

"The urban form and its quality: a French experience"

By Xavier Prigent

Surveyors are well known as guarantors of land property, producers and administrators of territorial data. However, their role is constantly evolving towards conception and counseling. In order to illustrate this evolution towards territorial planning, the Urban planning commission of the Order of French licensed surveyors, headed by Xavier Prigent, has been working on the very substance of urban planning. It has published, beginning of 2008, a book entitled "The urban form and the stake of quality" in order to define a qualitative step for the conception and the production of tomorrow's town.

Historically, urban forms have developed successively for centuries and were reconfigured. In the twentieth century, many urban forms have developed in parallel depending on the one hand, on the emergence of new concepts in urban planning and, on the other hand, on people's changing practices on much shorter periods.

Starting with an attempt to synthesize the concept of urban form, we have tried to measure the impact of sustainable development on the conception of development operations. Can we compare this concept, loudly advocated by our elected officials, to the one of quality? Is it possible to concretely bring to light the concept of sustainable urban form?

To answer this question, analytical criteria of urban forms were defined following a three-pronged approach: typomorphological, socio-functional and environmental.

Then, we analyzed six French successful operations characteristic of the twentieth century, each with an affirmed urban form, according to these criteria.

In view of the criteria grid established and of the assessment of fundamentally different operations, a number of factors contributing to quality operations have thus been identified:

- Integration of the new neighborhoods into the surrounding urban context,
- Hierarchy and design of routes,
- Permeability and ownership of the neighborhood,
- Mix of buildings and their adaptation to context
- Proportionate size and layout of open spaces,
- Functional mix and entertainment of the district,
- Connecting the neighborhood to the existing road network and

public transportation system,

- Economy of built space and privacy of housing,
- Saving energy,
- Water management and economics,
- Technical and technological innovations,
- Adaptation to the site and landscaping,