

Topic 1. A city as leaving environment and driving force of development.

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GENERAL PLAN AS STRATEGY OF SUTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, OR “PLURALISM OF TOWN PLANNING POTENTIALITIES”

A city is historically established and the most rational and sustainable form of human settlement. Owing to objective regularities of regional town planning, cities have repeatedly been rebuilt, changing their architectural image and planning structure.

Urban development of Azerbaijan has a centuries-long historical past, as witnessed by wide spreading of cities built on regular base throughout countries territory.

Typical for ancient cities of Azerbaijan, like other countries of the Orient, are such common features as evolutional nature of the development, sustainability of local traditions going back to the slave-owning system, particular figurative structure, notable for arts of Oriental countries, obvious monumental nature of key city structures. Cities shaped gradually, step by step assuming organic, albeit irregular, architectural-spatial structure. Note that urban development of the country was largely attributable to and underwent influence of ancient culture.

Medieval cities presented integral urban structures with domes and minarets emerging from residential building and merging all together into single composition ensemble.

Architects of the country created inimitable images of “Oriental city” with its silhouette and colouristic splendour, peculiar picturesque ness with architectural forms having been shaped under the influence of Iranian and Arab architectures.

Construction activities of Azerbaijani rulers were not confined to cult buildings only, including high towers-minarets and domical erections of mosques, which added a particular expressiveness to the artistic silhouette of cities. A key trend in the architecture of the reviewed period was the erection of fortifications, fortresses and fortified cities-residencies necessitated by endless wars.

This was clearly evident in the 18 century where the formation of independent khanates led to the construction of palaces and citadels in the capitals of feudal possessions.

In early 19 century, the northern part of Azerbaijan was conquered by Russia. Growth of old cities and transformation of some big settlements into cities were attributable to the rise of their economic importance, which, in turn, paved the way for carrying out architectural projects. Provincial centers and other big cities were built to comply with premeditated plans of regular building. The point is about Baku (from 1810), Shemakha (from 1824), Shusha (from 1855). Subsequently, the cities were built on the basis of general plans (for instance, Shemakha from 1857 and Gyandja from 1873).

It was intensive building of Baku in late 19-early 20 centuries, during the intensive growth of oil industry, that turned it into the biggest cities of the Russian Empire. Note that the city of Baku was among five biggest cities of the Soviet Union.

General plans of Baku development were drawn up in 1937, 1954 and 1986. Of the greatest interest was a complex district lay-out of Absheron peninsula first ever in the world practices drawn up by Prof.A.Ivanitskiy.

An agglomeration approach to unloading was first applied with respect to New York and London in 1918. However, experiments on this track were confined to creating satellite cities within the boundary of agglomeration, which later proved its ineffectiveness.

Prof.A.Ivanitskiy suggested a principally new design, which provided for the creation of the single system of settlements in Baku environs. This was far-sighted plan, unprecedented in the world practices. Subsequently, in 1932-1934 Prof.V.Semyonov identified a real Baku agglomeration and properly substantiated its development to take place in the course of further development of Baku and cities of its outward zone as single system towards transport lines.

In the tragic 1937, a label of “bourgeoisieness” was put on city-planning theory with its notion of “agglomeration”. As a result, all subsequent plans of Baku development were mono-urban, and those of Absheron peninsula development were declaratively related to the scheme of district lay-out.

Over this same period, France got down to unloading Paris through legislative recognition of Paris agglomeration and development of design conformably to the whole of its territory.

It is currently crucial to reveal and legislatively legalize the Baku agglomeration as integral object to perform capital functions (social and town planning).

Today, there are 69 cities in the Azerbaijan Republic, one of which is the biggest, Baku; 2 big – Gyandja and Sumgait; 6 medium-sized - Ali-Bayramly, Mingechevir, Nakhchivan, Lenkoran, Sheki and Yevlakh; 60 small. 9 administrative regions are presently under Armenian occupation. They include 12 towns, 7 urban settlements and about 670 villages.

Typical features of modern functional and planning structure of settlements, which reflect evolution of Azerbaijani cities are as follows:

- Irregular urbanization process and mono-centrism of its manifestation on Absheron peninsula. Note that on 6% of countries territory there is 55% of urban population, to say nothing of the huge number of refugees from Armenia and internally displaced persons;
- Sharp disproportion in the level of city development and urban settlements network.
- A great quantity of urban settlements, which makes it no possible to build new urban settlements;
- Comparatively high density of rural population distribution and a considerable number of rural settlements (4250 units) and urban settlements (130 units) contribute to the development of agglomerative forms of settlement in the zones of influence of small and medium-sized towns.

For the success of town planning activity in the region of Baku and other cities of the country, it is essential to pursue a concerted policy of the development of state and private sectors, realize an appropriate town planning concept, and exercise the right to manage urban territory within the framework of a specific zone.

A hallmark of town planning activity in Azerbaijan under current market relations is a formation of housing and immovable markets, changes in the role of customer, builder, designer and city administration. From now on, architectural projects, town planning designs and urban building development programs cannot be realized at the expense of state investments only.

Also, a range of the participants of town planning process is expanded; their powers are decentralized, new organization forms of town planning projects realization emerge, including corporations of territory development, business zones and partnerships. Note that under traditional “Socialist” projecting the population was regarded as passive consumer of social welfare. Today, design activity is

largely oriented toward potential customers and investors. Thus, groups of consumers have been substituted for groups of clients, which, in turn, offer other attitudes to town planning activity.

Differentiation of housing fund in modern cities of Azerbaijan takes place in accordance with property potentials of the population. There are two main perspective types of housing: municipal, or social housing fund, and private, or commercial housing fund. Currently shaped is the new typology of housing fund by belonging, means of maintenance, and sources of financing, size of area per man.

Optimum balance of private and municipal housing fund of Azerbaijani cities contributes to the social integration of the population and creation of favorable conditions for sustainable development of urban building.

At the same time, sharp growth of citizens' welfare, mentality of the nation combined with rudimentary position of securities market, banking and insurance sectors resulted in mass financial investments in immovable and industrial production over the past 5 years.

Endowing the executive power of cities and municipalities with the right to grant lands under housing and industrial building, we failed to work through mechanisms of state town-planning control over this process. Though the town planning should be developed on the basis of appropriate laws, decrees and resolutions, the lack of effective mechanism of the implementation of the said documents is a serious obstacle in decision-making in the field of town planning policy and management of urban and settlement housing fund.

In pursuit of favorable conditions for private investments, the state preferred to dissociate itself from tight town planning regulations. An existing general plan of the city and schemes of regional settlement proved to be ignored.

As a result, over past few years, due to chaotic and mass distribution of lands by municipalities under private sector building with main administrative-business life continuing on restricted area of the central part, the city has faced serious problems. Among them is the transport problem caused by sharp rise in the number of transport facilities in the urban line. Suffice it to say that if there were imported 11,200 cars in 2001, the figure exceeded 64,500 in 2005. Today, the situation in the capital is close to disastrous, especially in rush hours.

Main reason of transport problems and street noise is a result of fruitless attempts to adapt (since 1934) a medieval radial semi-circular system of streets with perimetral building to the modern transport requirements.

It was annual growth of economy by 25-30%, favorable prospects of Azerbaijan development for the nearest years that enabled the government of the country to take some drastic measures to neutralize problems on a short-term basis:

- State program of regional development has been drawn up and successfully realized to open 600,000 jobs over the 5 years.
- State program of improvement and economic development of populated localities around Baku has been realized.
- Measures have been launched to reconstruct main transport lines of the capital and build modern multi-level transport flyover.
- Programs on reconstruction of heat-supply systems of tenement housing fund and raise its energy provision are underway.

- Measures have been taken to reconstruct water-supply and sewerage networks with the attraction of international investment projects.
- A development of the concept of new general plan of Baku and Baku agglomeration together with satellite towns till 2025 has started.

Our ability to solve three priority problems of Baku – housing, ecological and transport is dependent upon the strategy of the development of the capital of Azerbaijan. De-urbanization is a sustainable phenomenon in the 21 century town planning. Baku with its growing population reproduces a model of rapidly growing capitals of developing countries. The main reason is in compact structure of the city. As megapolis of reviving Great Silk Way (TRASECA program) located on strategic lines “North-South” and “West-East”, the Baku district of settlement is characterized by high level of urbanization and intensive town planning development. Note that over the past 100 years the population of the district has risen by more than 100 times with density of 380 men per 1 km².

At present, in modern many-sided world we have every reason to speak about “pluralism of town-planning opportunities”.

Alternative conceptual variants of Baku development (by Prof.F.Guseynov) are as follows:

First variant – city as compact territory. The point is about principal idea of the general plan designed for 2005. This approach gave rise to all existing and, hence, future problems and tendencies of development: further expansion of the city at the expense of suburbs, penetration of new housing into the existing building areas (hence, impossibility of resolving housing problem in the visible future), building of all free lands (hence, inevitable destruction of vegetation), orientation toward existing system of streets, agonizing road construction (hence, transport crisis, so long as by 2025 traffic will grow by 1.8 times and thus exceed carrying capacity of streets by 1.5 times), increase to load on existing worn-out engineering infrastructure (hence, inevitable accidents), growth of pressure on environment (hence, its inevitable degradation). All these are objective regularities, and no exorcisms like “ensure invariability of Baku borders” can change the situation. It should be recalled that there were scores of identical exorcisms in the general plan of Baku of 1986.

Second variant – creation of satellite cities at a distance of 100-120 km from Baku. The current general plan provides for attaining this goal after 2005. Meanwhile, some town planners suggest to do that in the first turn. In both cases, satellite cities of this kind are unlikely to influence the situation in Baku, since they are located from the center by 1.5-2.5 hours of driving and not included in everyday life and, hence, are not a part of Baku and cannot solve its domestic problems. For this reason, no where in the world, even in Japan with its super high-speed transport facilities, satellites are not located farther than 50-60 km from the city.

Third variant – Baku as system of settlement, including the city proper and closely located new satellite cities. As the practice of Paris-London-Moscow, other world cities’ reconstruction showed, this variant is an optimal concept of modern city development (a scheme of Paris reconstruction was approved in 1985, and by 2000 approx. 1.5 mil people had been withdrawn from the city). For this reason, this variant should be applied to Baku as strategy of its sustainable development. A distinctive feature of Baku is that new cities would not emerge on blank space, but at the expense of natural growth of historically established urban settlements.

Analyses of the major social criterion – everyday labor ties – is indicative that Baku agglomeration has an area of 2300 km², not 1100 km², as the last general plan indicates with total population of about 4 mil and above 50 urban settlements.

Goals of sustainable development of Baku agglomeration are as follows:

- Execution of foreign political and domestic capital functions set by democratic society.
- Increased scientific and cultural contribution of Baku to the development of the country.
- Intensified training of cadres for high managerial sections.
- Improvement of conditions for agglomeration population reproduction.
- Ensuring of ecologically favorable living environment for permanent and temporal population.
- Improvement of transport infrastructure as basic center of trans-national corridor.

The above-mentioned list needs to be specified for concrete goals of lower levels and be brought to the notice of organizations in charge of their implementation.

This is the most acceptable strategy of sustainable development of Baku to stop its degradation, ensure its access to the level of modern world's capitals and visibly raise living standards of its population.

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