



Québec Roadmap: towards a new urban project (2022-2024)

NARRATIVE

Preamble

To date, twenty-one cities have adopted the Roadmap, including nine that have already explained the specific situations they are facing. The General Secretariat is offering a summary of these situations in the form of a "narrative." This is a subjective and provisional interpretation, intended to help understand the context and perspectives governing how cities are using and contributing to the Roadmap. As this is an ongoing process, cities will gradually adjust their descriptions, and cities joining the Roadmap will add their own contributions. The "narrative" of the Roadmap will inevitably develop and change.

Historic sectors registered on the World Heritage List are living entities where different functions coexist: residential, educational, commercial, administrative, cultural, social, tourist, and more. This delicate balance explains the resilience of historic cities and their ability to adapt to change. It requires enlightened policies to limit the impact of annoyances that can, over time, diminish quality of life and devitalize historic centres.

The problems identified by the cities involved in the Québec Roadmap, and which have prompted them to take action within this framework, are numerous and interrelated:

A decreasing number of residents

Anticipated or already observed in a gradual or sometimes spectacular form, the decline in the number of residents feeds a vicious circle that reduces the livability and vitality of older neighborhoods. It is becoming increasingly difficult for cities to maintain public services and infrastructures, and local businesses are losing the critical economic mass that enabled them to survive in the first place.

Québec City: It is hard to attract residents to Old Québec City, where the vacancy rate is 27.8%.

Over time, the proportion of occupied dwellings has continued to decline; the vacancy of living space on the floors of commercial buildings is increasing and facilitating the appropriation of public or private spaces; technical constraints linked to the preservation of old buildings are hampering their renovation, even posing conservation problems and leading to their deterioration. Historic neighborhoods are gradually being transformed, deteriorating, and becoming poorer, making daily life more difficult and leaving them all the more vulnerable to economic predation.

***Brussels:** Shopkeepers no longer live on the floors above commercial first floors, which remain empty. 30% of the 700 buildings in the UNESCO zone have empty floors.*

Pre-eminence of tourism

Tourism may seem like a miracle substitute, the sign of and key to a city's success. But the development of the tourism sector, or of any other economic activity, to the detriment of other declining urban functions, weighs on the daily lives of residents and accelerates the degradation of the city, with sometimes irremediable consequences: renting out buildings under commercial leases, leading to developments that promote the sole use of first floors to the detriment of upper storeys; densification of inner blocks to increase the commercial surface area; reduction in the supply of housing that meets people's needs in favour of tourist rentals (Airbnb, etc.), thus increasing through-traffic, reducing parking space, and having many other negative impacts besides.

***Colonia del Sacramento:** Colonia del Sacramento's "crisis of success" is generating strong demand for tourist services at the expense of everyday services. The increasing prominence of cars and tourist crowds is undermining the quality of life and sustainability of the historic centre.*

Where tourism no longer allows the city to function normally, radical measures (e.g. heritage protection, management of pedestrian and motorized traffic) may appear to improve the user experience in the historic centre. However, they often push problems to other neighborhoods, in particular to the buffer zone (e.g. traffic, modernization of old buildings), which is nevertheless an integral part of the historic city. As a result, excessive pressure is exerted on streets, new buildings and renovation projects, public spaces, green areas, and infrastructure.

***Dubrovnik:** Excessive development of tourism and related services is exacerbating problems of road traffic congestion, particularly in the buffer zone, since the World Heritage site itself is a pedestrian zone.*

Public and exceptional spaces under pressure

Public spaces (parks, squares, courtyards) are at the heart of prevailing tensions. It is on these prestigious sites, symbols, and sources of pride so characteristic of historic cities, that expectations and ambitions are focused. A surfeit of ideas and good will has sometimes justified developments that have ultimately blurred the identity of the site, denied its historical reality, erased all traces of authenticity, and even perverted its very nature. Residents' expectations have been unfulfilled, and visitors' experience has become incomplete or distorted. The use of sophisticated or costly materials, at odds with local specificities, or the accentuation of a "stone" character in the name of a certain aesthetic, all lead to dissatisfaction and new debates at a time when extreme climatic events are proliferating.

***Puebla:** The historic centre of Puebla has been undergoing progressive depopulation for 33 years. The architectural deterioration of the urban space, the*

dilapidation of public spaces, and the lack of resources for maintenance and restoration have severely hampered the livability and vitality of this UNESCO World Heritage site.

In addition to public spaces, places of worship and contemplation are also the target of intense debate concerning their transformation. These sites are sometimes extensive, with high commercial or tourist potential. They are avidly coveted, threatening their integrity. They raise complex issues that go beyond mere architectural preservation. The spiritual value of these sites gives them an even greater importance and urban potential, justifying a comprehensive reflection on their place in the city.

***Bruges:** The Bruges Beguinage is located in the centre of the historic city, inside the city walls. One of its main intangible qualities is that it is a "haven of peace and silence" under heavy pressure from mass tourism.*

Heritage is a fundamental resource in the city's transition to a quality urban space and in limiting the harmful effects of climate change and urban and tourist pressures.

Increasingly, solutions and innovations come from local communities and civil society, who alert public authorities, raise awareness, and mobilize: only a shared awareness of tensions and problems can lead to a search for solutions. Resistance on both sides is inevitable, depending on the interests of each player, but dialogue and new forms of consultation and participation are also a reflection of our times, and something to which cities are responsive.

These democratic impulses are a source of change, raising the right questions about the lifestyles people want, the uses to which public spaces are put, social justice, heritage values, and, more generally, what makes for quality of life and liveability.

***Krakow:** Although the market square is considered a prestigious space and a source of pride, it is perceived by residents as an unfriendly place due to the prominence of tourist activities and its "stony" character.*

Today, the trend seems to be towards simplicity, respect for the authenticity of places or buildings, but also greening, reintegrating biodiversity, and mixing public and private spaces to benefit the local population. There is a growing demand for the introduction of renewable energy technologies into older neighborhoods, and for the optimization of building energy to achieve carbon neutrality.

***Bordeaux:** The experience of mandatory lockdowns in response to the COVID-19 pandemic revealed great inequalities between those who could benefit from access to planted open spaces and those who could not.*

Heritage preservation is a responsibility shared by authorities, residents, and specialists alike. To maintain, restore, or rehabilitate the heritage of our cities, it is necessary to call on the specialized work of artisans who have the knowledge and skills to carry out the appropriate work using traditional techniques and new technologies. Preserving our heritage and the skills that maintain it is a challenge that also has an economic dimension;

it represents a considerable market that needs to be developed, particularly through skills training and sharing.

Regional Secretariat for Southern Europe and the Mediterranean: To maintain, restore, or rehabilitate urban heritage, it is necessary to call on the specialized work of artisans, but we also need to know whether these trades still exist and whether there is a sufficient market to support them economically and use them appropriately.