



## Improving the present, sustaining the future

There are some concepts which are born with a certain transformative aureole but as soon as they are included in the papers of the IMF, or speeches by the Pope, they somehow lose their magic. The Greens aroused great interest when they began to make their presence felt in German politics, yet today they are as nebulous as any other party. The attempt to turn the ecology movement into an alternative universal ideology has been frustrated because it is unable to come up with an all-embracing proposal. The concept of sustainability has been shunted back and forth from science to politics, on a permanent return ticket. Nevertheless, when the nations summoned by the UN take on the problem of sustainability—and no matter how much their innovative ideas are held back by the mechanics of bureaucracy—there can be no question that they officially acknowledge that there is an undeniable problem.

We need to regain the meaning of some of the words above and do everything within our power to ensure that the promises and good intentions bring about a collective awareness which can force politicians to act. The question of sustainability in the development of cities is central to the activities of the CCCB and one of its three permanent fields of research, together with urban history and public spaces. The exhibition *The Sustainable City* is one of the landmarks in our work; the first time we have made an appeal to the public to understand and acknowledge the problem and how serious it actually is. The research undertaken by the CCCB will be reinforced when it incorporates the documentary programmes of the Network of Towns and Cities towards sustainability.

We need to make it clear, without being obsessively alarmist, that if substantial changes are not made to the types of development and consumption inherent in the Western model for development—itsself the only point of reference for progress on the planet—the Earth will not be able to withstand the impact of man's actions indefinitely. We must also explain that urban systems have the greatest impact on the Earth and that our model of city is not extendible, so if we continue to tread this path we will come up against situations fraught with conflict which will be hard to endure. We must understand that the cities which wreak the most havoc are mainly those in the West, both in their own right and as a model which everyone seeks to imitate. We must be aware that we have often gambled sustainability on projects which are not exactly heaven on earth. We can find an instance of this at home. Barcelona and its metropolitan area have experienced hardly any population growth since the seventies. However, land occupation and water and energy consumption have increased exponentially. This is the model which needs to be put right.

It is not a question of being alarmist or dreaming of Arcadias which, fortunately, will not return, but of being aware that the authorities, the public and private sector and our societies in general have been inefficient from the point of view of ecological balance. We should know that if we want this awareness to last and if we come to understand, through basic respect and solidarity, that we cannot carry on building our model if this means depriving others of access to our living conditions, we must learn to do things another way, no matter how much powerful networks of interest systematically oppose the introduction of modifications which are indispensable to our model of society