



## TOWARDS A EUROPEAN CITY MODEL?

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Let's examine the aforementioned characteristics more. It is difficult to speak of a standard European model of the city if we take into account the diversity of the continent's cities, especially in terms of their respective traditions, whether Anglo-Saxon, Central European, Nordic or Mediterranean. Nonetheless, we can extract a set of common characteristics that are present in all these cities, and which define a similar way of understanding the city. The normative European city is a dense, compact area where a host of various activities occur in the same place and where there are also people from a substantial mix of social backgrounds. Its public areas are places of peaceful, enriching co-existence. Its residents' mobility is not entirely dependant on cars and public transport plays a major role. closely. We are talking about cities that are:

- Compact: grouped around a core and rather than sprawling like American cities, thereby preserving the integrity and coherence of their open spaces;
- Suitably dense: favouring mobility on foot or by public transport, bringing services closer, and avoiding an excessive level of green field development;
- Used for many purposes in the same area: combining residence, work and leisure to create an urban lifestyle that is diverse and complex;
- Home to people from diverse backgrounds: reducing the tendency towards ghettos caused by income, origin or race, thus encouraging better levels of social integration;
- Based on public spaces: these act as integrating platforms for various activities and for peaceful co-existence of different social groups;
- Places where public transport dominates: the pressure of private cars is limited.

These features are interdependent. Public transport needs a high concentration of people, and public areas also call for a variety of uses. All of this shapes the city. This form of city construction originated in part from

the city's maturity and size when the industrial revolution began and when private vehicles first made their appearance. It was a city accustomed to compact, high density lifestyles; either within city walls or within surrounding districts. Activities were mixed and everything took place in the areas marked out by streets or public squares. This tradition continued at the advent of the industrial revolution, when homes lay cheek-by-jowl with factories. At the start of the 20th Century, economic activity became more specialised, especially in industry and transport. The demand for quality housing and improved living conditions in the city prompted public health officials and modern architects to try and regenerate the city. Such regeneration, however, was often carried out with considerable respect to the existing city fabric, and zoning redirected new economic and residential uses towards the suburbs. Consequently, the compactness of the core was preserved. However, the city witnessed spatial segregation of activities and sometimes a reduction of densities in the new growth areas. The other major factor behind the transformation of cities in the 20th Century was the private vehicle, which offered the appeals of freedom and efficiency. New growth areas in European cities were built around car use. However, the old city centre was ill-equipped for this new traffic. Consequently it encountered major problems when trying to make cars the universal means of transport as American cities had done. Due to the compactness and density of European cities, public transport had to play a vital role to ensure the city's function.

The original city, which still exists, is now the heart of this new European city, thanks to its capacity to transform itself, to integrate economic and social changes and, at times, to rebuild what war had thoroughly destroyed. This is a complicated, yet necessary, internal transformation, and public authorities have been highly involved in the process. This can be seen with the remodelling of the old Paris by Haussmann or the opening of the Via Laietana in Barcelona, for example. Of course, we cannot say that all European cities are true to these characteristics. In many cases they show opposite trends, especially when they have undergone expansion and transformation in the

latter half of the 20th Century. We can mention countless examples of this. Other cities are paradigms of this European model and yet, combine compactness with dispersion, as is the case of the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona. Why is this so?

Social segregation and specialisation in production are spontaneous trends brought about by individuals, groups and sectors with a view to improving efficiency. This gives rise to spatial segregation which is supported by people simply expecting the car to solve all their mobility problems. In the long run, this zoned approach to the city, which for a certain time was useful for production, generally brings about strong restrictions to a city's economic and social efficiency. Accordingly, we must seek different models of organisation. As we enter the 21st Century, how are the internationalisation of socio-economic relations and the growth of the knowledge economy influencing the European city? Industrial manufacturing activity is losing its specific weight in the economy, particularly in Europe and the rest of the developed world. This is due both to the relocation of production to other places and to the declining use of human labour in the manufacturing process. Classic industrial specialisation will no longer play a major part in shaping the city, but creative synergy in all spheres of services and production activity requiring high levels of knowledge, will find a better setting in this complex but not necessarily standardised city. In this sense, we may say that the characteristic traits of the European city are efficient in terms of advanced economic development. From the standpoint of positive co-existence in the city, experience shows that solutions which create ghettos, while apparently straightforward and reassuring in the short term, may sow the seeds of far-reaching conflicts, whereas integrating solutions, although more complicated, better contribute to establishing and enriching long-term co-existence. Lastly, it should be pointed out that the compact, integrated city is friendlier to its surroundings, offering coherence and diversity and environmental benefits (conservation of energy, water, air).

Nevertheless, it is necessary to avoid the unconsidered and standardised repetition of these characteristics. We must not forget that some of the features we now value such as density, without quality urban design and with a mix of incompatible uses for example, have led in the past to situations of deep crisis in the city and could do so again in the future. We therefore need to "reinvent" older European cities on the basis of their experiences of urban transformation. Their continuing capacity for transformation, by preserving their assets and at the

same time rectifying failures, will once again make it possible to rebuild cities that can look to the future with optimism.

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