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Item 4 (c) of the provisional agenda

**WORKSHOP ON SPATIAL PLANNING SYSTEMS: ORGANIZATION AND  
PRACTICE**

Report prepared by the ECE secretariat

**Introduction**

1. The workshop “Spatial Planning Systems: Organization and Practice” was held in Warsaw (Poland) from 19 to 21 June 2005. It was organized by the Ministry of Infrastructure of Poland, in cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).
2. Representatives of the following countries participated in the workshop: Armenia, Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Poland, Italy, Slovakia, Slovenia and the United Kingdom. Representatives of the UNECE secretariat also took part in the workshop.
3. Mrs. E. Szelinska, Director of the Spatial Planning Department of the Ministry of Infrastructure, opened the workshop and welcomed the participants. She reported on the current situation of the spatial planning system in Poland, its organization and functions. She expressed the hope that the exchange of information, the recommendations and proposals of the workshop would improve the spatial planning system in the country, facilitate economic and social development and create a better living environment for the population of Poland.
4. Mr. S. Skrzypek, Deputy Mayor of Warsaw welcomed the participants. He stressed the importance of spatial planning for an effective modernization of the city of Warsaw and its infrastructure, especially with regard to traffic management, preservation of historic monuments and creation of business opportunities. He stressed the fact that the rapidly changing economic and social environment put pressure on all stakeholders to meet the new

challenges resulting from of modernization and the new role of Warsaw as a European business and a cultural centre.

5. Representatives of the UNECE secretariat stated that experience across the region indicated that spatial planning plays a major role in policy integration. However, in some countries, there are serious problems in this area, such as fragmentation of the planning process and lack of target strategy for urban development; spontaneous decision-making process without appropriate administrative, organizational and legislative network; and lack of specialists and financial means at the local level.

6. Mr. J. Zetter (United Kingdom), Chairman of the Workshop, addressed the participants. He underlined that spatial planning is a long-term activity, an ongoing, enduring process of managing change, involving different actors in the interest of sustainable development. Local involvement in spatial planning decision-making is an important element, which recreates the sense of ownership. He thanked the host authorities for the warm hospitality extended to the participants and for the first-rate working conditions provided.

7. Study visits were organized in Warsaw on 19 June 2005.

8. The following themes were discussed:

**Theme I:      Spatial planning as an instrument of sustainable development and promotion of democracy**

Chairperson: Mr. J. Zetter (United Kingdom)

Presentations:

*UNECE Strategy for Sustainable Quality of Life in Human Settlements in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, by Mr. G. Vinogradov, UNECE secretariat;

*Guiding Principles for Sustainable Spatial Development in the European Continent*, European Conference of Ministers Responsible for Regional Planning (CEMAT), by Mrs. M.J. Festas, Portugal;

*Summary of the responses to the UNECE Questionnaire on Spatial Planning in the UNECE countries* , by Mr. Z. Ziobrowski, Institute of Urban Development of Poland.

**Theme II:      Organizational framework for spatial planning**

Chairperson: Mr. J. Zetter

Presentations:

*Spatial Development Policies in the Czech Republic*, by Mr. J. Markvart, Czech Republic;

*Spatial Planning in Armenia*, Mrs. R. Alaverdyan, Armenia;

*Main Principles of Modern Spatial Planning Systems: The Experience of Slovenia*, Ms. H. Solar, Slovenia.

**Theme III:      Spatial planning practice**

Chairperson: Mr. J.M. Chmielewski (Poland)

Presentations:

*Aspects of Information, Data and GIS/CAD/ICT Support for Planning at Local Level*,  
Mr. J. Talvitie, Finland;

*Spatial planning in Poland*, Ms. J. Gorgon, Poland.

9. On the second day, participants held an in-depth discussion on the issues raised during the first day of the workshop and elaborated conclusions on selected issues of spatial planning.

10. The discussion was chaired by Mr. J. Zetter and Mr. J.M. Chmielewski (Poland)

### MAIN OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

11. Spatial planning is a major tool for shaping integrated government policies. It provides vision and priorities, and high-quality government service. It coordinates actions and investments and helps avoid duplication of efforts by different departments and levels of government.

12. There are two basic functions of spatial planning: a development and a regulatory function.

Development function: the government takes the initiative to provide the infrastructure, to support the sustainable development of cities, to preserve natural resources, etc.

Regulatory function: individual citizens, companies and institutions use the land for their own purposes; they carry out construction and other activities, but need government approval at local, regional or national level (building permit), and such approval will be given only if certain conditions are met.

13. The participants of the workshop identified four challenges (dilemmas) in spatial planning, concerning both the organizational framework and planning practice:

- (a) How to ensure **cohesion** of spatial planning systems in the UNECE region and at the same time avoid the loss of **local identity**;
- (b) How to reconcile the concept of **sustainable development** with economic development and prevailing patterns of excessive use of natural resources (land, energy, water, etc.);
- (c) **Public interests versus private interests** in land use and spatial planning; and
- (d) **Independence** of different governmental levels and **coherence** between them.

14. The participants agreed that, with regard to the organizational framework, these challenges should be addressed through the following spatial planning instruments and measures:

- (a) Cohesion and local identity

**Decentralization.** One of the dominant trends of policy-making in recent decades has been local empowerment and community engagement. This approach focuses on the specific needs and aspirations of particular localities, emphasizing bottom-up rather than top-down approaches to policy-making and thereby promoting local identity.

**Evolution.** Modifications of spatial planning systems should be carried out within a steady process of evolutionary change based on knowledge and experience; good and effective elements and instruments of the previous system should be preserved.

(b) *Sustainable development*

**National strategy on the use of resources.** Local policies and plans should be consistent with National Planning Strategies and statements on sustainable use of resources.

**Awareness raising.** It is needed for the general public and for politicians. Active community participation lies right at the heart of sustainable development.

**Fiscal measures.** Successful reuse of existing buildings and brownfield land will not happen without extensive private sector investment, and it is clear that this investment will not take place if there are no fiscal incentives.

**Education and training.** Training of local authorities in spatial planning for sustainable development should be based on the guidelines of the local Agenda 21: respect for the principles and objectives of sustainable development in relation to the economic, social, cultural and environmental aspects, linking short and long-term objectives, local and global activities, good governance, etc.

(c) *Public interest versus private interest*

**Stakeholders involvement.** It is an important part of the trend towards democratization of all aspects of society and good governance principles;

**Public/private partnerships.** Recently, the response by governments has been the emergence of a new political ideology. This has focused on re-examining the role of government, reducing bureaucracy and the tax burden, tapping into the expertise of the private sector and introducing competitiveness into the delivery of services. Public agencies should seek an appropriate distribution of responsibilities between the public and the private sector. Governments progressively turn to the private sector for additional resources as well as to capitalise on the private sector's efficiency, capacity and innovation.

**Governance.** Urban governance poses a new challenge, in which the art of planning resides not in the production of sophisticated plans, but rather in what can be implemented and by whom, with the participation of all parties concerned.

(d) *Independence and coherence*

**Coordination.** Successful regional and national zoning and infrastructure provision schemes, require co-ordination and co-operation among those concerned. There are two types of intra-government coordination: (a) horizontal coordination between various ministries that play a role in the implementation (transport, economic development, environment, housing, education and culture, finance, energy, etc.); and (b) coordination between the national, regional and local levels. But there is also a need for coordination between the government and single-interest business and community organizations.

**Integration.** In order to achieve more integrated and coordinated policies and use of public funds, the government could design national spatial planning frameworks around particular national and regional development programmes and priorities. National spatial planning documents could also take into account European policy guidelines in the field of spatial development.

**Legally binding instruments.** The right balance between legally binding and non-binding recommendations and act should be found; however, both types of documentation are needed.

**Flexibility.** The planning process should be flexible, but this word should be used cautiously: planning documents have a certain legal power. Focus should be on attitudes and self-critical approach.

15. The participants agreed that, with regard to planning practice, those challenges should be addressed through the following instruments and measures:

(a) *Cohesion and local identity*

**Subsidiarity.** For integrated spatial development close cooperation is needed between different levels of administration, with a clear distribution of responsibilities between these levels.

**Benchmarks/Monitoring.** A coherent measurement system is required, together with a clear strategic view and cooperation among data providers (statistical officers) and data users (policy makers).

**Social impact.** Local authorities should incorporate in their plans social aspects, such as gender, equality, poverty alleviation, job opportunities, social inclusion, etc.

(b) *Sustainable development*

**Positive planning.** Positively worded policies are preferred to negatively worded policies. For example, it could be stated that planning permission (building permit) should be granted unless the development would cause harm.

**Managing demand.** This is related to a number of issues on the use of resources (land, energy, water, etc) by the business and municipal sectors. Questions may include: How are policies and programmes that promote conservation practices implemented? Who should take responsibility for encouraging efficient use of resources? What institutional and cultural barriers stand in the way of specific conservation practices, such as reuse/recycling? How can these barriers be eliminated? How can the development of new ideas for conservation be encouraged? Local governments need integrated and locally adjusted strategies to deal with these issues.

**Strategic impact assessment.** Environmental assessment should occur at the earliest possible stage in plan preparation with a meaningful measurement of progress during the lifetime of the plan.

**New development versus renewal.** The process usually ignites tension between different parties - those who push for new developments versus those who champion the value of the existing landmarks.

(c) Public interest versus private interest

**Empowerment.** Community empowerment can contribute to the planning process by providing a humanistic orientation to a discipline, which is based on “physical community” (buildings, roads, green spaces, etc.) and “human community” (individuals, social groups and institutions).

**Mediation.** Professionals and administrators should act as enablers, helping accommodate different interests of local people, public and private parties, rather than provide services and solutions.

**Transparency.** People will accept a land use plan more easily when they have had the opportunity to take part in its preparation. Land use plans based on consensus are much more effective than plans that have been imposed “top-down”.

**Communication.** There is a need for practical-oriented dialogue. It is also necessary to enhance participants' communication skills in planning to prepare, present and evaluate presentations. A variety of topics, such as selecting communication strategies for specific audiences, creating computer-generated graphics, and handling equipment problems, should be covered.

**Education.** Evolving European cooperation in spatial planning is viewed both as an opportunity and as a new task which calls for training and exchange between countries and regions.

(d) Independence and coherence

**Consultation and conflict management skills.** Urban planning and management has always had to respond to the competing needs of a variety of stakeholders. The shift from command and control methods to participatory community-based management places even greater demands on planners to balance sometimes irreconcilable demands. In this context, in order to manage planning processes effectively, planners must be able to identify and deal with a variety of conflicts relating to the use of land and property.

**Strategy/Implementation.** In order to foster community engagement in the pursuit of sustainable development, the activities of all organizations that provide services to the public need to adapt to local circumstances. These services are better coordinated within and between delivery agencies. To that end local authorities are requested to work together with other key delivery agencies and the community at large to adopt a community strategy.

**Terminology.** Over-complicated policies should be avoided: the use of succinct and unambiguous wording will pay dividends during the key stages of consultation, public examination and implementation.