

What is generally known as “the crisis”, a term with a misleading cyclical connotation that leads us to believe that previous equilibriums will be soon restored, is, in fact, a gigantic mutation, the type of mutation that usually occurs at each turn of century. The 21st century will be nothing like the 20th but we continue to think along the same old lines. The drivers that led us to where we are today are running out of steam: growth is sluggish, inequalities are increasing and rising anxiety is leading to an upsurge in nationalist and populist movements despite the heavy price already paid by our continent for succumbing to them. The construction of Europe took time but its destruction would probably take less.

The failures of the International Climate (since Copenhagen) and Sustainable Development (Rio+20) Conferences have shown the limits of inter-state multilateralism in a complex world where the balance of power is undergoing deep changes. The problems that humankind has to jointly solve in order to ensure its long-term survival in a pacified world are more prominent than ever. We know what the solutions are but the decisions are always postponed to a later date ...maybe. Any negative signal is rapidly interpreted by those who prefer the *status quo* to risking their short-term interests. And they make no bones about it. Forces hostile to change recently made use of their talent in an attempt to deprive the “energy efficiency” draft Directive¹ of its substance, a directive which only aimed to make widely spread political decisions law.

What count as news in the European Union in 2012 for citizens? They essentially hear about short-term safeguarding, salvaging and dressing measures. Bad news such as debts, unemployment and poverty prevails. What are the prospects? Where is the vision that would set a course for our disoriented societies? Where is the dream -if necessary- that provides the stamina to keep going? Where is the enthusiasm that drives a community of men and women who share the same destiny, wherever they live?

The light at the end of the tunnel that would raise hope is hard to see. It is easier to give in to temptation and throw in the towel, withdrawing into ourselves, ignoring others or blaming them for our miseries. And just wait and see...

And yet, there has never been so many local initiatives aimed at breaking with the past and placing territories on a different trajectory. Many cities and villages have set themselves ambitious change objectives combining energy/climate and local economic development policies.

“Zero fossil fuel” cities, “positive energy territories”, “passive” 100% renewable districts: local authorities are on the move, setting long-term objectives and shaping a future that is both *sustainable* and *desirable*². This is what Energy Cities wanted to encourage a few years ago when launching the “*IMAGINE – the energy future of your city*” initiative. This initiative has led to:

- The “*low energy city with a high quality of life for all*” concept,
- A forum around an *Annual Foresight Seminar* (the next one will take place in Munich on 3-5 December 2012),

¹ Voted by an overwhelming majority of MEPS at the European Parliament on 11th September 2012.

² These cities used the 30 proposals for the energy transition of towns and cities published by Energy Cities for the RIO+20 summit as a source of inspiration http://www.energycities.eu/IMG/pdf/CahierPropositions_A4_fr.pdf

- A Website-based³ *Resources centre* giving access to an e-library, participative and creative methods, a Wiki and a co-operation platform,
- An Interreg project⁴ uniting 8 cities from 8 countries that imagine their energy future.

The European Commission published its *Energy Roadmap 2050*⁵ in December 2011. This document presents contrasted scenarios, thus demonstrating that the future is not written down but lies in the hands of citizens and decision-makers, including local authorities. Following its tradition of linking European and local levels, Energy Cities would like to encourage the development of *local roadmaps* based on “factor 4”. These roadmaps could, for example, try to answer the following questions:

- What will make my city a desirable and sustainable city by 2050? How would we like to live, travel, have fun and work in such a city? What energy sources will be used and produced? What food are we going to eat?
- What strategies should I put into place in order to move in this direction and prepare for the unexpected events that are bound to happen? With whom, using what human and financial resources?
- How can short-term decisions (e.g. next year’s budget) be aligned with this trajectory so as to make long-term and short-term objectives coincide?

The underlying idea is that both large and small territories need to have a direction, failing which they cannot mobilise energies and meet the conditions that make change socially acceptable. This approach privileges the voluntary choice of a desirable future over usually painful changes imposed by successive waves of events that are out of our control. It provides a way of mobilising players and citizens around a joint, exciting project they can be proud of, as opposed to a totalising, if not totalitarian exercise. People can then assume their responsibilities in a freshened up democracy. Is this utopia? Maybe, but what alternatives do we have?

The International States conferences followed the same rationale. Whereas the term “local authorities” was, not so long ago, banned from their conclusions, it is now the complete opposite with local authorities being systematically mentioned. Should this be viewed as an acknowledgement of the fact that state multilateralism is powerless or that change will necessarily come from local authorities? It does not really matter. Municipalities and regions did not wait for their *green light* to go ahead. They did not resort to *locally-centred* policies advocating isolation but rather turned to *universalist localism*⁶ where local action is geared to preserving global ecosystem equilibriums, whilst reducing energy poverty, stimulating the economy and creating local jobs.

Most of these local authorities have joined the *Covenant of Mayors*⁷ and are striving to reach and exceed the 3x20 objectives of the EU Energy & Climate Package on their territories.

2020 has become a short-term horizon and the die is cast in most cases. Cities need a longer-term vision, they need challenges, even though these might seem *impossible* to achieve in today’s world. How many events deemed impossible -or even unimaginable- did happen in the last 40 years?

The Covenant of Mayors gave rise to a new movement in Europe, a *bottom-up*, multi-level movement with no precedent in European history⁸. The time has come to give it a new dimension where “visioning” could play a critical role, i.e. a ***Covenant of Mayors 2050***.

³ www.imaginelowenergycities.eu

⁴ <http://www.energy-cities.eu/-Local-IMAGINE->

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/energy/energy2020/roadmap/doc/com_2011_8852_en.pdf

⁶ Term borrowed from Laurent Gervereau, SEE-socioecolo Network – Le Monde, 11th May 2012

⁷ <http://www.energy-cities.eu/Convention-des-maires> and www.eumayors.eu

⁸ http://www.energy-cities.eu/IMG/pdf/the_covenant_of_mayors_a_hope_in_europe.pdf