

# European 7

European competitions for new architecture

## **Theme :**

Sub-urban challenge,  
urban intensity and housing diversity.

All towns are faced with the phenomenon of urban sprawl, splitting, and fragmentation. The increasing use of the car, the development of out-of-town shopping centres, the increase in the number of leisure complexes, and the extension of business/industrial parks, seem to be leading inexorably to a “dispersed town” urban model. There is, visibly, a new will to act in these contemporary areas, in order to reorganise them by reviving the traditional planning ethos of European towns, and by associating this with the challenges of urban sustainability.

The means to fulfil this need for the progressive transformation of the contemporary town are provided by the existence of land development opportunities and the appearance of a desire for spatial innovation that has been generated by the evolution of lifestyles. Individual autonomy is increasing, as is the diversity of social interactions within the same family, professional mobility, and the speed of communications; all of which lead to a more spread out town. On the other hand, there is a strong demand for a neighbourhood social life which needs to be rebuilt on new foundations. Architects responsible for transforming the dispersed town must ask themselves how they can give it a new set of values.

EUROPAN 7 proposes to tackle this issue at the interface between the urban planning level and the architectural level.

How can the dispersed town be transformed into a sustainable town, ecological and urban, with its foundations in the new social and cultural demands that are currently emerging? How can the creation of new residential districts, with innovative typologies and complex programme briefs, be fashioned into a strategic urban tool?

## **HOUSING DIVERSITY**

Diversification is the main characteristic of the new demand for homes. Composite households, the young, the elderly, “nomads” (tourists or mobile professionals), have not found apt architectural responses in today’s contemporary town. The housing product remains largely modelled on a limited number of types that are supposed to respond to all needs.

The issue for EUROPAN 7 is to initiate new thinking on research into typological innovation. How can appropriate housing perspectives be offered to town dwellers with myriad cultural and social profiles?

Several spatial logics can be pursued:

diversification of typologies: open plan, duplex, triplex, through simplex, gardens, terraces, courtyards, etc.;

convertibility of space: transformation and adaptation of a dwelling according to: the evolution of the family living in it, a succession of different occupants, changes in the overall requirements of the housing programme;

creation of morphologically complex layouts: scattered houses, housing clusters, mix of houses and flats, typological mix of flats, etc.

## **URBAN INTENSITY**

Today, it is taken as read that technological change (mobility, communication) has not only strongly influenced urban lifestyles but also the practices of urban dwellers. To live somewhere is no longer just to be "at home", cut off from other daily practices: work, shopping, recreation, etc. While new technology links us to a virtual world, it has, in fact, brought about a demand for neighbourhood social intensity. We now want to work from, or nearby, to where we live, to shop locally, to invent new ways of social interaction, and to fill our free time with sporting and cultural activities without being obliged to travel great distances from our homes.

The residential space proposed in the dispersed town is, however, nearly always mono-functional. Residential zoning has produced the large social housing estate and the private estate of houses, treated as two extreme forms of segregated housing model, which prevent, by their spatial structure, all neighbourhood social intensification.

In today's contemporary town, how can one give housing districts a new dynamism, and favour the spatial intensification of the social life that can take place within them?

A variety of approaches can be developed, indeed interwoven:

- assembly of different forms of housing, that is, the creation in a neighbourhood of different types of dwelling designed for inhabitants with different households: dwellings for the elderly, students, single-parent families, etc.;
- addition of associated services: new local shops, public services, sports and cultural facilities, etc.;
- creation of conditions that will allow for the existence of a home/workplace interface: work space associated with the home, technologically high performance units for skilled trades and professions, small units of offices.

## **SUSTAINABLE PROCESS**

Areas affected by urban sprawl have not stabilised. They have often been formed through an accumulation of partial logics, and a variety of disparate interventions without any thought for overall urban ecology. As such, they constitute a favourable field for analysis in terms of sustainable development. On a European scale, they cover a wide variety of forms and situations. Besides large, emblematic sites, liberated by industry, which offer towns enormous scope for internal expansion, there is a wealth of potential in other more modestly sized, but nonetheless strategic plots of disused, and underused, land.

The aim of EUROPLAN 7 is to work at research into principles of urban coherence in the dispersed town, but concentrating on specific elements that go beyond the historic principles of the old town, or of traditional urban composition.

How can new logics of urban assemblies be conceived, that are adapted to the fragmented, heterogeneous territory of the contemporary town? How can a landscape be created that, while enabling mobility, will offer elements of urban coherence and environmental quality?

The environmental approach must be linked to urban restructuring, in order to work:

- on the scale of an entire area, where it is a question of creating compact residential platforms that both liberate and integrate natural space, that combat noise and other pollution from road and transport networks;
- on the scale of these platforms, in order to manage natural resources (water, energy, etc.), and artificial elements (waste), with care to take into account the ecological and economic rules of networks;
- on an architectural scale, in order to integrate technical innovations, to adapt the construction networks to the principles of diversity and of the convertibility of spaces, using materials that are not hazardous to health;
- with the whole range of scales in order to introduce the question of nature as an element associated with housing (garden, neighbourhood space, park, etc.).

To conceive new contemporary residential districts with the aim of sustainability also means taking into account the period over which a project is to be implemented. Competitors must, therefore, explain how their overall vision fits into a spatio-temporal strategy that takes into account local means of creating space.

How can spatial lines of force be laid down which will give coherence to the urban project while opening up to a series of programmed interventions and appropriations that will call upon a range of players who follow a logic of opportunities?