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Human settlements are, in general, the result of a more or less long historical evolution. Additionally, urban areas and their associated infrastructures often have development implications that last for generations. However only in recent decades environmental, social, and governance factors have begun to be taken in consideration in their development. This underlines the importance of acting decisively to transform human settlements into truly sustainable communities in line with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and the urgency to act to tackle the climate change actual crisis.

It is a major challenge that provides very interesting opportunities for our industry and involves a transformation of the problems approach. An innovative and holistic response at local, national and international level that integrates all sustainable aspects is necessary at planning, design, construction and operation of urban areas and their associated infrastructures.

At a large scale perspective, rural development and strength its network with urban areas is critical to reduce social inequalities and the population tendency to move to cities suburbs. It will probably require national and regional planning that highly promote positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas.

Mobility (seasonal and daily) and existing transport systems will certainly have to be reviewed. The energy shift towards renewable energy sources seems also inevitable to contain the growing air pollution problems in urban areas and it is equally important the sustainable management of water with a broad territorial perspective and integrated consideration of availability and quality.

From another point of view, the scarcity of certain natural resources will undoubtedly condition waste management under circular economy principles. New management systems and infrastructures will probably be required to ensure not only recycling capacities but also segregation, storing and materials reuse.

On a smaller scale within urban areas, these trends will increase challenges and opportunities for our industry. We will need to develop innovative solutions in relation to all the above-mentioned aspects (mobility and connectivity, energy and water efficiency, local resource availability and waste to resource management) taking into consideration local environmental, social and cultural particularities. This local specificity will probably make it difficult to replicate solutions into other contexts. However, concepts of successful experiences and technologies must be transferable to other geographic areas through transparent and agile mechanisms if we are to achieve results in relation to the SDGs.

At this level it is also particularly relevant to provide solutions that improves quality of life of the entire urban population. Sustainable communities must not only provide the traditional services (housing, work, education, health, etc.) but also they should adequately address other concepts related to social welfare. Urban solutions must incorporate safe and adequate spaces for social interrelation both from an economic and leisure activity perspective. These spaces must meet the needs of minorities with an inclusive and tolerant approach as well as integrate the cultural particularities of all members of society. Many of these concepts are already being considered by our industry and there are already multiple examples of good practices. In many cases success has been conditioned by the active participation of society in the processes of design, construction, maintenance, and management of these spaces. This is undoubtedly a key factor when we talk about transforming our cities into sustainable communities.

Finally, it is important to strengthen the environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas as it has been mentioned before. We cannot continue to expand our cities to accommodate the world's growing population at the expense of natural resources destruction. Communities must enhance the environment and support local biodiversity while ensuring their sustainability. There are already many good examples that suggest creativity and innovation can transform current urban concept to a more sustainable perspective (green and brown roofs, green façades, green corridors along infrastructures, natural ecosystems patches in open spaces, urban vegetable gardens, etc.).

As an industry, we must lead these transformations by introducing the perspective of sustainable development in our daily work, propose new solutions to better tackle climate change and to promote a global sustainable future. Challenge is huge but so is our sector's capacity for future transformation.

