

## Walk21-III: Steps towards liveable cities, San Sebastian-Donostia, May 2002

### Conference Conclusions

As committed professionals, involved in developing and delivering walking projects in our own cities and towns across the world, we are making a difference. Even if sometimes the benefits to the individual are difficult to quantify and to measure, by improving the quality of life for a community thousands of people are benefiting. Collectively we are making cities more liveable for millions of people across the earth.

We have learned in San Sebastian, from the example of Mayor Odon Elorza Gonzalez, that our contribution to a city's liveability becomes more pronounced when there is a strong political and technical marriage which:

- is united by a long term plan;
- is underpinned by a sound ideological backbone which centres policies on people, whether the motivation is for pleasure, recreation or for everyday activities;
- recognises and uses the democratic processes;
- is multidisciplinary;
- connects to other strategic documents and provides a sound economic case.

Five issues have been identified during the conference as common steps to be addressed when planning for liveable cities:

#### 1. Public opinion

It has been recognised in past conferences that walking is such an everyday activity and so taken for granted that a strong pro-walk lobby cannot be expected. At Walk21-III the discussion moved on. Accounts were given suggesting that the lack of a positive lobby is often made more noticeable by the strength of negative opinions which are routinely met by professionals at the outset of many 'enhancement' proposals.

Those people with potentially most to gain from schemes (such as the insufficiently active, local car drivers, retailers, residents etc) appear often to shout the loudest in the shorter term. *It is concluded that professionals need to be prepared for (at best) sceptical public opinion in the short term, but should take heart from the experience in more walkable cities that in the longer term the benefits to the community and to the individual will be recognised and strong support for the liveability policies will grow.*

#### 2. A new relationship with cars

It was concluded at the first Walk21 conference that we should not be anti-car. At Walk21-III many examples of traffic taming and calming were given, including reallocating road spaces and the 'out of sight, out of mind' approach adopted by San Sebastian where cars are parked underground to remove the temptation to use them for short trips. *It is concluded that through such efforts we must reduce our dependency on cars so that we can co-exist with them, but not be subordinated to them.*

#### 3. Inclusive mobility

Liveable cities are 'people cities' and Claude Bochu from the European Community cited children as a priority voice to be listened to and planned for when considering cities for the future. Workshops called for global accessibility standards, more knowledge sharing and training in implementing inclusive designs. *It is concluded that if we are to plan popular places to live we must seek to know the needs and desires of individuals and plan for their inclusive mobility.*

#### 4. Walking towards healthier cities

*Walk21-III concluded that on an individual basis 'liveability' is best presented with the positive health message that 'walking will make you look and feel better.' At the same time, it was*

*recognised that we need to think about the 'health' of cities as a whole and in a broader sense promote their liveability as places where people can meet, experience life, maintain communities and achieve economic sustainability.* Daniel Sauter from Switzerland quoted a Roman phrase which fits this point well – “via vita est” – “streets are life”.

#### 5. Connectivity and intermodality

Liveable cities are interconnected places. Sometimes we will want to walk the whole way to our destination and at other times just to and from the bus and train. *The conference concluded that in all circumstances pedestrians are the key to multimodality and a connected city, and that they should have the ability to move freely around the city in comfort and safety.*

---

In the concluding debate there were calls for more data and research into the needs of pedestrians; to involve pedestrians in the consultation of proposals; to consider the importance of work places and corporate health in future discussion. Further training for professionals was considered imperative in liveability planning and design.

Some delegates called for future conference themes to look at public opinion, changing attitudes and social marketing and exploring the space linking town and country. Walk21-IV in Portland, Oregon (1<sup>st</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 2003) will take these issues forwards.

The Mayor of San Sebastian closed the conference with a speech in which he recognised that *“the debate is not over, there are more obstacles to be overcome, but we have made an important contribution at Walk21-III and we must all endeavour to make these conclusions both useful and real”*.