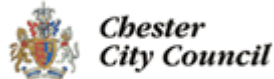


Sustainable Promotion of Atlantic Areas (SPAA)

Our Legacy: A Banquet of Consequences

A speech by Martin Parr on sustainable cities and environmental awareness to the SPAA Legacy Conference and 8th General Assembly of the Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities (CAAC)

Chester, UK
28th June 2007



Hello

I am here to enlighten you of the consequences, should you fail in your efforts to create sustainable cities. It is YOU, who have the responsibility to ensure that a legacy is left.

What gives me the right to give you “food for thought”? Well, we are all on the same planet, breathing the same air; the same planet that is going through alarming climate change and rapid depletion of its natural resources. In this context, it is important that our municipal leaders make the right decisions.

There is nothing sustainable to the environment about the lack of forethought by some local authorities, in the planning permissions they give, because they believe it is right, for whatever short-term reasons!

So, what legacy can I leave you today? I want to sow some long-term seeds to give you roots and ideas for doing YOUR bit to ensure sustainability in the development of OUR future, now that the world has woken up to the fact that man himself is destroying the very nature of us being here at all.



Whose world is it anyway? A famous quote by conservationist, Aldo Leopold, got it right, because we have not regarded land or our planet, as fragile. We have abused it and now the consequences are serious.

Alarming figures on climate change, melting ice caps and rising sea levels have been much in the news recently and 21% of the world's population lives within 30km of the coast! In the UK alone, 26 million people could be effected. We humans are here for the time being, but it is estimated that, worldwide, 12,000 animal and plant species are threatened with extinction.

Desertification and water shortage are no longer confined to Africa and Asia. Many European countries, especially around the Mediterranean, are now suffering too. As for deforestation; each year we are saying good-bye to a country the size of Poland; 31 million hectares of lost forest every year.

We are greedily using up our planet's natural resources at a rapid rate.

The European President stated a few weeks ago that climate change is the EU's top priority. But, of no less importance are the other challenges - declining biodiversity, the threat to our health from pollution and the production of too much waste.

The problems of urbanisation and the environment are not new. We knew about them 25 years ago and how towns and cities were encroaching into the countryside; not just here in Europe, but across the globe. I have devoted much of my time to what used to be known as the Third World, creating projects in sustainable and economic development. It is just as relevant in Europe as elsewhere.

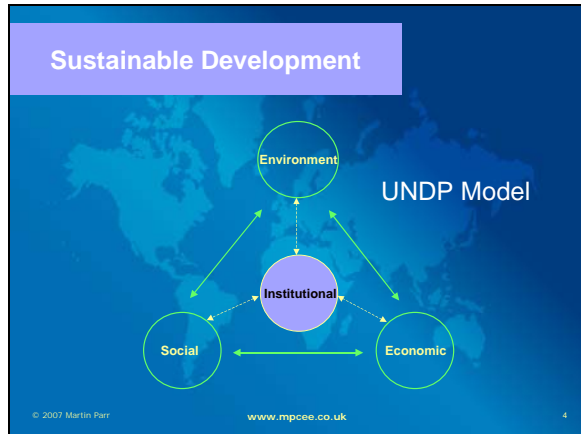
It is now necessary to develop an environmental culture in us all. But that culture does not come naturally.

Awareness has to be taught and maybe for some it means having to be coerced!
Let's start with the definition of the environment and what is meant by sustainability.
The knowledge of one, leads to the other. If you understand what the environment is, you are on the way to understanding the meaning of a sustainable environment, and then in turn how to have sustainable development.
I won't bore you with the legal and internationally accepted definitions of Environment, Pollution and Harm, but the definitions are important. I know legal jargon can be very heavy, but that's the point I'm making. It is necessary to translate into layman's terms.



In fully understanding all these definitions, you are on your way to understanding that using Urban Governance and Sustainable Resource Management will give you your:
Cultural Heritage,
your Sustainable Built Environment
and your Sustainable Transport

You should search and select cost effective solutions, because what will work in one city may fail in another. When formulating your strategies for sustainable development, these must include prevention, adaptation and integration. Lookout for your thresholds, because around these you will find your sustainability!



In the words of the UN Development Program, Sustainable Development is characterised by a dynamic interaction and balance between environmental, social and economic values and the corresponding institutional arrangements.

Sound environmental protection and pollution control comes from good environmental management. The key is to understand your own immediate environment.

Any example of urban development is likely to have an impact on our ecosystems and the interaction between them. Remember, a city's environmental objectives should be accorded the same priority as its social and economic objectives.

All this is associated with sustainability.
Your impact WILL affect the global change and the health of us all.



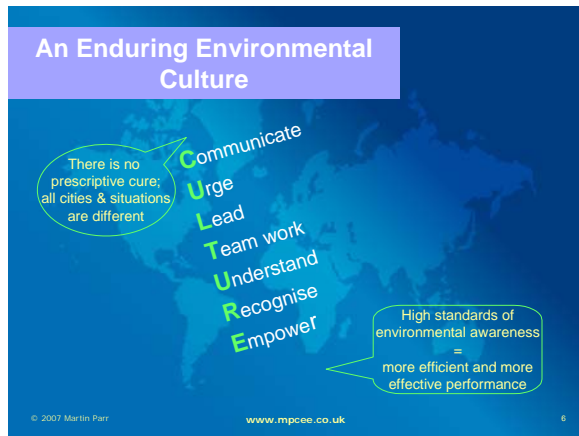
International legislation and regulation comes from information shared globally via international think tanks, conferences, and summits etc, which all assist in bringing the requirements together. This then has to infiltrate to regional and national bodies to debate what should be legislated for. But, legislation alone cannot enforce what is necessary, as it has to be regulated and policed. Here in the EU, we have Directives and very efficient they are too, to ensure that EU Member States incorporate the Directives in to their respective national legislation.

Standards, whether international, European or national enable us to conform and perhaps produce a benchmark for "doing" or achieving something that we all do independently of each other. Standards are not compulsory. Standards, at best, like the ISO14000 series and EMAS are for those organisations or businesses that can afford to go down that line, to be accredited to a standard and then maintain that standard. And here you have it. There are those that can afford a standard, those that would like to conform but cannot afford it and then, yes, those that just do not care what they are doing to the environment, or whether there will be a planet for our children or our children's children. It is sad that this is a fundamental fact of the world today.

Responsibility and accountability belongs to all of us here today. You are the leaders. You must ensure that the actions of the planning decisions you make, are met, as you would like them to be; what we would like them to be collectively. Remember, Urban Governance is at local, regional and national levels.

Above all else, you must have a Contingency Plan. If something goes wrong, you must know what you are going to do, without even thinking about it. Natural disasters, through climatic change, are going to increase. From the melting of the ice caps and rising sea levels, to severe weather conditions, these now unfortunately cannot be reversed. But we can slow the inevitable down by not exacerbating the problems and contingency plan at all levels to protect what sound environment we have left to protect.

This is not doom and gloom; that was a product of the 60's. This is reality NOW.



Here, you are representing not only your particular cities, but you are also ambassadors for your respective countries. You have to develop a particular culture if you are going to make this happen. Use today's opportunity, it's a wonderful platform for discussion; different languages, religions, political persuasions and, without doubt, different opinions. Your cities are all different too. I cannot indoctrinate you; there is no prescriptive cure to have you all conform and be the same. However, what should link you all together is your concern for the environment.

I am going to give you something that you can take back and share. Our future now depends on an enduring environmental culture and this little play on the letters of "CULTURE" is a good start. High standards of environmental awareness start here today and you will go out and start to do something about it. Every positive word you utter is making someone else aware.

It is interesting that companies with a high level of environmental awareness have been proved to be more efficient and more effective. You can relate this to any business or organisation. Less waste, more energy efficient, are just examples.

There is a cost to this of course.

The biggest investment is commitment, from all.

Training plays an important part, as environmental awareness has to be taught; it does not just happen on its own. It will then be possible to develop, especially in the young, the knowledge and skills to actually make a difference, as part of the overall effort to instil a CULTURE.

It does need the involvement of all of us, you, me, governments and the public and private sectors and each of one of us has something special to offer.



EU Funding alone cannot cover the increasing changes that have to be made to ensure sustainable development. EU Funds can assist with education and training programmes for environmental awareness and other such initiatives. But major changes need incentives for private investment towards the identification of new technologies, best practices and the list goes on.

From these four issues come the WHY, HOW, WHERE and WHEN questions. I only have a couple of minutes left, so these answers are for another day.

Effectiveness

- The Good – The Bad – The Ugly
- Environmental Management
- Environmentally Correct Society

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Will your city be The Good, The Bad or The Ugly one of the future? I cannot be the judge or jury on that; it will fall to your children's children to decide. But, I am looking for a benchmark. Why? - Because this concept could be rolled out across the EU Member States. It is not just the legislation and regulation that will determine where we go from here, it will be the bureaucracy of the system itself, along with the acceptance of all to let it or not let it happen.

Next year, the world will cross an invisible but momentous milestone: the point at which more than half the people on the planet - roughly 3.2 billion of us - will live in cities. Over 50 million - equivalent to the population of France - are now added to the world's cities and suburbs each year. Urban centres often display, on the one hand, breathtaking artistic innovation and, on the other, the world's most abject and disgraceful poverty. Cities are the source of most of the world's resource destruction and pollution, whether directly or indirectly, but they are also becoming the pioneers of groundbreaking environmental policies.

Public funding alone is not going to accelerate improvements. Nor is it going to be a competitive lottery to see who is best at it. The city of tomorrow and its cultural heritage will stem from good environmental management and an environmentally aware society. We have the bones and the skeleton of this now and that's all. The approach has been piecemeal, now it has to be a collective operation for it to be effective.

So what about the future? The future will be managed by YOU...

Allow me to take you forward then; you are the leaders.

It starts with your ability to guide, motivate and direct and to support the committed and the courageous ones. Use your skills to communicate and collaborate.

Awareness means being environmentally aware, aware of your responsibility and accountability, understanding the necessity to conform to legislation and regulation and appreciating the need for contingency planning and disaster preparedness.

Lastly your commitment is required to protect our fragile environment. Stick your neck out, be committed for the right reasons and think long-term rather than short-term.

Your effectiveness is going to effect how sustainable OUR cities will be.

Managing the Future

Leadership for Sustainable Development

The cornerstones for effectiveness
environmental protection
and
sustainable development

commitment
effectiveness
awareness

- ability to lead
- environmental awareness
- commitment to the challenge

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Finally, what will our legacy be? What will be enduring? What will we be remembered by?
Your efforts are needed and we can all make a difference. Little differences add up to a BIG difference!

The opportunities to drive positive change are there and clear.

I'm following on from Aldo, who actually died the year I was born. I want you to take home my quote:

"Protect the environment; give your children's children the right to a pollution free planet!"

Thank you.

Links

Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities (CAAC): www.atlanticcities.eu

Sustainable Promotion of Atlantic Arc Areas: www.arcata.org/SPAA

SPAA Guide: www.chester.gov.uk/PDF/SPAA-Guide.pdf

EU Interreg 111B-Atlantic Area programme (incl SPAA): www.interreg-atlantique.org

To contact Martin Parr:

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