

EUROPAN SUSTAINABLE CITIES: FROM VISION TO REALITY

Caisse de Depots – Europartenaires
Committee of the Regions – *Brussels January 26, 2009*

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When in 1993 I was elected for the first time Mayor of Torino, the city was facing the crisis of the manufacturing industry and seemed on the way of an irreversible decline. The “*one-company town model*” definitely belonged to the past and the community was challenged with the task of reinventing a future. A vision was needed first, and all the social actors were urged by the administration to approach the problems in a long term perspective. *Sustainability* became immediately the paradigm of our effort, but the complexity of the urban context urged us to improve the comprehension of what sustainability means for a City Government.

One well known definition comes from the Brundtland Commission (1983): a sustainable development “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. I like very much to emphasize the concept of **Sustainable Communities** because I believe that the human patrimony of values and pride in affiliation is the fuel for the engine of the sustainable development. As a consequence I like very much an interpretation of a **Sustainable City as a place where it is worth while to grow our children**. Children - and in general all fragile persons – are a good benchmark to measure the demand for sustainability!

Trying to elaborate the concept of Sustainable Communities, it was said that they have a strong sense of place, they have a vision shared and actively promoted, they dare to be innovative, they value healthy ecosystems, they seek a locally based economy, they promote mixed partnerships, show a pervasive volunteer spirit, have strategies involving the whole community and not only parts of it, and so and so on...

This is the vision and like all visions it looks like a dream far from reality. We know very well that this is not the picture of a real Community, especially when it is facing the depression of a declining city (just to recall reality, Torino lost in ten years around fifty thousand jobs in the car industry!).

The challenge for a Mayor – as the Leader of a working team – is that of identifying suitable tools to trigger in a credible way the process of change in the directions identified for and with his Community.

My purpose here is to sketch in a concise way the key actions that were pursued in the two terms (eight years) of my administration. I will focus on six items that I shall briefly comment.

1. The strategic Plan.

Torino was the first city in Italy to adopt this **governance tool**. A wide bottom-up process was stimulated promoting the participation of the main actors of the whole community. The two-year debate that produced the Plan involved local figures from all walks of life, drawing on their expertise to help formulate it. It soldered a strong network of 57 leading individuals, committed to implementing the resulting Plan collaboratively, using both their own expertise and the resources to which they had access. The Plan identified **six main strategic objectives in the frame of a 10-year “road-map”** for the city’s development. These lines guided henceforth the main actions of the Administration.

2. The New Urban Masterplan.

Torino had not had a new Urban Masterplan for over 45 years. The new administration saw the Masterplan as a way of achieving the physical regeneration of the city by **re-zoning industrial land and thus encouraging private developers to revitalize these areas**, within the clear guidelines set by the city for land use. Through the new Urban Masterplan the municipality set out a vision for the physical re-configuration of the fragmented industrial city which had developed around the Fiat factories. The twin goals of the city’s regeneration would be improving transport access, and recycling centrally-located brownfields for new post-industrial uses.

3. The Plan for Marginal Neighbourhoods

There was a growing recognition in the city of the need to address Torino’s social problems, concentrated in dilapidated residential neighbourhoods across the city, as part of the overall recovery effort. Accompanying this was an awareness that the major neighbourhood renewal funding bodies (the EU and national government) were increasingly allocating funding on a competitive-bid basis. The plan proposed a **bottom-up model** by which residents’ day-to-day experiences are the starting-point for the development of urban renewal policies. Solutions are then formulated to address that neighbourhood’ social, economic and physical problems as perceived by the residents, and are implemented by a multidisciplinary team of civil servants, working in partnership with residents (**integrated approach**). To this purpose we took advantage from the participation to the network “**Quartier en crise**” and to the EU initiative **URBAN**.

4. The Local Agenda 21

It was signed in the wider frame of the Province of Torino and was the guideline for all the actions for the environment policies.

5. The Urban Mobility Plan

It is useless to spend words to emphasize how critical is the mobility demand in urban areas. Our Plan was aimed to prioritize – in the city of cars! – public transportation and gradually changing the culture of the new generations. The Plan led us in 2000 to open the construction site of the new underground of the city whose first trunk was opened just before the Olympic Games in December 2005 according to schedule.

6. The Olympic Winter Games (Torino 2006)

The decision to bid was taken with the awareness that they might act as a **catalyst in the transition of the city toward the post-industrial century**. To enhance and legitimate the transformation process of the city it was necessary to promote its **international image**. The Games were “used” to this purpose, thus leaving an irreversible legacy, both tangible and intangible. Huge investments in a short period of time and the widely recognized success of the event made the miracle: the Olympic Games were for the Community the **turning point** from the depression of the late 90’s to a new pride in affiliation.

To conclude my contribution let me quickly mention what are some of the present issues for my city. The **structural transition seems rather consolidated** and thus irreversible, but not yet completed. Two main challenges are on the agenda of my successor, Sergio Chiamparino: the first is the global crisis that also reopened the question on the future of Fiat which, in spite of the strong recent recovery, faces the problem of new alliances with other partners; the second is the necessary integration of Torino in an **urban region** with Milano and Genova to become together a competitive area in Southern Europe. This second objective is – in my view – the effective approach for the vision of all contemporary cities: to be part of polycentric regional areas whose critical task is to supply efficient physical and virtual connections and insure the mobility of persons and knowledge, of course in a sustainable way.

Suggested reading:

A.Winkler “Torino City Report”- *Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE)*
Research Centre of the London School of Economics (www.lse.ac.uk)