

## **Harmonization of Policies and Training Systems in Europe for Urban Development – The Experience of LUDA Project**

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The work developed in LUDA's project has clearly showed that, in a European economic and cultural diversified frame, crossed by recent and not so recent historical challenging processes, the issues of the urban affairs certainly have different layouts, but, as a matter of fact, we can assume that in their essence they are common to all regions.

Identifying a set of common problems is not difficult: the Luda's; the disadjustment between people and goods mobility, the difficult articulation between space and development sustainability the fragile features of the urban space in its complexity, the responsible social management of current migrations etc.

But despite all these shared things, the truth is that it is still very difficult to come to a common understanding about different things, be it the most elementary one or be it the most complex one.

- Concepts
- Aims/targets
- Procedures
- Sample analysis grids
- Indicators (Definition / content or lexical items)
- Legal framework for activities of spatial development, urban planning
- Competencies held by the actors in these processes
- School, college and throughout life education in Urban studies
- Level of dependence from Architecture, Geography and Law due to the infancy of the Urban studies as a subject.

These are examples, which clearly show the necessity of establishing a common language in order to improve collaboration and allow a shared understanding of attitudes, and the definition of targets as well.

This process of harmonization is obviously complex and applies to a wide range of areas:

- At the laws level
- At the lexical level
- At the level of definition of aims
- At the tools level
- At training and professional accreditation level

Reflections on this last issue have been and still are in the centre of the concerns of several international organizations such as:

ISOCARP: International Society of City and Regional Planners, ECTP: European Council of Town Planners, AESOP: Association of European Schools of Planning, APERAU:

Association pour la Promotion de l' Enseignement de la Recherche en Aménagement et Urbanisme. Also national organizations: RTPI : Royal Town Planning Institute, SFU: Société Française des Urbanistes and L'Office professionnel de qualification des urbanistes (OPQU), IPI: Irish Planning Institute (Ireland), SRL: Vereinigung für Stadt - Regional – und Landesplanung, INU: Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica (Italy) and the Associazione Nazionale degli Urbanisti e dei Pianificatori Territoriali e Ambientali, AUP: Association of Portuguese Planners and the APROURB Professional Association of Portuguese Urban Planners.

The main common characteristic to all these organizations is the lack of an international understanding basis with **objective** implications at the training and professional accreditation level. There are several countries where the rules are very clear for everybody: students, employers and official authorities. But there are also many European countries where chaos shows up in a way or another.

There are four different areas where European harmonization seems more urgent than ever.

- Basis harmonization of Curricula at the BA level in Urban Studies
- Harmonization of the Accreditation Procedures
- Harmonization of the related professions (architecture, landscape design, geography, civil engineering, law). What place they should occupy within the scope of spatial and urban development, based on the needs of the pluri and transdisciplinarity, without internal submission to the oldest or most powerful lobbies.
- Actual harmonization of the mobility of professionals, which to a great extent goes beyond the reform of education systems (Bologna Declaration).

Not because they are the most important, but in order to give you examples, let me explain two of them, which, I believe, are two basic harmonization items.

### **Harmonization of the training plans**

Nowadays any sort of education (any level or scientific area) is enough to create a professional in Urban studies. As we recognize in a document from the USA's Planning Accreditation Board, which is perfectly sustained for most of the European countries, **“it is not necessary to have a BA/BS in Planning to do graduate work in planning.** Some planners are educated first in the social sciences like public administration, sociology, economics, geography, or government; others are trained first in the design professions like architecture, urban design, and landscape architecture. Still others have their undergraduate degree in professions such as public health, social work, nursing, or engineering. Many people with undergraduate degree in the Arts or Humanities (English, Art, History) also choose to pursue a graduate planning degree. Some people use the new skills they acquire in graduate school to expand the emphasis of their undergraduate degree while others develop new approaches. For example, those with economics training may become economic development planners while those with degrees in biology or chemistry may choose to become environmental planners. But it is not unusual for someone trained at the undergraduate level as an architect to become a social policy planner or for someone with a BS in Nursing to become a housing planner!”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> **Criteria and Procedures of the Planning Accreditation Program**, May 2001, Planning Accreditation Board, website: [www.netins.net/showcase/pag\\_fi66](http://www.netins.net/showcase/pag_fi66)

That is to say, the chaos is completely settled in!

It is certainly not normal that such complex intervention fields, urban affairs, are not based on a solid common training basis and in general appears as a complement to the other training areas.

Fortunately, for us obviously, areas with the highest interdisciplinarity such as Medicine (Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Sociology and others) acts in a more consistent way and assumes its own theoretical and practical maturity).

I think it is time to implement a training basis framework like other scientific/professional areas have (Medicine, Geography, Architecture) which is only accessible to people who have already had at least three or four years of basic and specific training.

What kind of social minority is attached to Urban studies, which has been preventing a full development and obligatory training in these areas?

### **The harmonization of criteria for accreditation**

A European accreditation program assuring professional access with clear and transparent rules in benefit of everyone would have the following objectives:

- Provide assurances to prospective students, employers, and the public at-large regarding the basic quality of accredited programs;
- Provide schools with an incentive for careful and thorough self-examination, and with constructive recommendations for improvement;
- Provide schools with information on trends and innovations in planning education, using knowledge gained through the ongoing accreditation review process;
- Assist planning faculty and administrators in achieving institutional support for their programs;
- Provide a vehicle for engaging practitioners and academicians in joint and ongoing deliberations regarding the roles, content, and effectiveness of planning education;<sup>2</sup>

### **A new awareness of urban affairs in Europe**

Looking at these problems in the frame of a **new awareness of urban affairs in Europe**, Michael Barnier, as Member of the European Commission responsible for the Regional Policy and Reform of the Institutions said recently: “Towns and cities in Europe present a paradox – be aware that half the population live in urban areas with more than 50,000 inhabitants. On the one hand, they are the motors of growth in an increasingly global economy, concentrating wealth, knowledge and technical capacity. They are also centres for the provision of public services, such as education, healthcare and transportation. At the same time, however, many of the worst problems society faces today are concentrated in urban areas, including economic and social exclusion, degradation of the natural and built environment, congestion, crime, intolerance and racism, and loss of local identity.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> **Criteria and Procedures of the Planning Accreditation Program**, MAY 2001, Planning Accreditation Board, website: [www.netins.net/showcase/pab\\_fi66](http://www.netins.net/showcase/pab_fi66) )

<sup>3</sup> *Directorate General – Regional Policy, Europe’s cities, the Structural Funds and the URBAN Community Initiative Partnership with the Cities, 2003*

And at the beginning of the very important document released in 1999 “European Spatial Development Perspective, Towards Balanced and Sustainable Development of the Territory of the European Union”, there was already the key idea of “**Territory**”: a **New Dimension of European Policy**”.

We know that the European Union urban policy has been laid down in several documents, particularly in Commission Communications “**Towards an Urban Agenda in the European Union**” (1997) and “**Urban Sustainable Development in the EU: a Framework for Action**” (1998). These documents mainly focus on four policy aims: strengthening economic prosperity and employment in towns and cities; promoting equality, social inclusion and regeneration in urban areas; protecting and improving the urban environment: towards local and global sustainability; contributing to good urban governance and local empowerment.

But in the meantime, the Urban affairs are still distributed or, better said, spread among the different EU Institutions: European Commission, Directorates, Advisory bodies such as the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions with their own commissions (Territorial Cohesion Policy, Sustainable Development, Culture and Education, Economic and Social Policy) and in many of the 15 European Agencies.

The issue of programs focused on spatial development, environment and support to scientific research has its origin in the most different activity sectors in the EU and are supported by funds from most different places.

Thus, for sensible reasons, it was obviously important to create a co-ordination body in the EU structures where the Ariadne’s thread of the **European Urban affairs policy** could be located.

It is difficult to understand why the urban affairs are not centralized in a general directorate like the Fisheries, Environment, Agriculture, Energy and Transportation.

**And we believe that the challenges of Urban Affairs have at least the same strategic dimensions, for the future of Europe.**

Such procedure is certainly not the responsibility of our LUDA’s project. But it may be of our competency prepare a guiding document expressing our contribution to the creation of a European body affected to the urban affairs where, in the respect of Europe’s cultural diversity, consistent forward harmonization steps could be made in the matters of the **European Urban affairs policy**.

The harmonization of national politics, programs, tools, aims, education and professional skills, shared information as well as shared professionals are more than ever necessary for all this process.

We believe that this is closer in a short period, with or without our contribution!

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