

Urban Planning and Sustainability: a common challenge for the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP)

Appeal to the Universities for the development of Teaching and Research in the areas of Urban Planning in the CPLP countries

Work document prepared at the Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias in its role as Consulting Observer attributed by the Council of Ministers of the CPLP gathered in Bissau for the 11th General Meeting on 16. and 17. July, 2006.

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Work group coordinated by:
Prof. Mário Moutinho, ULHT – Lisbon
Prof. Luiz António de Souza UNEB – Salvador

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Appeal to the Universities to develop Higher Education and Research in the areas of Urban Planning in the CPLP countries

The Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias, in its role as Consulting Observer attributed by the Council of Ministers of the CPLP gathered in Bissau for the 11th General Meeting on 16. and 17. July, 2006, hereby proposes to the CPLP that it should urge the Universities of the Community countries to foster the creation of specific training in the area of Urban Planning as a way of providing these countries with qualified human resources to take action in this area with a view to solving the urban planning problems that concern all Portuguese-speaking cities. To this end, it bases this request on the following document, hereby submitted for appreciation.

Urban planning and sustainability – a common challenge for the CPLP countries

Current situation

The importance of cities in the contemporary world is a decisive fact for the future of Humankind. The United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs estimates that in the year 2030 about 60.8% of the world population will reside in urban areas,

whereas in the CPLP countries this figure will exceed 80%. Nowadays, these worrying figures are already 48.7% for CPLP and 76.1% for the world.

In the space of Portuguese-speaking countries, with the specificities of their different economic and social characters, cities already gather most of the population, following a trajectory that results from the dynamics of their own growth, the migrations of the rural world – whether as a result of recent wars or of the ruthlessness of the agricultural modernization process – and the hope that the idea of the city represents for many.

Most of the Lusophone cities, rich in tangible and intangible cultural heritage, are characterized by deep asymmetries, fostered also by growing environmental degradation, and by the lack of technical and social infrastructures, properly designed and managed.

The needs

The urban planning decision for sustainability is multidisciplinary in its nature (as is true of other scientific and professional fields) and is increasingly based on an integrating vision of urban issues, where the technical, economic and sociological components are articulated.

In this sense, the urban planning decision in its whole refers to the dynamics of management, qualification and transformation of the city, and is therefore distinct from the intervention of architecture or civil engineering. In fact, these latter areas are identified with the knowledge and professional practice for the architectural creation and edification, as well as with the techniques of civil construction, and of the calculation and technical implementation of structures and infrastructures.

This integrating vision increasingly demands more specific competences in the area of urban planning which facilitate inter-professional work in today's world characterised by multiple globalization processes. Urban planning in general has been introducing and consequently recognising new fields of knowledge and practice, increasingly more profound and complex.

The need to promote in a sustainable manner, the transformation and management of cities is a challenge that draws, on the one hand, on the duly grounded political orientations and, on the other, on the possibility that properly qualified human resources will intervene in the process.

The days when urban planning could merely be a complement of other professions are long gone.

In fact, the urbanization process which has been affecting the planet on a global scale in particular for the last thirty or so years, has given rise to new and diversified problems of growing importance, for which the traditional areas of education (Architecture, Engineering and Geography) have been unable to provide the necessary scientific, technical and professional response, in particular in the Portuguese-speaking countries. The result of this course of action is plain to see and partly explains the condition the large majority of Lusophone cities find themselves in nowadays: poverty, exclusion and urban chaos.

Naturally, there cannot be qualified work without qualified training.

In this context, the challenge faced by Higher Education institutions of Portuguese-Speaking countries at the beginning of the 21st century is to provide CPLP countries with technical staff educated in the modern understanding of the place and function that Urban Planning holds in the sustainable development of cities and societies.

Regardless of how serious the problems faced by Lusophone cities are, it is always time to start an urban process involving true planning, which is technically supported and defined in a participated way, aiming, on the one hand, to give an urgent solution to the present problems, which grow incessantly, and on the other to qualify, rehabilitate and transform cities, in articulation with sustainable land use planning, which will ensure the intelligent management of natural resources.

A new context for the teaching of Urban Planning

The growing consolidation of the Lusophone Space for Higher Education and its inevitable articulation with the reforms deriving from the application and/or adaptation of the Bologna Declaration, the adoption of which already surpasses the European space, demand the need to harmonize education as a way of ensuring the circulation of knowledge and professionals, as well as international cooperation.

The ongoing reforms introduced within the context of the Bologna process are a unique opportunity to create a platform of European and extra-European understanding for the teaching of Urban Planning. This platform can be translated into a general 1st cycle in Urban Planning, with a natural development in the multiple areas of specialization of contemporary Urban Planning at the level of the 2nd and 3rd cycles (BA, MA and PhD, generically equivalent to 3+2+3).

In this context, the best way to promote the teaching of and research into Urban Planning is certainly to adopt a clear study path (both in contents and model) based on the recognition of the epistemological majority and the social need that is imperative in Urban Planning.

Bases for raising universities' awareness:

It is the task of universities in the exercise of their scientific autonomy to create the study programmes they consider most adequate to each country's or region's realities. In so doing they should bear in mind the following situations:

1. The recognition of the guiding documents issued by international organisations in the specific field of Urban Planning which identify, with due flexibility, the syllabuses that should uphold not only the full education in Urban Planning, but also the exercise of the profession of the Urban Planner.
2. Recognition of the guiding documents issued by international organisations gathering hundreds of Universities and Urban Planning departments that aim to develop teaching and research in the area of Urban Planning.

3. Recognition of the guidelines on these matters drawn up by the various sectors of the United Nations (UN) (UNEP, PNUD, UN-Habitat), as well as by the regional organisations of the European Union, of Mercosul and of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) regarding the sustainability of the planet, human development, urban planning and city policies.

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