Comparing US and Europe: Could Europe be the American Dream?

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I have been asked to reflect upon the meaning of comparing USA and Europe on climate change, mobility and clean tech and to speculate if Europe could be the future of the American dream. On this background I shall also offer some remarks on what I think could be in focus in future sessions.

I have chosen as entry to the meaning of comparing USA and Europe to 'follow the actors'. I shall look at how two American actors in the field of clean technologies themselves 'compare' by moving from the US to Europe. I shall make use of two examples from the Danish context both of which have been mentioned earlier in our series of sessions. The first example is the Copenhagen Wheel, which was mentioned in the 4th session in December 2009 on information technologies by Carlo Ratti. The next example is about the electric car and the activities of the company Better Place in Denmark, which was also touched upon in the same session. Finally, I shall refer to a third Danish example of quite another kind: the climate plan of my hometown Aarhus.

The Copenhagen Wheel

The Copenhagen wheel is, as some of you will know, an invention made at the Laboratory SENSEable at MIT. It is a device that can be fixed to the rear wheel of an ordinary bicycle and which transforms the bicycle into a hybrid electronic bike. It can conserve the energy produced, when you use the breaks, for later use when you need it, and it can be connected to the telephone to collect data about pollution, traffic, green miles, exchanging data with friends etc. The wheel has been developed as a joint venture between SENSEable, Donati Energeia and the Italian Ministry of the Environment.

The Copenhagen municipality considers buying 600 of these wheels to be used by the employees instead of cars. This will help developing and commercialising the wheel. For Copenhagen the initiative is part of a plan to make 50% of the citizens take the bike from home to work or school and back again, every day. Today 1/3 of the inhabitants' trips are already taken on the bike. The goal is improve the health of the citizens and to be the first 'zero carbon' Capital city in 2025.

What does this story tell us about the US-Europe relationship? Firstly, I think, it tells us about a situation that has been stressed earlier by Taoufik Souami: so-called American innovativeness is not necessarily focused on the US; it operates globally, both in regard to clients and to recruiting people. Here Italy is as important as the US. Secondly, the story shows the importance of Public Private Partnerships in developing new clean technologies and that such PPP's are obtainable across nation state borders, perhaps more easily outside the US than inside. Thirdly, the story indicates that European municipalities and especially Scandinavian municipalities, which are parts of large welfare oriented public sectors, can be important players in such partnerships. As 'welfare cities' they dispose of much more important parts of the Gross National Income and the total pool of labour power than the liberal welfare models of the US (and UK). This means that new initiatives within the frames of local welfare states can have important impact in the local areas as a whole.

Better Place in Denmark

Better Place is an American firm that endeavours to provide systems of services for electric cars: loading stations, batteries, renewable energy sources, services for the cars themselves. In Denmark Better Place cooperates with the large dominating State owned energy company DONG, with

some municipalities and with Nissan-Renault to establish a system of infrastructural services for electric cars that covers the whole, small nation and utilises the wind energy produced at night where the total demand for energy is small. Better Place also operates in another small state, Israel, and they also have made partnerships with the city of Los Angeles.

Why is Denmark interesting for Better Place? First, of course, because the country is small and distances short, but also for other reasons. One reason is that Denmark for several years through public policies has supported the production and use of windmills, which now supplies 20% of the country's energy. Another reason is that the nation has a high taxation on gasoline and a very high taxation on cars ("take one, pay for three!" which makes the Danish car park at the level of 1967 in California, as Donald Shoup reminded us during our 2nd session on the Californian paradox in June 2009). The latter provides for the present favourable tax reductions on electric cars. (The long-term situation after 2012 is, however, unresolved, which the actors involved in the project now are complaining strongly about).

Again an innovative American company finds important partnerships in a (North)-European context where public sector activities and regulations have provided conditions favourable for clean technologies.

The Aarhus Climate Plan

My third example is the Climate plan of the municipality of Aarhus, where traffic accounts for 29% of CO2-emissions (a bit more that average USA of 27% but less that the 50% of San Francisco), electricity for 40% and heating for 25%.

The aim of the plan is that Aarhus should be CO2-neutral in 2030. This is going to be achieved through a series of measures:

- Energy efficient new building plans for local areas,
- Renovation of existing municipal buildings,
- Energy efficiency in new municipal buildings,
- Energy efficient behaviour of municipal employees,
- Co2 neutrality in existing urban areas among other things by providing Co2-neutral district heating supply (chauffage urbain),
- Increasing wind and biomass energy production,
- More electric transport (light rail, electric vehicles in the municipality),
- More bicycling,
- Support of commercial and R&D activities within the fields of climate and environment,
- Support of energy optimisations in local enterprises,
- Increasing forestry in the open land areas,
- Prevention of flooding,
- Energy efficient municipal purchase,
- And last, but not least: communication and citizens participation and involvement to produce better CO2-behaviour making CO2 neutrality a common goal for the citizens.

This climate plan seems *rather similar* to what you will find in many other European cities and in American cities as well, as was demonstrated in our session on local climate plans. And it can be criticised as well for being too focused on what today seems possible, for not being radical enough, for being too little concerned with the 29 % emissions from transportation, for being less integrated with the urban planning system than possible, and especially for not being sufficiently focused on the problems of the sprawling city. However, the *potential* importance of such comprehensive climate plans should not be underestimated, especially in contexts where the public sector has a large impact on societal life as in Denmark.

New explorations in the triangle urbanism, climate plans, clean tech mobilities

Well then, I have now presented this constellation: 1) two examples of American inventiveness well supported by public private partnerships in Europe, both of them in the field of possible changes of traffic behaviour which is relatively neglected in the municipal climate plans, and 2) one example of a European municipal climate plan that is not that different from what you might find in US-cities, highly focused on energy and buildings, not that well integrated with urban planning and too little concerned with traffic emissions.

This constellation, I think, calls for the following questions to be explored more in depth in the coming sessions of our programme:

How can the (American) inventiveness in regard to changing technologies and behaviour in traffic and mobility be better integrated with the climate plans, and how can both of these be better integrated with the strategic planning of our differentiated, urban 'metapolitan' areas? How can the productive interplay within the triangle of 'urban plans, climate plans and clean tech in urban mobility' be improved?

Further, such integration and improvement implies, as I see it, that questions of climate and environment must be considered as *one* important dimension of urban development; one, yes, but not the only one! In terms of the orders of worth theorised by Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot in *De la justification*: urban problems are mostly related to several such orders: aesthetic, domestic/traditional, civic, efficiency, market, opinion, green, project. In the city justification and action should not be based on a 'green order of worth' only. The sustainable city as only green would be as nightmarish as the modern city mainly planned and justified by the order of efficiency.

The city should be more than healthy and sustainable, it should, as Spinoza would have said, be joyful.

Sustainability and the Eclectic City

In a European context such an urban pluralism also implies that we look at the city as what Francois Ascher has called an eclectic or pluralistic city that consists of typically 5 cities within 'the metapolitan' agglomerations: the centre city, the near suburb, the periurban areas, the neo-rural areas, and the social housing areas. They are not separate entities, they make system, some urbanites prefer living in one type of city, others otherwise. The questions of sustainability, climate change, mobility and clean tech should be related to *this* 'metapolitan' complexity. And in this context one important thing is to investigate if low-density urban development and sustainability can go together.

An American dream?

Will this be an American Dream? In some respects yes! It would respond to American enterprises' call for public intervention and regulation to promote clean technologies, and it would not be a priori focused on rigorously restricting mobility and low density. In other respects surely NO! It will be much too much oriented towards the central and local STATE to be an American Dream.

A question of politics

The point here is that the problems of climate change, urban mobility and clean tech are inherently *political*. They are ridden with conflicts of interest and justification, conflicts that will not go away as was emphatically shown at the COP15 meeting in Copenhagen in December 2009. Some are hoping or asking for a future government with global sovereignty to cope with the environmental problems of the Earth. Not even such a government will be able to do away with the politically contested character of these matters of concern. We have, I think, still been talking too little about

politics during our sessions. Therefore I will add to the triangle: its inherent *political contestabilities*.