

**21 JUIN 2010*****Should we plan the landscapes of urban regions?****By Pierre Donadieu*

To answer this question, it is necessary to compare different points of view, presented by one of the founders of landscape ecology Richard T. T. Forman, in his book: *Urban regions, ecology and planning beyond the city* (2008).

At the inhabitant scale, the space concerned is that of the apartment or the house. The individual genuine concern for environment decreases from his neighborhood to the city, the state and the world. It is an embarrassing fact, written R.T.T. Forman (p. 316), that small spaces are easily transformed, but remain unstable, and in contrast, large spaces, which are difficult to change, are relatively stable. For him, the right scale of intervention is that of medium-dimensional spaces, "such as landscapes and regions". Thus, we can "act in short-term on the visible and persevere in the long term." Viewed this way, landscapes and urban areas are large gardens to which attention must be paid with the public authorities concerned (of the city, the metropolitan areas). This is to preserve the integrity and identity of landscapes related to woodland and farms in their relations with urbanized areas. In other words: "Think globally, plan regionally, and then act locally" (p. 317).

The political perspective of sustainable urban development deserves to be qualified then. According to Forman, it is an ideal goal that we will seek for a long time, but we will never or very rarely achieve it. However, if this injunction is translated into a multitude of tiny local solutions - such as water and waste recycling, or local agricultural production organized in green corridors - then the transformation of social practices will become reality in terms of environmental and nutritional qualities.

That is not enough, he said, because the city is like a box with holes that allow exchanges with the outside of the city (climatic, economic, social, but also living species and pollutants). More such exchanges are important, less the city is sustainable. Its ability to withstand disruptions flux (eg strikes) – its resilience – decreases; what should be limited, for example by increasing agricultural production in and for the urban area, or by seeking energy autonomy (solar) or water resources in the region. From this point of view, planning areas of ecological footprints can create the conditions for a balance between natural services and urban demands.

Added to that, possible disasters for an urban area: fire, volcanic eruption, earthquake, tsunami, flood, cyclone, landslides, pollution from industrial sources, radioactive contamination, bombings, pandemics, economic crises, etc. These risks must be evaluated in the region area, but all cannot be taken into account (beyond three it becomes difficult or illusory, said Forman).

The complexity of planning grows further with the inclusion of risk management related to global phenomena such as climate change, species extinction and water scarcity. For those who think that these forecasts should be anticipated by adaptations, it is essential to reduce sources of CO2 in cities like London and Singapore, to generalize urban greening (from roofs to parks) and develop urban agriculture. Also sea and rivers levels rising must be accompanied by urban redevelopment and adaptation of new construction in flood zones. Regarding the erosion of biodiversity and natural environments, it will not be stopped in urban areas, but must be reduced or balanced in networks of intra or extra urban natural areas. Finally, the threat of scarcity of drinking water in cities across the world is equally serious and requires drastic urban public policy if the townspeople do not want to support both water shortages and rising prices for this essential good.

Does the complexity of urban challenges not make urban planning unable to cope with all threats at once? In 2030, 60% of the world population will live in cities, mainly in 20 to 30 megacities of more than 10 million people and in 400 to 600 agglomerations by bringing together 1 to 10 million (p. 343). In view of the "urban tsunami", on the water and species scarcity, and the climate change described by Forman, it is possible that points of no return have already been achieved locally in chronic crises: the increase of climate refugees or urban poverty for example.

The most realistic attitude is certainly not to invoke transcendental utopian visions. Even if they rely on public institutions and legal injunctions (the new vision of Forman is included in the theories of justice of the American philosopher John Rawls 1921-2002). Would it not be better to give rather greater confidence to local collectives to face their landscapes? Not only to support changes in social practices necessary to adapt locally; but also to preserve for future generations the greatest possible free choices of landscape potential and ways of living in urban regions. What is to think differently, as Amartya Sen's analysis (chronic 26), it is rather the ways to reduce human inequities instead of these no or few manageable changes.

In short, first understanding and acting locally, in order to plan landscapes regionally by thinking globally. This is not exactly the action recommended by R. T. T. Forman.
