

6.- TOWARD THE FUTURE

Not all has been said, numerous shadows subsist.

An old country rich in culture, Belgium must carry the weight of the precocity of its development, whether it be in relation to the decline of industrial regions or to the ageing of its population. It is also handicapped by the exiguity of its territory in a world where the economic scale is at least on a continental level. But what of future wealth!

Belgium strives to leave behind its old industrial structure and to capitalize on new technologies. "FLANDERS TECHNOLOGY" in Flanders and "OPERATION ATHENA" in Wallonia demonstrate its efforts. In Wallonia, the most troubled region at the moment, employment in the advanced sectors went from 22 % in 1974 to 29 % in 1984, whereas in the sectors in decline it fell from 34 % to 25 %. The tertiary sector also has a bright future.

That is, certainly, one of the major problems confronting the nation's survival. But efforts to improve the standard of living are not the only ones, there are also movements aimed at the material efficiency of life and the quality of life. Arranging of the territory and environment are the two directions taken in putting the country's geographic structure in harmony with new demands on social-economic development and with the rational preservation of biological balances.

The national law of territorial planning of 1962 forced the entire country into a system of "plans de secteurs", which are presented on maps with scales of 1:10,000 or 1:25,000; the zones sensibly previewed for the land's diverse functions. The rural renovation in Wallonia (1978), the Development Program introduced by the European Community for the agricultural regions of south-eastern Belgium (1981), the land consolidation throughout the country (1956), are the instruments of modernization in rural regions. The laws of economic development regionalize financial aid for investments (1959, 1960, 1970, 1978); the definition of employment zones (1982) and reconversional zones (1984) are other regionalization tools of the recovery effort. The European Administration of Regional Development also provides support. Urban renovation essentially rebalances the historical centres of our cities. The law of the protection of nature in 1973, multiple rulings against nuisances, the efforts of the Royal Commission of Monuments and Sites dating from the 19th century, new site plans accompanying plans for land consolidation, biological evaluation map of Belgium, natural parks and reserves; these factors all unite in protecting the biological and cultural heritage of the country.

Territorial planning and the environment is now handled at the level of regional executives; areas of study and management of the land are thereby brought together. Therefore, Belgium's regional variety is better taken into account.

Governmental highlighting of regional potentialities requires a rich knowledge of our geography. And thus opens another area of debate on rational, applied geography in Belgium, of which we have only touched the top of the iceberg.

We hope that this short document which we have prepared arises questions and provokes a wanting to seek further knowledge of Belgian diversity which can only bloom under a united Europe.