic consequences, but also rapid social change. Open labour markets and population movements mean greater diversity of societies; and,

within cultures, the age gap creates different leisure and recreational interests. People need open spaces, for example, for different reasons from previous generations. As land-use requirements evolve, so must the design and management of space.

Only eight per cent of UK land is urbanised, but the great majority of our population lives in urban areas, and it is increasingly recognised that traditional systems of land-use planning are too complex, hierarchical, and detached from citizens to keep pace with these social changes, or to respond flexibly and quickly to new priorities. Few really expected London to win the 2012 Olympics until it happened, but now time is short to make all the necessary planning decisions, in ways that the public will support. The answer lies in a fundamental change in planning culture.

not. Not surprisingly, it demands new ways of working and new skills from planners.

The UK leads

Among the economically powerful nations of north west Europe, the UK is in the vanguard of this process of change. The Government's recent radical reform of the planning system has embraced the ESDP concept of spatial planning at regional and local levels, emphasising that communities and local stakeholders must be engaged from the bottom up to achieve lasting development.

Significantly, the overarching planning guidance, Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 1, is called *Delivering Sustainable Development*. PPS 11 on regional spatial strategies brings to bear a multi-faceted approach by harnessing a range

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Spatial planning offers a move away from the regulation and control imposed in traditional land-use planning. It is an interdisciplinary way of combining spatial vision and social objectives, with sustainability at its core. It seeks to achieve a balance between our need for new development with conserving what we value about our environment in a way that plan-based mechanisms could

of statutory and non-governmental agencies including health, transport and environment, while PPS 12 on Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) seeks innovative approaches to involving community leaders in LDFs.

Although too early to judge how this new emphasis on an inclusive process will deliver in practice, an instructive demonstration model is already in place at the regional level. The London

THE SAUL APPROACH

In recognition of the changing planning culture, ‘Sustainable and Accessible Urban Landscapes’ (SAUL) is a transnational partnership project part-funded by the European Union’s Interreg III B programme for north west Europe. Through transnational spatial development initiatives, which promote sustainable development, the EU programme encourages closer cooperation and integration in north west Europe (see also GP13, ‘Research in union’, page 22).

Led by Groundwork London, partners, including the Greater London Authority, Amsterdam, Frankfurt Rhein-Main, Luxembourg, Saarland and the Rhein-Ruhr, are working together to address the vital role that socially inclusive open spaces play in the sustainable development of metropolitan regions. Key themes of ‘regional identity’, ‘planning through partnerships’ and ‘the learning region’ lead the enquiry into the new planning culture.

SAUL is seeking practical solutions to today’s challenges of balanced spatial development through transnational working, both in terms of research and practical projects. All apply the principles of cooperative spatial planning, testing and demonstrating methods and processes for involving local people in planning for land use.

The current SAUL project will conclude with a final conference in spring 2006, where good practice guidance on planning through transnational partnerships for new urban landscapes will be published for dissemination throughout Europe.

Visit: www.saulproject.net

Mayor’s Spatial Development Strategy – better known as the London Plan – reflects the principles of the ESDP. It was adopted in 2003 after a genuinely inclusive process that achieved remarkably broad consensus for a 15- to 20-year vision for a sustainable world city. Its first content review process begins later this year, demonstrating the potential flexibility of holistic planning systems designed to evolve with changing needs.

In the light of these examples of good practice in the UK, it would seem odd if the Government did not yet recognise the significance of its own brave step into spatial planning, for the larger challenges now faced by a Europe that needs to deploy the same principles to plan for global competition. Holding the EU Presidency, as the UK does at present, seems a good time to join up the lessons we are learning at home with the needs of future Europe. ■



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