



**The Maison de l'Europe de Paris and the City of Paris have organized a preparatory seminar of the conference entitled:**

### **The underside of the metropolis**

11 December 2008

80% of Europeans live in cities, 50% of them in large conurbations. How are supply lines to be maintained? How are goods to be transported into built-up areas? In a context of urban expansion and cities in constant change, the transport of goods is dominated by the internal combustion engine – which creates noise, pollution, oil dependence and global warming. Of the 32 million tons of goods that arrive in Paris each year, a million arrive by rail, 2.5 by river, and the rest by road. In France, river transport is under-developed. During the post-war decades of expansion, the State largely neglected this sector. The policy was to leave the transport of goods to the market, with the result that roads became the universal carrier.

But in more recent times the different protagonists have become aware of the role that can be played by urban ports. River transport does not just involve cumbersome bulk cargoes, but a diverse range of consumer goods and merchandise. And in cities like Amsterdam, for example, it can help solve the problem of urban congestion by providing an extra link in the transport chain. This, however, presupposes a reorganisation of logistics, namely a profound change in mentality on the part of production and transport companies. It also implies a political method of managing co-existence, between the different functions of urban space: the transport of goods must be compatible with tourism, leisure activities, office work and housing. The ways in which ports are to be integrated into cities is one of the major issues. In Lille and Brussels, for example, an effort has been made, in architectural terms, to harmonise the port with the urban way of life. It has been opened up to leisure activities, thus giving the population an opportunity to make it their own. In Amsterdam, urban integration is functional, with a highly innovative and effective system of transporting goods. In Lille, waste management has been the motive force.

The objective of compatibility between the different urban functions also entails problems of governance. Political decisions have to be made, in the framework of territorial planning and land allocation, to promote resolutely global infrastructure such as that of ports. And questions of governance also come into deciding the scale at which a port whose activity may be at the same time metropolitan, regional, European and global should be governed. The general trend is in favour of decentralisation, and ports similar to that of Brussels which have not already become regionalised (in France, for example) are in the course of doing so. But their optimal functioning necessitates close links with sea ports, and with other ports on the European and world scale. Among the Commission's objectives for the years to come is that of achieving greater cooperation, on the one hand among sea ports, and, on the other hand between sea ports and inland ports.

The morning's proceedings highlighted the fact that a city can in fact be constructed round a port. And river ports provide opportunities for today's cities. While the metropolitan future

of urban areas can be difficult to plan, from the institutional point of view, ports are *immediately* metropolitan. Urban planning can be centred on rivers and ports, and not just districts.

The second part of the day also focussed on logistics, but with regard to the geography of consumption and the globalisation of exchanges. Concerning the geography of producer-consumer relationships, two paths were explored. Firstly there was the idea of bringing areas of production and consumption closer together in urban and architectural terms, with buildings that combine apartments and greenhouses. But then the question arises – does this approach not comprise a certain view of consumption, translating the traditional extensive, horizontal type of architecture into verticality? Secondly, there was a militant vision of responsible consumption that would consist of creating short circuits in the form of direct transactions between producers and consumers' associations. In both cases, the very concept of a city was at issue, in its opposition to "the country", as an area of consumption and a boundary between different spheres of life.

The concept of a city, a metropolis, was also at the heart of the debates that took place on commercial planning and the globalisation of exchanges. If the centre of a metropolis is equally assumed to be the hub of logistical flows, in other words the place where local and global dimensions coincide, the scale at which this theme has to be taken into consideration is that of the "glocal", which measures global flows and their local impact. But this immediately leads to political problems. How is a metropolis to be defined, other than in territorial terms? And how is conflict in such territory-networks to be managed? Democracy as we know it was defined within well-established territories, whereas we are now faced with dynamic processes. This represents a serious challenge to our political forms of organisation, with time-honoured categories being called into question by mobility.

What added value can Europe bring to this equation? In terms of transport, it has produced contrasting, sometimes frustrating results. In terms of the report on transport transfers, there is a flagrant divergence between discourse and reality. In terms of pollution, though, Europe has made considerable progress. Diesel engines now emit fifteen times less than they did twenty years ago. The question of logistics, and of the transport of goods into towns, is one that has only arisen recently, and it is just beginning to be discussed. It has a high profile in the Netherlands, and in Germany, which wants to become the logistical capital of Europe. But it is still new and unfamiliar in many other countries. Though Europe plays a role in generating networks, and in the circulation of ideas, there is no one, as yet, who holds the key to the problem of urban logistics.

The final part of the day's proceedings took on the theme of risk in metropolitan life, and the dangers of urbanisation. The city can appear to its inhabitants as a place where risks are particularly numerous: atmospheric and auditory pollution, the transport of toxic substances, chemical plants, etc. The problem here is the confidence that people have in experts and officials; but also, and more generally, the health of city-dwellers and the overall environmental impact of urban life. There again, the city must rethink its transport system and its energy consumption in such a way as to make them compatible with its surrounding environment. Europe has a major role to play in these domains, in terms of legislation, innovative ideas and the generalisation of good practice. Such measures are necessary if cities are to make a success of their future.

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