



# VITAL SPACES

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE  
UNECE COMMITTEE ON  
HOUSING AND LAND MANAGEMENT  
AND THE WORKING PARTY ON LAND ADMINISTRATION

## IN THIS ISSUE:

**The floor to the Chairs:** The chairs of the UNECE bodies related to housing and land management speak about “hot” topics

**Kyrgyzstan:** Land of opportunities. Thoughts from the experts

**Why a newsletter:** Help us reaching out to more individuals and organizations!

**What's new:** Welcome to the new director. CHLM and WPLA Secretaries. The Logo. Our new Interns.

## ENSURING ACCESS TO ADEQUATE FUNDING, by Doris Andoni

“When I was working in the National Planning Institute (some 10 years ago<sup>1</sup>), I didn’t think of the poor. Probably because there were no poor at that time (!), or probably because everybody was poor; or because poor was a prohibited word. When I started working in the housing department in the Ministry (1995), I began to have contacts with different people and to listen to different sad stories: how people have worked and struggled with the life in lost areas of North-East Albania for building the hydropower stations; how other people have suffered the exile from the communist regime; how other people have lost their houses in the pyramid schemes hoping to become rich, and how old pensioners or veterans of the WWII were asking for their entitlements. Myftar was one of them; he was a pensioner, a veteran of the WWII. He was coming in my office every Monday at 12 o’clock asking very gently: “is there something new for “us”? And with “us” he meant the people who live in poverty. He is not coming anymore. I don’t know what has happened to him, but most probably he lost his hopes that one day he could have a house to live comfortably in, as something he would have deserved at his age and given his situation. I hope some day I can do something for people like him”.

This is the preamble of my research paper of 8 years ago, which has become somehow a personal moral and professional engagement. Since then, many economic, demographic and social changes have occurred, and have become challenges in everyday life. You have to look back to notice them. For example, my city has tripled its population; you cannot even distinguish its borders anymore, as the formal rural areas adjacent to it have become (informally) urbanized. New settlements are established from populations that have migrated from other regions. You may lose yourself in the new redeveloped neighborhoods within the city. People, bicycles and cars move chaotically, although they always find their ways with no problem (this cannot be said for a foreigner). Sometimes I feel a stranger in my city, as I cannot see people that I used to see before. My city has been a big construction site (more than 10% of the GDP has contributed to the economy), despite of the concerns expressed

<sup>1</sup> The National Planning Institute was state owned until 1991, and was responsible for all architectural and urban planning for the country.

by intellectuals about its future and urban pattern of development. Is this what we were looking for, for our city? Probably not (!) but certainly it sheltered the dreams of the incoming population.



DORIS ANDONI IS  
CHAIR OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON  
HOUSING AND LAND  
MANAGEMENT (CHLM)

What has happened to people like Myftar? Some might have gotten a house from the government (in total 13,000 units built); some might have informally built a house in the peripheries of the city (there some 350,000 illegal constructions, mostly housing); others have become richer and have bought an apartment in the inner-city (nowadays the prices have reached an average of 800Euro/m<sup>2</sup>); some might have emigrated, but some others might still be living with their relatives (we still have very strong family links) in an overcrowded apartment of the 60’s.

These last 8 years of intensive work on the housing issues I have been trying to give an answer to this dilemma: Can we, governments, improve housing conditions for the poor through housing policies or will housing conditions improve in line with social conditions? Neo-liberal policies have shown how the market can provide the quality and quantity of urban services and housing. Despite this, the ability of individuals to take advantage of these benefits differ notably according to the specific geographical and demographic conditions, climate, demography, gender, education level, family structure, employment and by the existing legal framework. In all societies there are problems that need public support to be solved. Societies with democratic values support the principle that each individual has the right to enjoy a standard of health, security, well-being and housing (article 25 of The Universal Human Rights Declaration). This means that ensuring adequate housing conditions is an obligation of each society; however the ways to achieve this goal might be different.

Issues of housing adequacy, affordability and sustainability are challenging for most governments, however they are even more

acute in transitional countries, where legacies from the past and new housing problems of transition need to be addressed. Is it possible to set up the right policies and programs that balance the abilities of the market, the (economic) ability of the governments and those of individuals? Are there recipes, or models that can be replicated? It seems there are not! Housing is the responsibility of each government; it is not part of an EU mandate as well. But housing is certainly one of the priority issues discussed at the governmental level at the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Administration, which I had the privilege to chair for the last two years.

People like Myftar, vulnerable groups, young couples, teachers, doctors or students would want to know “if there is something new for them”. The concern of the Committee is to support Governments in providing solutions for each housing need which is not met by the market through social programs for housing, forms of public private partnerships, formalization /legalization of informal settlements and other instruments for stimulating the private market provision of affordable housing and empowering the poor to facilitate its access. The **Country Profiles on the Housing Sector**; **Guidelines on Social Housing**, the **Housing Finance Study**, the **Condominium Guidelines**, the **Study on Informal Settlements**, are some of the Committee’s instruments for supporting Governments.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD LAND ADMINISTRATION, by Peter Creuzer

Given the individual circumstances and the heterogeneous situation in altogether 56 ECE member States across the ECE region, it is a true challenge to support appropriately sustainable administration and use of land. The WPLA has been dealing successfully with this for many years and has reached really remarkable results. It is of vital importance for the WPLA not only to deal with current challenges of countries moving to market economy structures but also to include those important topics referring to well established land administration systems.

To that end, it is an urgent task of utmost importance to further elaborate the interdependencies between urban and rural areas and to underline the importance of well functioning **land management systems** for sustainable development. This does not only apply to the institutional framework for the realisation of an integrated, holistic approach towards spatial planning, land re-allocation and securing of ownership and tenure structures at different administrative levels, but also to the provision of the necessary legal and technical framework for implementation of such planning.

In this context, the WPLA is currently preparing a study on, **Informal Settlements** in close collaboration with the CHLM, that does not only analyse the current situation concerning this sometimes omnipresent problem across the ECE region, but above all offers approaches to sustainable solutions taking into account the individual characteristics of all member States.

Of similar importance is the approach to setting **Fees and Charges** for land registration and other land-related services to be delivered by land administration authorities. A relevant WPLA study explaining the necessary principles for dealing with fees and charges and distinguishing different approaches to the issue according to the current situation in the different ECE member States, is currently being finalised and will be published in due course. The study is based on the evaluation of the answers to a questionnaire on fees and charges that was distributed prior to the elaboration of the study. A response rate of 94% to the questionnaire clearly emphasises the importance of the issue for many ECE member States.



PETER CREUZER  
IS CHAIR OF THE  
WORKING PARTY ON  
LAND ADMINISTRATION  
(WPLA)

In addition to the drafting of **studies on land administration** as such and on particular fields of interest that have been used as reference material by many ECE member States so far, a major concern of the WPLA is the regular exchange of experiences amongst officials in land administration. This is facilitated through the organization of two **workshops** per year hosted by different member countries. Upon request of a country, its land administration system is evaluated by an independent expert team and appropriate recommendations for improvement of the system are developed. The next WPLA Workshop covering the topic of ‘Land Administration – Influence on People and Business’ will be held on 2 and 3 October 2008 in Cavtat, Croatia.

Since 1999, the WPLA has substantially supported the establishment and maintenance of efficient land administration systems across the ECE region. Recent measures taken within the UNECE reform have broadened its action frame towards integrated land management, which is very much in line with recent developments in the region and current professional requirements. The integration of the private sector in the field of real estate markets and the establishment of the Real Estate Market Advisory Group (REM) under the WPLA enables the WPLA to provide a portfolio of land management services that guarantees a maximum support for the ECE region. Still, the institutional framework for the maintenance of real estate cadastres and land registers as well as the delivery of member oriented services in land management is most important. Land management and thus WPLA have an important role to play in achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals to be reached by 2015.

## MANAGEMENT OF MULTI FAMILY HOUSING, by Stephanie Bamford

Poor physical conditions and a lack of management and maintenance represent serious challenges to policymakers and stakeholders, especially in transition countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and South-Eastern Europe. Throughout the UNECE region there is a serious backlog in maintenance and repair of multi-family housing stock. Privatization of large segments of the multi-family housing stock, built mainly in the period 1960–1990, has further exacerbated management and maintenance problems for the new owner-occupants and the local governments. In many countries of the region, the upkeep of the multi-family housing stock is becoming ever more urgent, as this type of housing stock represents the majority of all dwellings.

During a High Level Ministerial Meeting in Geneva in September 2006, it was emphasised that the role of the State in funding maintenance of the multi-family housing stock could be more prominent. Participants stressed the importance of consolidating the legal and institutional framework, establishing practical procedures and regulations, strengthening local governments, developing targeted policies and investing in urban infrastructure in order to improve the management and maintenance of the multi-family housing stock. Challenges would not be addressed until the

issue of multi-family housing is introduced into the national political agendas of the countries concerned.



STEPHANIE BAMFORD IS CHAIR OF THE HOUSING AND URBAN MANAGEMENT ADVISORY NETWORK (HUMAN)

In line with the Ministerial Segment and the related Declaration, which recognised that the management, maintenance and refurbishment of multi-family housing stock has become a major problem in the UNECE, HUMAN presented a project proposal to the CHLM on the management of multi-family housing stock in 2007. The proposal was based on the fact that existing recommendations and policy advice have not been implemented thus far, and that in many countries the situation has not improved.

The goals of the project are to:

- Raise the standard of the housing stock in the longer term;
- Improve the living standards and the quality of life of the tenants and home-owners; and thus strengthening social cohesion and stability, which is often threatened by the absence of a strategic approach and deficiencies in operational programmes to manage and maintain this type of the housing stock;
- Build capacity across the region in the necessary skills and techniques for management of such units;
- Focus on awareness building among those responsible for the development and implementation of housing policies;
- Provide insights into and practical exchange of experiences in the fields of legal, institutional and financial frameworks

The project is being implemented in phases.

It is expected that the overall programme will focus on the following main elements:

- Review and report on the current situation in pilot countries (see ECE/HBP/2008/5);
- Pilot studies in 2 countries
- Confirmation of the priorities of the project;
- Formulation of practical guidelines on legal, institutional and financial frameworks;
- National case studies;
- Workshops, conferences and roundtables.

A pilot project analyzing the situation in depth in two countries identified from the questionnaire analysis, and positioned as far as possible apart on the 'ladder', will provide the opportunity to define those policies, strategies and actions which have accelerated progress, and those that do not work, or indeed has not even been attempted.

It is also envisaged that, based on the results of the pilot project, and in-country workshops, conclusions will be formulated and recommendations will be put forward on the design of a more detailed Multi-Family Housing Management Programme to formulate practical guidelines on legal, institutional and financial frameworks; to disseminate the guidelines and to run in country workshops to support local implementation of the guidelines.

## THE NEED FOR TRANSPARENCY IN THE CREATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF A REAL ESTATE MARKET, by Brian Emmott

As the transition and developing economies create or expand their real estate markets it is beholden upon the developed economies to help them avoid the problems and pitfalls that have befallen the so-called mature real estate markets. This has been especially true over the last 12 months, where the problems of the sub-prime market in the USA have affected many global economies.

This has mainly been through the lack of transparency within real estate markets which is an issue that needs urgently to be addressed.

The World Bank states that land and real estate assets comprise 50-70% of the national wealth of the world's economies. In Developed Countries in general, a person's or small to medium company's greatest asset is their land and property and in most cases their greatest liability is the mortgage or other loans secured against their land and property or rental commitments.

Several crucial and important benefits will flow from the creation of a secure system of land rights. First is constitutional benefit. Given that an inherent requirement of the notion of establishing individual land rights is that such rights should be protected by a transparent and reliable system of law, the establishment of an independent judiciary, free from political and administrative interference, will be paramount. This in turn will demonstrate the benefit of living under the rule of law.



BRIAN EMMOTT IS CHAIR OF THE REAL ESTATE MARKET ADVISORY GROUP (REM)

The second is economic benefit. Development of land rights is often solely thought of in terms of real estate markets and profiteering. However, this ignores the crucial role that land rights play in all successful developed market economies, all of which have active real estate markets. By definition, every country has land and property. All it needs, in order to exist in useable form, is the creation of a system of regulations and law which recognize it as an asset which can be deployed for the benefit of individuals and companies alike. Once established, an interest in land can be used to create a capital sum (by sale or by the use of it as security for a loan) or develop an income stream (by letting). This benefit can be used by an individual to support his family or enable the provision of support for small start-up business activities.

Thirdly, people become empowered, which in turn brings immense social benefit. The individual attains a real stake in his country, and visibly and directly benefits from reform which has devolved responsibility to the individual. It also helps the mobility of labour within a country and can help to stem economic migration – the brain drain. The critical significance of this to the maturing of a country should not be underestimated.

Fourthly, the development of a reliable and independently enforceable system of land rights can help solve practical problems when they occur. Compare what happened after the Tsunami in South-east Asia and Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. The former

by and large relied on traditional custom based unrecorded systems of land rights. The latter had a recorded land rights system. After the catastrophic events, New Orleans is mainly back in business, aid having been directed to those entitled having been identified in large measure by title records. In contrast, in parts of South-East Asia, funds provided for aid lies unspent because identification of recipients based on occupation of land devastated by the tsunami cannot be confirmed.

## KYRGYZSTAN: A LAND OF OPPORTUNITIES



Above: UNECE experts meet with the project managers of a HABITAT for HUMANITY building in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

A group of experts and the Secretariat undertook a mission to Kyrgyzstan to develop the Country Profile on the housing sector in May 2008. The results of their assessment will be shortly available. The group came back with the feeling that the country has great potentials to develop sustainably, in the housing sectors but also in many other areas. *Vital Spaces* has informally asked them to report about what they see as potentials for the sound development of the housing sector and effective land administration, as well as for sustainable development.

I was impressed with the academic system in Bishkek. In particular I found the Kyrgyz State University of Construction, Transportation and Architecture very modern, well equipped, extremely well managed, with a very qualified faculty. However, brain-drain there is very high, reaching 80%. Most of the qualified students leave the city after graduation to find employment in neighbouring countries that are developing at a fastest pace and can pay higher salaries. The academia has a great potential to form qualified architects, engineers and planners which can lead the development of the country in the future. Ways and tools to retain the well qualified laureates should be identified. *By Paola Deda*

The Association of Cities of Kyrgyzstan is a positive example of how the country combines its existing capacities with old and new forms of networking to create opportunities for development through targeted housing policies. The association was founded in 2000 and has 25 members, all cities throughout the country. It works on housing issues ranging from municipal ownership, social housing to assisting members in attracting grants from donors like the Netherlands, Hungary, USAID and the EU. In 2008, the association received an award for the best association of cities by UN-Habitat. Its website provides an excellent overview of its members and activities and may serve as an example for other countries in the ECE region: <http://www.citykr.kg/en/>. *By Silke Rusch*

Kyrgyzstan's surface area is mostly land with generally mountainous terrain. The mountain ranges are extensive and feature ridges, deep gorges, wide valley, virgin forests, rivers and lakes, and boast of

many natural hot springs which could very well make Kyrgyzstan a potential popular destination for tourists that could help its economy and people. However, it has to overcome many challenges to tourism development like improving infrastructure, promoting the country, and enhancing tourism services among others, to make this industry sustainable. *By Cecilia Batac*

Kyrgyzstan possesses an important heritage of administrative structures, which will be the spine of any future housing policy. Kyrgyzstan is a link between the GIS- and the Turk-World with strong impacts from Europe, China and the USA. For a small country, such a position at the crossroad of cultures is most auspicious. *By Wolfgang Amann*

After participating in the UNECE research mission to Kyrgyzstan and my personal research project about land management I believe the use of the Land resources in Kyrgyzstan would be more efficient if the sustainable urban and rural land use policies will be integrated in country's long term development. This can be achieved through monitoring the use of the land resources, strengthening the development of the new updated master plans and zoning regulations. Some successful pilot projects have been implemented in this area which can be further expanded throughout the country with governments support. *By Dinara Abjamilova*

Stable macroeconomic environment and huge needs in adequate housing made investment in housing very attractive. To support a boom in housing investments the Kyrgyz Republic is lucky to have an opportunity to introduce long-term budget planning system, earmarked housing expenditures and targeted housing subsidies. It is a good time to introduce more efficient housing and land taxation system as well as to promote education among housing market participants on the world recent developments in housing finance. *By Andrey Tumanov*

Regarding land administration, we found that there had been some very significant developments over recent years, including some very successful pilot projects. What is needed now is for these to be implemented nationwide and for further simplification and rationalisation of laws and processes. *By Jon Atkey*



Informal settlement in Bishkek, KR

## HELP US REACHING OUT TO MORE INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS!

The UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management (CHLM) and the Working Party on Land Administration (WPLA) have been long-standing and successful bodies of the United Nations. The former, born in 1947 to address the post-war problems of reconstruction, it is still modern today, and addresses other compelling issues in the UNECE region, such informal settlements or energy efficiency in housing. Since 1999, it has seen its work on land management reinforced by the creation of the Working Party on

Land Administration, dealing more specifically with the administration of land.

Throughout over 60 years of activities in the case of the Committee and almost a decade in the case of the Working Party, these bodies have produced guidance at the national and regional level, which could and should permeate the decision-making machine, but also academia and other related institutions in the enlarged Europe it covers.

However, outside the UNECE circle of member States, there is still little knowledge of what the Committee and the Working Party do, how they could help countries improve their housing and land management and administration policies, and how new and emerging topics could be brought to the attention of the United Nations through its work.

The idea of the newsletter is simple but could be very effective in forwarding the message and information on the Committee and Working Party's activities outside of its membership.

We invite all those reading this first issue, to send the Secretariat the e-mail contact of other potential readers, in order to enlarge the CHLM audience, extend the debate of CHLM issues to other institutions and individuals and reinforce our outreach.

## WHAT'S NEW:

### WELCOME TO THE NEW DIRECTOR:



MARCO KEINER IS THE  
NEW DIRECTOR OF THE EHLM  
DIVISION AT UNECE

Since the 4<sup>th</sup> of September 2008 Mr. **Marco Keiner** is the new director of the EHLM division at UNECE.

Before joining the EHLM team he worked for UN Habitat as Chief of the Urban Environment Section (Global Division) and was teaching environmental planning and sustainable development. Mr. Keiner has published many articles and books on topics such as Urban Development, Environment and Sustainable Development and has been very active on a wide variety of projects in the European and African context.

### CHLM AND WPLA HAVE NEW SECRETARIES:

Since March 2008, **Paola Deda** is the new Secretary to the CHLM. She is an architect with a Ph.D. in environmental/territorial planning. As part of her academic career, she worked as a researcher at UBC in Vancouver and at the University of Berkeley, California. Before joining UNECE, Paola occupied different positions with the UN and UNEP in New York, Montreal, Bonn and Geneva.

**Ariel Ivanier** joined UNECE on 1 September as the new Secretary to the WPLA. He is a political scientist and a Ph.D. candidate at Boston University. Prior to joining UNECE, he has worked as a researcher at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the Inter-American Development Bank. He has also earned university degrees in International Relations at SAIS Johns Hopkins University (MA) and San Andres University (BA).

### A NEW LOGO:



In order to increase the visibility of the work on housing and land management of the Committee and the Working Party, a number of activities have been initiated, including this newsletter. As part of these, a logo was created to be used on informal relevant material and communications. The logo schematically mirrors the areas covered by the Committee and the Working Party, symbolically summarized in the profile of the house and the land. The roots sustaining the house indicate that the work on housing and land management are based and entrenched in members States' traditions, needs, and history. They also want to give a sense of "solid basis" to the work of the Committee and the Working Party. This logo is not an official UN emblem.

The secretariat wishes to thank Mr. **Ascanio Colonna di Paliano**, for designing the logo

### OUR INTERNS:

**Anna Badyina** has been working as an intern in EHLM since the beginning of July. She has several years of professional experience working with land and housing issues in Russia. In charge of the Department for Property Cadastre of the Federal Cadastral Chamber at a regional level in Russia. Anna holds a University degree in Land Economy, Russia, and MSc in the Built Environment, Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm. She is currently a Doctorate student in urban geography at Oxford University.

**Elena Ravano** joined the UNECE interns at the beginning of July. She comes from Italy and is finishing her BA in Political Science at John Cabot University in Rome and in March will start her MA in International Relations at the Geneva School of Diplomacy. Elena is currently writing her senior thesis on the European Union and the Responsibility to Protect.

**Emanuele Strano** has started a PhD at the Oxford Institute of Sustainable Development (Oxford Brookes University) on "Unplanned and informal settlements: a comparative study to understand their potential for sustainable planning". Emanuele studied Architecture at the Polytechnic of Milan and has participated in several research projects at the HumanSpaceLab, a Laboratory at the Department of Planning and Architecture of Polytechnic of Milan focused on space analysis and urban design.

*Disclaimer: This is not a UN official publication. This newsletter is distributed only electronically to CHLM members and interested individuals and organizations wishing to receive information on the work on housing and land management. The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors of the articles and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the United Nations.*



The UNECE Housing and Land Management team

**From left to right: Evelina Rioukhina, Cecilia Batac, Paola Deda, Ariel Ivanier, Elena Ravano, Christina von Schweinichen, Marina Novikoff, Anna Badyina, Emanuele Strano**