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The local & the global: making sense of European spatial policies. An opinion about the draft for the New Leipzig Charter.

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**The local & the global: making sense of European spatial policies.
An opinion about the draft for the New Leipzig Charter**

Keynote speech to the web conference
Future-Proof Cities and Regions – What a New Leipzig Charta Wants to Contribute
organized by the Deutscher Verband für Wohnungswesen
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In the development of European spatial planning, Germany plays a prominent role. The French have often brought a state of mind, a *doxa*, but the Germans made things happen: this was the story behind the ESDP, TA, LC.... Today, you give us a new Leipzig Charter. So, what is new ?

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The charter has a wide ambition, visible in its subtitle: "*The transformative power of cities for the common good*".

The reference to the common good draws on the roots of European civilisation. The common good is defined by St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. It is the foundation of the organisation of the city, where men must find the material and moral conditions to seek God and work for the salvation of their souls. I will not tell the history of the idea from the Middle Ages to the Nobel Prize of Elinor Oström in 2009! But I want to underscore that the notion of common good has a moral dimension, unlike the neighbouring notion of general interest, which is more economic. This ethical aspect appeals to town planners. Didn't they embrace their profession precisely for this reason, to offer their fellow citizens a better world ?

The other part of the title, 'transformative power of cities' reminds us of Le Corbusier's modernism. He had ethics! The city was an instrument for transforming man into a new, a better, a more collective being. The disaster of large housing estates seemed to have ended the times of the demiurges. And so, I found surprising the little music of social engineering and technicism that may be heard here and there in the new Leipzig Charter.

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The draft for the New Leipzig Charter enlarges the scale of action. This is a big step forward. Albeit making the plea for an integrated approach, the old charter of 2007 essentially confined itself to deprived neighbourhoods. With the call for an "active and strategic land policy and land use planning", the new LC makes a shift from urban regeneration policies to urban and regional planning. From now on, the city is approached at all its scales, the neighbourhood, the local authority, the functional urban area. By doing so, the new Leipzig Charter fills a gap. It establishes a link that was missing between the European scale of the ESDP and the TA, and the micro scale of the neighbourhood.

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Through this shift, the role of the cities and regions becomes central in the implementation of overarching policy goals defined at the upper levels.

Between local and global, cities have the capacity to carry out policies on the ground that respond to challenges identified by international organisations – in particular, the urban agendas of the EU and of the UN. Let's take an example. To preserve biodiversity, we must restrain the use of certain products in agriculture: this is a sector policy, which can be decided at the level of the EU. But we also need green and blue infrastructure, where fauna and flora have their habitat: this is spatial planning, done by the local authorities. Similarly, for the energy transition, we need to improve the energy efficiency of buildings (sector) and to reduce urban sprawl (planning). By the way, we should also limit the use of the Internet, which is becoming the world's biggest energy consumer (sector)...

In fact, sector policies won't be sufficient if they are not complemented by those policies that local and regional authorities draw up through spatial planning. Cities will be increasingly called upon to take action in the multi-level governance. We must ensure that we respect subsidiarity! Local authorities should not become mere implementers of policies designed at the global level.

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The diversity of the territories, and its implications, are not taken into account sufficiently. Small and middle-sized cities are a good example for this.

I would also like to point out a matter that does not feature sufficiently in the draft charter: small and medium-sized cities. Cities are not equal and small and medium-sized cities, forgotten by globalisation, have specific problems. In 2015, the Latvian presidency came forward with the Riga declaration. Since then, almost nothing has been done. It would be a pity if the new Leipzig Charter, missed the opportunity to address this issue.

All the more so as small and medium-sized cities have a role to play... For the Corona lockdown, in 48 hours time, before the order to stay at home became effective, more than a million residents fled from Paris to the provinces: this represents 10% of its population. And, since January 2020, property prices have been rising in the provinces but going down in Paris... Let us be aware that things are changing.

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To sum up my opinion, I say :

- Yes ! To the common good, the shift to (good!) urban planning, the articulation of scales. These are good things.
- No ! To digital transformation. This is a dead end.
- And more ! Please include in the charter more about the issue of small and medium-sized cities, more about subsidiarity.

Thank you for your attention.

This conference paper will be extended and published in a planning journal. The reference of this publication will be provided.