



Keynote speakers at the debate of the 'Sustainable City Districts' seminar: from left to right : Denis Grimberghs (SDRB), Tamás Polster (DTZ), Isabelle Pauthier (ARAU), Vincent De Wolf (commune of Etterbeek), Isabelle Durant (European Parliament), Charles Picqué (Brussels Region), Laurence de Hemptinne (Editions & Séminaires), Christian de Portzamparc (Architect/planner), Stéphan Sonnevile (Atenor), Marie-Laure Roggemans ('Madame Europe'), Cédric Mali (CBRE), Michel Pilette (com.realty).

Returning the city to its inhabitants ...

One of the major trends in Belgium over recent times has been to renovate entire city districts rather than just individual buildings. 'Returning the city to its inhabitants' is a much-used phrase, and this aspect was illustrated in a number of ways during the recent 'Sustainable City Districts' seminar organised in Brussels by Editions & Séminaires (Laurence de Hemptinne). Laurence de Hemptinne herself opened the seminar by explaining the challenges in terms of CO₂ reductions, mobility, public transport... and it concluded with a lively debate. Speaking of the Brussels European district, an example which was covered at length during the seminar, Brussels Minister-President Charles Picqué said: "We have to create public spaces and conviviality, while also solving the problem of mobility. We need people living here in the city, for one reason because we need taxpayers!"

The debate inevitably turned to the question of tower blocks. Christian de Portzamparc, the renowned French planner and architect who won the competition to set out the master plan for the 'Projet Urbain Loi' segment of the European district, put the emphasis on openness, views, public spaces and light. He compared the best practice of creating light and views, which is his intention here even where tower blocks are scheduled, to the situation in New York. "The inner courtyards of the buildings there", he said, "are not wells of light, they are just wells of air. And if we can encourage pedestrians to come into these areas, the shops and restaurants which bring life to a district will come with them" he concluded. Voicing a doubt, Vincent De Wolf, mayor of one of the Brussels communes partly accommodating the European district, wondered whether it was financially possible to tell an owner of an existing building that it was to be demolished to make way for a public space.

Atenor CEO Stéphan Sonnevile talked of the importance of mixed use districts, and said that Brussels was in a position to manage the long term while also taking care of short term needs. And Denis Grimberghs, head of the SDRB (Brussels Development Agency) pointed out that when mixed use districts were considering housing, it had to be remembered that society needed all types of residential accommodation, not just private apartments: social housing, old people's homes... The ARAU (urban action research workshop) organisation's director Isabelle Pauthier called for obligatory housing construction by the developers of offices, saying that Brussels needed this. And her point of view which was almost entirely against tower blocks, led to an important point, once again relative to creating a 'living city' from Tamás Polster, Head of Consulting Europe, and Middle East, DTZ: "We need good quality and large scale buildings near public transport hubs if we are to maintain and increase employment in the city".

A section on city district redevelopment projects can be found in this magazine, including those which are the responsibility of some of the speakers in the debate.

Tim HARRUP ■