

Sustainability in European Union through the Free Market: The effects on the physiognomy of the cities

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1 INTRODUCTION

Humanity has become obsessed with the assimilation and exploitation of new technology and novel scientific data which are presented through everyday research. This obsession is accompanied by a permanent anxiety of each society so that they are not left behind in this attempt. In our days, the orientations of a society are alternated rapidly. The consequence of this is that there is not enough time to study the impacts that these changes have on human life and surroundings.

The European Union with the Agreement of 1992 has set the direction of Europe for the 21st century. The principles of the agreement articles are materialized with the preparation and performing of “side” policies which the European countries have considered in a first attempt in 1996 at Intergovernmental Conference for the future of Europe.

According to the conclusions of Intergovernmental Conference the top priorities are the policy of Free Market and labor, the protection of society and the financial coherence in Europe. Undoubtedly these policies affect a wide range of activities not only of European Governments but also of any European citizen on individual level. The question that comes up is if these alternations that accompany certain political activities have an effect on solid characteristics in the European social life. Under this approach it is very interesting to study the impact certain developments have on the physiognomy of the European Urban Surroundings.

We are all aware that the “European city” is the core of the development of the European and Western civilization. It is certain that throughout its historic route, the city, as if it is an alive organism, has gone through a lot of changes. However, the creation of its physiognomy and identity is a product of significant works in natural and human level. Preserving the physiognomy of the city is vital for the mental balance and the normal personality development of human beings in a complex period of humanity.

2 THE FINANCIAL MAP OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE POLITICAL ORIENTATIONS

After the European Union Agreement, one of the top priorities was balance in financial and social development in an international competition frame and the rise of global financial demands. The E.U. has thus decided to strengthen every geographical region for the successful confrontation of the new financial conditions. In 1995, it was realized that the state members of the Union appear to have some competition drawbacks in the international scene, part of which is the weakness of organizing “land - planning”. Further more, it is a necessity to carry on the activities which aim at the abolition of the boundaries so as to facilitate the attempt of the unification. In this frame it is essential to accelerate the construction of the global European nets of transport, energy, telecommunications and information so that even the most remote part of the E.U. will become accessible and financially turned to advantage.

Furthermore, the White Book has defined the financial development of the E.U. countries in geographical level. This development presupposes the homogeneity in financial status in the E.U. In this way the E.U. encourages the establishment of corporations in any country or region as long as certain conditions exist for infrastructure development and their function. The result of this policy will be the creation of working positions at any geographical spot of the E.U. and also the capability of any area to profit from the predicted benefit that is offered by the successful union of the common market. The promotion of this policy will insure competitiveness among the different areas independently and individually.

In this direction and with an orientation towards creating a global free market and the creation of the E.U. common market, the E.U. decided to free the state-member-markets, especially the monopoly of the telecommunications and transport which up to recently had a prime position. It has also been realized that it is essential to conserve the development of interior dynamics and to make the most of the multiformity of the cultural elements traditions and the residents’ “technology awareness”.

Many of the activities of the E.U. proved inefficient as it is obvious that the general directions, the possibility of taking advantage of the working force and the effects of the transport network and telecommunications, deteriorated the unbalance of the E.U. areas. The big urban centers having better infrastructure and organization have attracted the placement of central services and undertaken decision centers and at the same time the gathering of “technology awareness”. Consequently, the big cities have become even bigger and the small, smaller. Furthermore, more services have been created like banks, schools, “cultural infrastructures”, athletic centers and other more or less important services. All the above have maximized the big urban centers which have attracted with growing pace, a huge amount of population who abandoned the rural areas.

Through the policy of the E.U. towards the enhancing of the outer district and the expansion of local authorities, the cities are exposed to more immediate global changes compared to the past. Today it has been realized that there are serious risks underlying because a significant part of investments take place in big cities. This is in accordance to specialized services like banks which have mostly been established in London, in Frankfurt and Amsterdam, but also with the establishment of the headquarters of huge international corporations like in Brussels, Paris, London and Amsterdam. A characteristic example is the Japanese corporation in Dusseldorf. Furthermore, the area around Amsterdam has become basic spot of distribution centers in European scale. On the other hand Spain, Portugal and Ireland have accepted a big part of investing flow after the creation of the common market. This situation indicates the excellent financial status of Madrid and generally of the big urban districts of the East coast of Spain and the steady development of Lisbon.

During the 80's, the gathering of the population at specific urban regions was realized and at the same time the decrease of diaspora to other regions. So, serious problems were created like the congestion of some areas and the desertion of others. Obviously, there is great danger for the European vision which depends on the citizens' equality and opportunities.

3 THE IN-HOMOGENEITY OF FINANCIAL DEVELOPMENT - THE PROBLEM OF UNEMPLOYMENT

We should point out that, as anyone would expect, after the unification of the Union market, greater movement of the E.U. citizens would be noticed at the general European level due to the financial activities and occupation opportunities. Finally though, this movement was remarked at local level, in state scale. So the inhabitants of rural areas gather to big urban centers. The phenomenon of recycling of occupational positions appeared due to technological progress which has created new occupations and has abolished old ones. Of course, it is an exception the inflow of immigrants from other countries out of the European Union.

A significant parameter is the fact that nowadays the development of technology has minimized distance while telecommunications are greatly developed too (eg. Wireless, telephone, fax, Internet etc.). So commuting time is much less. Thus people considered it easier to stay far from their work even though they would be obliged to cover daily a big distance when commuting. The increase in commuting has caused a deteriorating situation at the city centers as traffic jams have become worse and contribute more to air pollution especially at rush hours. So it is not accidental that the above problems are a special element of the physiognomy of some cities. (Rome, Athens).

The phenomenon of the "Shift" in occupations through technological progress - occupations becoming obsolete and being substituted by others - had as a result the gathering of the population in big urban centers where it is easier to find work. This phenomenon has makes them even more densely populated. We can observe a tendency to establish more productive co-operations at more favorable spots. By this we refer to spots that offer better public services, have more specialized working force or those which offer the possibility to be established in the national and international market. All the above, however, have as a result the reinforcement of regional inequalities in terms of regional planning separation and the differences in income. Poor regions lose a significant amount of their "active" inhabitants because they lack in financial progress. Those areas are thus unable to offer working positions and are lead to decline.

At this point we should mention the serious problem of unemployment faced by the E.U. The number of the unemployed is dramatically increasing and has become one of the biggest problems of the Union. Even though there have been numerous attempts in the direction of tackling the problem, there is a weakness in providing opportunities to an increasingly large number of people in need of work. Steps had already been taken in the Amsterdam Agreement to deal with the face occupation and the unemployment problem as well as attempts for co-operation between state members. (3rd pylon). In addition, the announcement of the E.U. with title "A European Strategy for the encouragement of local initiative development and occupation" has looked into new opportunities for the creation of occupation opportunities in the public and private sector (for example domestic and social services, local-public transport, social security, housing sector, local trade, tourism and cultural heritage). At the same time the political aims of the E.U. are:

- *The financial support aiming at prosperity and occupation in cities:*

The Committee has emphasized the importance of financial support of urban areas through funding from organic funds based on local programs. The role of the cities will be re-enforced with the financial development and the development of initiative will be also encouraged.

- *The measuring of social data in urban areas:*

The state members have to focus on co-operating against predisposition and social exclusion. The European Commission have already suggested:

- Financing through organic funds with complete social, cultural, environmental etc. programs for the renewal of the downgraded areas.
- Supporting the links of urban areas so as to avoid their separation and alienation.
- Programs for the education of citizens.

Aiming at a successful outcome, the Commission have encouraged the exchange of experiences (know- how) and also activities between the state-members. The 5th Frame of Support for the Research and Technological development contributed drastically towards this direction. The same and the 6th.

We should finally point out that important political programs are being formed for the solution of the problems of occupation and unemployment whose effects on urban life and on the shape of the modern E.U. city, we will be able to evaluate the forthcoming years.

4 THE ENHANCING OF THE SUB-STRUCTURE OF MEDIUM AND SMALL SIZED CITIES

Taking as a fact that the E.U. regions appear to be heterogeneous in terms of shape development and sub-structure and with the imminent danger of a decline in the medium and small sized cities, directions have been given for actions followed to insure the convergence of the different areas. In this way, these areas will hopefully become viable and competitive in European and global level. These actions focus on:

- The nets for provisions of energy and transport in areas that need to become more accessible

- The organizing of a society of information promoting the construction of tele-communication nets so as to be organized in a “settled” frame which will guarantee the total provision of services and the funding of the applications and local nets through the substructure funds. This will allow the less prosperous regions to exploit the new technology of information and communication.
- The substructure of educational issues occupation specialization and differentiating activities throughout the Union.

To sum up, we can conclude that the Policy of Competitiveness and Occupation has dramatic spatial effects since only the cities have the sub-structure to offer high-level services and manage to attract investments and new establishments. The following phenomenon appears:

- huge cities taking monstrous proportions
- the weakening and desertion of the already small and medium cities.

The cost of the adoption of small and medium cities is great while it also seems impossible for them to keep up with the rapid pace of development and competitiveness as imposed by the modern European Union. The spatial differentiation and the increase of inequality among the regions can become obvious in European and state-member level. Undoubtedly, a substantial factor of financial success, is the ability to innovate. Particular urban regions in the E.U. like London, Amsterdam, Paris, Frankfurt, Munich etc. are organized in a high technical and research level combined with a business mentality orientated towards innovation. Almost half of the funds of the 2th and 3rd “frame-programs” have been given to regions of the above areas, which are European top-centers. So, cities which do not have the substructure needed are automatically put aside and gradually weakened. Inevitably, youngsters abandon these cities to seek a better future and thus small and medium cities become cities of over-aged people with all the serious consequences involved. The physiognomy is alternated and appears to have a dramatic lack in initiative and activities which create an appealing for the youngsters environment.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The measures taken by E.U. with an aim to improve competitiveness and the balanced financial development is natural to affect people’s life, their financial situation and the daily image of the cities. Eventhough these measures have not been completed, some of their consequences are already obvious in the cities

- We can remark that a lot of city centers which were once downgraded and the home of financially weak classes and immigrants, have undergone a number of renewal interventions. This had as a result a rise in the price of the land and the return of well - off citizens. Simultaneously mixed uses of land were attempted so that city centers which were used only for business purposes were reshaped into domestic spaces. That led to the creation of shops that serve the new inhabitants and the development of businesses concerned with entertainment which gave a “night-life” look to the urban areas that used to look deserted in the night hours. (eg. Psyrri, in the center of Athens).
- The improvement of net subtractions allows, even though in a rather slow pace, the establishment of businesses and the development of financial activities at small and middle-sized cities. The every day life of these cities changes due to citizens moving to those areas and demanding a superior way of life.
- The rapid development of new technology and telecommunication gives the opportunity to the big production units to the decentralize their activities. In addition, the daily physical presence of many executives is no longer necessary at the working environment. In this way a gradual reduction of city dwelling will be observed.
- The urban inhabitants’ demands related to health and quality of life have been increased and intensified. The total amount of changes at the urban environment need to include research and activities which will be compatible with the physical environment protection and the protection of health and life of the people.
- It is proved that financial development is parallel to an increasing interest for culture and art. This is proved by the examples of European cities which developed a great cultural and spiritual achievements at the same time with their financial development. The success of European programs has naturally led to the upgrading and elevation of the political and artistic view of the cities which, as it is known, is particularly interesting and an essential characteristic of the physiognomy of the European cities.
- The development of standards of living even in countries less developed like Greece, have lead to a demand for better quality life and has raised life-style standards in sections like housing. The chosen locations for housing are mainly non-developed rural, mountainous or coastal regions which are turned into domesticated areas which in spite of being rather disorganized, they have their very own local character.
- Historical or traditional areas which become popular among financially powerful classes and are chosen as suitable areas for the creation of a second or third residence.
- The above have lead to the development of two kinds of cities:
 - a. The modern cities which are in harmony with the spirit of globalization and whose prominent features are not related to their local monuments but to modern buildings incorporated into a global financial-cultural network connecting the specific financial-center city to other key-cities worldwide.
 - b. The cities and settlements with national, local and traditional character whose traditional qualities are the main attraction and the most profitable "Resource". Such cities in Europe (e.g. Greece) and generally countries with special character and outstanding cultural heritage will not be badly influenced by globalization.

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