

Land use management for sustainable European cities

>> Interview with Brigitte Bariol, Director of EPURES, Saint-Etienne, on the 4. March 2010

Interview



Brigitte Bariol, Director of EPURES, Saint-Etienne

Mrs Bariol, could you describe in 20 words your Local Action Plan for the Region of Saint-Etienne?

A Plan to give to Saint-Etienne Metropole the tools and resources to be able to elaborate and put into action a transversal land use strategy to serve the agglomeration project.

What are the reasons for this LAP and which problems have been identified from the beginning?

Well, today, there is no land use strategy, rather more a land use action on a logic of projects with a sectoral, step by step and short term

oriented initiatives. The transversality in the case of land use action is inexistent, which means that each service develops its own tools and methods. Furthermore, there is no mid-term strategy for anticipation and land use control. Proposals are dealing with consolidate an operational action in the short term, exactly on a political mandate time, and then build the anticipation tools for land control, preparing a land use action in the long term.

On the level of the agglomeration project, after the impact of big infrastructure and equipment projects, which mobilized in the past a huge land use action, it is now time to ask how to think the future without big concrete operations in the short term; also Saint-Etienne constituted in the past an interesting land portfolio, for what it wish to have a more strategic vision. There were already some projects in the south of Loire region, which pointed out un certain number of characteristics of the urban territory, such as urban sprawl, urban consumption: strong challenges which Saint-Etienne Metropole should today inform sensibly the municipalities members of the agglomeration. There is a huge challenge of recycling of urban brownfields in Saint-Etienne.

This challenges, did you identified already in the past?

We identified this challenge already long time ago; this urban and industrial recovery is a project, a political policy of public actors since 30 years.

What was your idea to integrate this approach in a PLH (Plan Local d'Habitat – Housing Local Plan)? And what about the land use chapter of the SCOT?

We are in a more operational approach, there is no plan to develop a land use chapter to the SCOT.

The objectives of the PAL are therefore to elaborate the transversal vision on the agglomeration

... but also to propose tools, organisation scheme and prioritisation, on the internal level.



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Can this approach be considered and proposed for other cities?

I am convinced that a lot of municipalities are conducting land use policies in a very sectoral manner. There are land use policies for economic space, for housing, for nature preservation, and it is difficult to have integrated approach, which can cross for example the challenges of mobility (polarisation around railway stations) and development challenges of land potentials for housing. This is this type of crossing needed to build a land use policy, which can respond to the needs, but also respond to the SCOT orientations and a more polarised planning, less "gourman-dized" in spatial consumption. This permits to think about the conciliation of the different challenges on the scale of the agglomeration project, and also on the different sectoral policies.

Do you think that you would have done this project anyway, also without participating in the LUMASEC project?

The URBACT project has been the starter and the lever of it, because of the rhythm given by the URBACT project; another reason is that Saint-Etienne Metropole has been chosen to be the place of the final event, which obliges the actors to adopt the subject and to have a calendar. Maybe the things may be stopped or slowly developed in the other case; definitively, URBACT permitted to force the action, in the rhythm and the results to produce.

Did you learned also from the other partners of the LUMASEC project?

The added value of such exchanges is to be able to have some distance to its own project and own context. The identified challenges in Bristol were not the same as the challenges in Saint-Etienne, but the way, how the problems were put in the discussion and the exchanges with the partners on solutions to solve problems brings to its own territory and own action back. I came back from Bristol regenerated by the exchanges, although the input has not contributed professionally to

me. Unfortunately also, we did not succeed that our technicians attend the Bristol meeting; we failed. In this case, Bristol was not on the right time.

One of the difficulties of our local action plan is that our project is situated amongst a public policy, and is consequently (still) not supported. There is at this moment not the perception that land use is a challenge, which is not understood as a priority supported by politicians and technicians.

How are you going to convince the politicians?

I think that the work done by the Local Support Group permitted to develop a certain amount of expertise, of tools proposals, and that the entire technical level of EPURES is aware about the importance of this. It is now time for them to take decisions and engagements to formalize a strategic policy. The second step after the final event will be a political debate on the decision level, to see how this project will be developed in terms of strategy, tools and citizens mobilization.

Are there other cities in France doing the same?

Some cities in France are quite in progress, such as the Grand Lyon, more ancient, but also in another institutional context more integrated; another one, the agglomeration of Rennes, also older, which attributed in the past an impressive amount to develop the land use strategy for housing – about several millions Euro for the realisation of their Local Housing Plan (Plan Local d'Habitat – PLH); and, finally, another territory working on the tools, the Region Nord-Pas-de-Calais, due to certain convinced persons, developing a policy of land use development potentials, with the help of the Region (EPF).

In France therefore, the other territories with a reflection on land use and action are these three, together with Saint-Etienne. Saint-Etienne has something particular, since many years: the establishment of a methodology and operational tools. It is the fact that there is a public Land Institution, EPORA, financed jointly by the State

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and the municipalities, founded in 1999, with the aim to deal with military and industrial, but also urban brownfields. Another one is a tool of land use action, called EPASE, and is a French speciality. EPASE is a public developer joint establishment together with State and municipalities, playing the role of a developer, conducting urban projects for the municipality and the land use charge. Both are working on the land use aspect.

EPORA and EPASE are actors integrated in the process and also member of the Local Support Group. Is there a real engagement of those actors in the LSG?

There is a real engagement of EPORA, and EPASE is working more on operational actions and scales, and only in the city of Saint-Etienne and some quarters.

Who was the initiator of the LAP?

The Agency EPURES, with Rémi Dormois at the beginning, and Sandrine Sanchez, playing the role of mediator today. Saint-Etienne Metropole was interested in this topic, because this subject was actual since many years: the idea was to develop and formalize an agglomeration land use strategy. First, because it is a fact that top have a land use plan has to be part of agglomeration projects – as contracts between municipalities and region -, and on the other side the chance to formalize thanks to URBACT. Only few politicians asked for this. Therefore, the Local Support Group is working more on internal level, with a core of technicians of the Saint-Etienne Agglomeration and EPORA.

Has the LAP already influenced the policy of EPURES?

In the past, EPURES worked a lot on land use, but only on the urban scale. The LAP has permitted to develop a transversal approach and on the regional scale. It was the first time that we discussed the land use topic related to economic development, housing, agriculture, or nature preservation. This dimension of integrated approach was inexistent before, EPURES worked on an urban project, or on land portfolio, but always in a sectoral manner.

Which key steps are important in your opinion for the implementation of this strategy?

First of all, a technical and political mobilization at high level is needed. By EPURES, the technical mobilization is on the way, the political is still to be initiated. Second, this supposes knowledge – we are working already 10 years on it -: there is a need to accumulate knowledge, method, and arrive to leave sectoral approaches.

It is important that the technical support should be located on a decision level considering the economy, the housing and environment, therefore at a general level of direction. And of course, dedicated competences; for example in the Grand Lyon, there is a service with high level means, which has a certain authority –technical-comparing to other services.

And finally the method: it is necessary to work and have the tools, so to be able to overtake the sectoral dimension, including at the same time the actors. I am convinced that land use and urban development have to be considered in a chain, which starts with planning (SCOT and PLU in France), followed by action of “watching” and land use keeping around projects with some priorities, and finally using tools for the operational action. Urban development can only function if this chain is well functioning. Therefore, it mobilizes the political level, the technical level (planning) and the technical level (operational). A sectoral organisation avoids crossing situations. And avoids, of course, a strong linking of planning services with operational stakeholders.

Which recommendations could you propose for other cities, on national or European level?

Some principles:

- An urban policy, and a fortiori an integrated policy, can only be realized, if it is built on an effective strategy and land use action. This seems to be evident to me. Whatever the way, how it is organized or not, it may have high costs.
- It has to be integrated as a strong dimension of the urban policy
- It supposes also to have knowledge and planning tools; a land use action plan cannot exist if there is no knowledge of the markets, or land use market constraints. Also if there are no priorities in future challenging sectors (moving, changing sectors) and therefore not succeeding in identifying brownfields, sectors of urban potentials, etc, a sustainable land use policy is

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not realistic.

- A land use policy has to be in the service of a project: economic situation, housing, agriculture preservation – so to be able to mobilize financial means in an effective manner and tools. Regarding the tools, it depends on the European local contexts, but some basic tools for land use strategy do exist in every country; in fact, it needs “mandatory” tools. In France, some tools exist, permitting to buy in a forced manner, or permitting to identify stake sectors, or to intervene in a concerted building plan (ZAC), buying for example land by land owners, also if they not agree with a quick realization of the urban project. There are also technical tools, aiming to help to buy, depollute and relocate inhabitants to have the land control (e.g. EPASE). After this aspect, the stake of the control of costs has to be considered, which is essential to avoid speculation. Such tools have this vocation. EPORA, for example, is responsible for buying industrial or urban deprived areas, for depolluting, relocation and reselling to the municipality, but at lower costs: it buys an area for 100, and sells for 60, the rest is considered as public investment. Of course, operation in existing build area is more expensive than on greenfields.

- In the case of speculation on agriculture land, a regulation of land costs is also necessary: tools (like SAFER) exist, with the right to buy land at the price of agriculture land to avoid speculation. A municipality has the duty to mobilize different tools to enhance its financial investment.

Considering this, it means that the city should be able to control land as much as possible?

The city should control land there where necessary and useful; therefore the agglomeration project has to define the priorities. Europe can only advise cities to develop land use strategies, which helps to develop especially a public land use strategy, with the aim to avoid speculation on land, permitting realization of projects.

In this case, are taxes playing an important role?

It is evident that each European country is different. On the level of European recommendations, the link with land property and taxes is so different, but Europe has to give a methodical framework.

Was it difficult to get the LAP started?

It was not easy, because of the sectoral and not transversal approach. Therefore, an approach focussing on the medium and long term is not a natural exercise...

Is an education process necessary?

Only few mayors are aware about this resource, it would be necessary to elaborate a training and information cycle related to this subject.

On the topic of land use, there is the notion of building material related to the time to achieve an urban project; if a reasonable period of time is needed, a good control of land is necessary. Effectiveness in time, related to the notion of public regulation. It is an error to let play the game of speculation.

The management of land use has to be considered as a necessity, especially if a sustainable urban policy is wanted, which supposes a regeneration of deprived areas and brownfields. The costs are obligatorily higher than new one, and are integrated in the logic of preservation of natural and agriculture spaces, and consequently, the first land use tool is the urban planning tool. In France, a mayor has a lot of power in designing the urban sectors or not: he can decide on the value of agriculture land, influencing his value from 2 to 200, a huge responsibility and huge financial consequences. So again, it is clear that the first land use tool is the urban planning document, giving the capacity to build or not, followed by more operational tools, permitting the realization of urban projects, supposing to have a public control on the project, without mentioning the profitability.

What is about the question of profitability? Should it be integrated in the land use policy?

This is the reason of the creation of the Public Land Institution (EPORA), which permits to buy land outside of the market and compensate with public finance. Other cases are related to regularisation, therefore segregation. In Poland for instance, stakes of land recycling, and questions of pollution and land control are more present. Not to forget the other attractive hyper-centre

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sectors, where the stake is to have a land control, which will permit to realize social infrastructures to avoid too much segregation.

Mrs Bariol, thank you very much for this interview

Lyon, 04. March 2010
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