

WORK, LIVE AND PLAY: CORNERSTONES OF SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS DISTRICTS?

Combining work and leisure in business districts is a delicate issue. If we consider that the business district has to be primarily a place of work, the services marketed there will be aimed basically at employees and will focus on underpinning their productivity by being useful, easily accessible and low time consuming. However, they will be closed outside working hours and result in deserted business districts during evenings and weekends.

Be that as it may, this does not reflect to current trend. Actually, a number of business districts are installed in the heart of the city, such as in Vancouver where the business district has a population of 85 000 inhabitants for 135 000 employees, or have always played host to a large residential population. This is the case for La Défense that was designed from the very outset as a mixed area and currently has a residential population of 20 000 inhabitants, including a significant portion of social housing.

For their part, large enterprises and the employees, especially their executives, are increasingly seeking a pleasant and convivial working environment. Therefore, the fact that the business district is also a space for living is considered as a basic criterion when choosing to locate in such an environment. Hence, the priority placed by the majority of modern business districts on increased desegregation that includes training and education facilities, shops and personal services, leisure and cultural facilities and activities, green spaces, pedestrian areas and cycle paths.

INTRODUCTION OR CONSOLIDATION OF LEISURE ACTIVITIES IN THE BUSINESS DISTRICT: ACTION PLAN

The introduction or consolidation of leisure activities in the business district fundamentally alters one's perception of it. In fact, it is a matter, on the one hand, of viewing the space as a location for social interaction rather than a simple transit zone between workplace *per se* and the transportation system providing access and, on the other hand, of placing emphasis on the comfort and wellbeing of employees, users and inhabitants and no longer on simple functional efficiency and productivity in its raw state.

In order to achieve this, we have to adopt certain measures:

Reduce the pre-eminence of automobiles, as was the case in Montreal where the business district was cut in two by a veritable urban highway.

Improve security, safety and cleanliness, as well as urban furniture, and transform the site from an industrial city in agony to a place of beauty and culture, where it becomes a real pleasure to go out and stroll about. The Albany Building or Saint Paul's Square are two typical examples.

Encourage the opening of quality hotels, bars and restaurants, as is the successful case of the London docklands area, along with cultural activities: cinemas or theatres and also one-off events such as the "Twilight Run" or the Football World Cup in 2010 in Cape Town, and the "Community Sports Day" in Liverpool.

INTRODUCTION OR CONSOLIDATION OF LEISURE ACTIVITIES THE BUSINESS DISTRICT: COSTS AND BENEFITS

Undoubtedly, implementing such an action plan comes at a cost: that of rehabilitating and/or altering infrastructures, creating new facilities and new services.

Nevertheless, it presents a host of benefits. As illustrated by the Cape Town experience, residents who had deserted the district came back and new arrivals made it their home. In addition, a feeling of inter-communal spirit and belonging is developing. The business district returns to being a living space and a place of social interaction that boosts its attractiveness even further. Creative sector industries such as design, fashion, image, etc. are flourishing there and the absence of any leisure sector activities, especially restaurants and late-opening bars, is being remedied at a fast-growing rate. The district even becomes a place of interest for tourists, and not only for business tourists (e.g. La Défense).

The future belongs to business districts where the various functions of work, housing, shopping, culture and leisure live side by side, sometimes in the same building. The EPAD had this vision in mind in July 2007 when it launched its international call for tenders to build a mixed activity high-rise building, the Signal Tower. Mono-functionality, with its cortege of empty streets and deserted spaces outside office hours, has had its day. As highlighted by Jean Charles Decaux, we are now entering the era of 7/7 and 24/24, where it has become indispensable to combine work and leisure, social interaction and efficiency, ease of access and productivity.