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Madrid (Spain), 8 to 11 June 1998

INTRODUCTION

1. The Eighth Conference on Urban and Regional Research took place in Madrid from 8 to 11 June 1998 at the invitation of the Government of Spain. It was preceded by a technical visit around the metropolitan area of Madrid on 7 June.

2. Representatives of the following countries took part in the Conference: Armenia, Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Latvia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom.

3. The following international non-governmental organizations were also represented: International Federation of

Housing and Planning (IFHP), International Society of City and Regional Planners (ISOCARP), International Union of Tenants (IUT), International Urban Development Association (INTA), Rooftops Canadian Foundation, and Union Internationale de la Propriété Immobilière (UIPI).

4. Mr. J. M. Alvarez del Manzano, Mayor of Madrid, welcomed the delegates. In his address, he noted the topicality of the issues under discussion and highlighted the importance of both identifying the trends in the physical development of cities, and looking into the environmental, social, economic and cultural aspects. This would help to better understand the changes and the problems in the development of cities, and the different policies to be applied.

5. Mr. F. Nasarre y de Goicoechea, Director General de la Vivienda, la

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Arquitectura y el Urbanismo, Ministry of Development, in his opening address, pointed to the need to intensify efforts and strengthen cooperation to improve the living conditions in cities and towns. He added that the challenges posed by human settlements existed worldwide and, although the problems were ever more global in context, individual countries and regions faced specific problems that required specific solutions.

6. Ms. C. von Schweinichen, of the ECE secretariat, drew attention to the complex transformations in cities and urban societies which required new viewpoints of analysis. Cities were sources of innovation, capable of creating new conditions for an efficient social and economic environment for local employment and the well-being of its inhabitants, and so a coalition should be formed between politics and spatial development.

7. Mr. R. Segura (Spain) and Mr. U. Christiansen (Denmark) were elected Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson, respectively. The rapporteurs were invited to introduce the discussion on their respective themes:

Theme I: Globalization of the economy affecting spatial development

Rapporteurs: Mr. Harri Andersson (Finland) and Mr. Abel Enguita Puebla (Spain)

Theme II: Conflicts between major trends in spatial urban development and the requirements of sustainable urban development

Rapporteurs: Mr. Liviu Ianasi (Romania) and Mr. Petter Naess (Norway)

Theme III: The role of key actors in the formulation and implementation of sustainable urban development policies

Rapporteurs: Mr. Terje Kleven (Norway) and Mr. Zygmunt Ziobrowski (Poland)

8. As a basis for discussion, the Conference had before it papers prepared by the rapporteurs together with a group of experts: the study on Major Trends Characterizing Human Settlements Development in the ECE Region (ECE/HBP/108) with its abstract (HBP/SEM.52/R.1). Furthermore, it had before it response papers which dealt with questions related to the three themes of the Conference (HBP/SEM.52/R.1, annex). Case

studies were used to demonstrate challenges and policy responses in the existing urban systems. Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom, and Rooftops Canadian Foundation prepared response papers.

9. In addition to this material, participants had an opportunity during the technical visit around the region of Madrid to become acquainted with the different plans and projects carried out to develop and improve the conditions in specific areas. Some of these projects, e.g. in Tres Cantos, Las Rozas Business Park, El Culebro and in Madrid South (Vallecas), were public initiatives. Others were «joint ventures» between the public administration and private business. All projects aimed at striking a balance between multiple functions and at providing the areas with new facilities and upgrading the dormitory towns of the 1960s.

CONCLUSIONS

General

10. Although there are many similarities and overall trends characterizing human settlements in the ECE region, it is necessary to highlight the wide variety of national contexts, in terms of geography, economy, society and culture. The study on Major Trends Characterizing Human Settlements Development and the conclusion of the Conference itself developed within this frame.

11. Today national economies have become increasingly integrated within a global system of production, distribution and exchange. The liberalization of trade and international capital flows, the growth in the number and influence of transnational corporations, the economic progress of the newly industrialized countries, and the establishment of international trading blocks are developments which have led to fundamental economic restructuring. This is one of the «megatrends» influencing the development of, and changes in, human settlements.

12. The globalization of the economy and the liberalization of markets imply that the local industries are increasingly exposed to competition from foreign companies. In particular, this has affected the cities of the countries in transition. At the same time, urban development is also strongly influenced by the market competition within a domestic context, involving companies as well as local authorities. Therefore, the drive for economic growth is a major underlying factor influencing spatial urban development, working at a national as well as at an international scale. There is also a strong relationship between the drive for economic growth and *the occurrence of consumerist values among the population*, as manifested in the demands for more spacious housing and higher mobility.

13. To understand the trends in urban development it is necessary to appreciate the scale and pace of international economic restructuring. The shift from industrial production towards services has transformed the occupational structure. Manufacturing jobs have declined (especially as globalization increased), contributing to new relationships between business, labour and Government. These changes call for new kinds of cities.

14. The role of the State and public sector institutions concerning settlements development and management has been redefined. More emphasis is given to deregulation, privatization and competition in the delivery of urban services, with a subsequent risk that low-income urban inhabitants no longer have access to some urban services. New partnership arrangements have emerged –between the public and the private sector as well as among public sectors– often combined with a more active role for the State in financing major infrastructure projects to boost economic activity. Globalization has a deep impact on the restructuring of the localities involved in the process, with consequences for other settlements. The performance of cities and regions is increasingly affected by processes and forces external to them. In *some countries, regionalization may prevent or retard the growth of medium- and small-size cities*, which would otherwise help create a more balanced urban system.

15. The impacts of the increasing polarization resulting from rapid economic and social change have become visible in the growing social problems in cities. In central and eastern Europe, the social costs of the transition from centrally planned to market economies are particularly high. For these countries it is questionable if improved economic performance will necessarily result in social progress in the future, although the economic improvement is a necessary condition for such progress.

16. Gender issues and inequalities do not always attract enough attention in the development of urban communities. Usually urban planning does not take into account *the differences in behaviour and the implications for urban life of the massive integration of women in the labour market*. Women are more affected by the negative impacts of spatial urban development, which manifests itself in a dispersal of activities, inadequate transport, environmental degradation, etc. This also applies to disadvantaged and special-needs groups.

17. The increasing ecological impact of human activities on the natural environment and the extended knowledge about environmental degradation have contributed to growing concern about the environment. The growing emphasis on environmental issues on the part of most ECE Governments is primarily a response to increased environmental knowledge and the popularity of the concept of sustainable development. However, the term has been used and misused, and the many interpretations of the concept have often resulted in a steady expansion of its goals and content. The term «sustainability» is used indiscriminately in the political discourse to legitimate a broad range of development policies, some in direct conflict with the definition given by the World Commission on Environment and Development (annex). This may in itself be seen as another «Megatrend» affecting urban development.

18. The current trends in land use, pattern of development and transport *demand and infrastructure in urban areas* are leading to a steady loss of natural and/or agricultural areas and green structures within cities and increased

energy use for transport, heating and cooling. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the current spatial development of cities in most ECE countries conflicts sharply with the requirements of sustainable development.

19. Sustainable urban environmental policies should also pursue objectives related to the quality of life of the urban population. The trends of social polarization and deprivation underline the observed signs of urban disintegration.

20. Sustainable and environmentally sound urban development have to overcome the obstacles related to the competition and decentralization of urban management. Urban development policies working in favour of certain local and regional interests may be inefficient or even undermine the development opportunities of other regions at the national or international level. Moreover, political and institutional factors account for critical differences in the formulation and implementation of sustainable development policies in the ECE countries. The differences in social and economic priorities also affect the content and scope of sustainable national development policies.

21. There is an noticeable shift in the application of policy instruments from traditional, rationalistic, comprehensive planning towards more emphasis on policy integration – from project orientation towards more participatory, network-oriented processes. To increase the knowledge base for urban planning and management, systems of environmental and socio-economic indicators are being developed.

22. Urban planning today is experiencing a revival, which demands the application of long-term instruments (20-25 years), together with much simpler city-planning tools than those currently used. They should incorporate the selective approach of strategic planning into urban planning, be flexible and amendable and be able to react quickly to new processes and changes.

23. The existing tools for monitoring and managing the city largely fail to provide a coherent understanding of the underlying forces at work in city economies. Often the indicators used are sectorial or limited to

some parts of the economy or society. They rarely provide means for understanding the relationship between policy and urban outcomes or the interaction between different sets of policy measures, or the linkage between demographic, economic and environmental phenomena.

24. The inherent complexity of urban dynamics calls for systematic, comprehensive indicators relying on high-quality data. Consequently, there is an obvious need to develop appropriate geographical information systems. However, developing the statistical infrastructure for such an approach is in itself conditioned by the complexity of the underlying mechanisms. The pressures shaping the perception of the quality of the urban environment and city life should be translated into comparable facts and figures. Sustainability, governance, environment, renewal, social exclusion, and the quality of life each have to be translated into more accurate concepts and definitions entering into the terms of reference for policy action and public scrutiny.

25. Ideally, indicators should measure not only the inputs but also the results of urban development: the performance of policies and the reaction of the urban actors. In practice, the availability, validity and reliability of data will put constraints on the possibility of establishing such indicators. However, indicators should aim at permitting spatial temporal comparison. An enabling process must be started particularly in the countries in transition in order to build up knowledge of, and interest in urban conditions by all stakeholders: national and regional governments, local authorities, business and citizens. In particular, indicators should be easily accessible to the public in order to facilitate its participation in the planning process. There is a need to develop systems to monitor the effects of urban policies at different levels in terms of their appropriateness and effectiveness.

26. Special attention should be paid to the role of inhabitants and especially of associations in the protection of the environment and in defining sustainability goals. The associations of inhabitants, including representation of minorities (ethnic, social and age), should gain

recognition for their positive role and be given the means to act and to intervene at different stages of planning (in both the elaboration and implementation).

Theme I: Globalization of the economy affecting spatial development

27. *The fact that globalization affects the evolution of human settlements originates from a political and a system-wide restructuring. Nations and transnational regions are observed by other nations and regions from a fresh point of view. Their aim is to establish networks, international alliances and organizations focusing on the global scale.*

28. Some multinational entities, like the European Union, have already developed «regional spatial perspectives», urban policies and territorial strategies. At a lower scale, the intensity of interchanges between neighbouring countries concentrated on some frontier areas demands the application of specific transborder regional planning schemes.

29. The evolution from a hierarchical to a more balanced and poly-centric urban system fosters urban networks. Networks are specialized or differ by their regional, national, and transborder character. Certain urban regions and metropolitan areas are affecting the role of cities. Instead of *competitive market processes*, «collective» market processes around new innovative networks, regional partnerships and urban links between these cities may emerge. Networking urban systems «deny» the importance of specific locations, providing an entirely different perspective on the degree of urbanization of regions and on accessibility, but creating at the same time new peripheral areas.

30. The culture of urban networks offers new possibilities for differentiation and urbanization. The spatial structure focuses on strengthening internal relations and cooperation within Europe. Some of the urban links have considerable regional importance, but they are not significant as future development axes for a strong transborder development. In a global scenario of cooperation, cities see themselves in relation to an outside market,

and define their strategies with these references. New urban networks are changing the traditional roles of cities and creating new ones. There will be a new kind of «gateway cities» such as information centres, airport cities and border gateways.

31. Networking could also be a strategy between similar cities which cooperate to better compete with other cities. This kind of *development may lead to competitive urban networks.*

32. The development of future city regions will generally be influenced by the combination of two sets of forces: (a) decentralization, as new telecommunication systems, more flexible production and distribution systems, the suburbanization of office jobs, increasing social preferences for lower-density environments, congestion and deteriorating infrastructure in central city areas, and (b)(re)centralization, increasing energy costs or uncertain energy supplies, increasingly stringent environmental protection legislation, the locational inertia of major institutions, the continued attraction of revitalized inner-city settings. Some of these forces are ambiguous. For example, the use of telematics in already prosperous areas may result in geographical centralization.

33. Currently, the relationship between location and success is not so direct as it used to be in the industrial society. There is a direct correspondence between the growth of cities and their more or less remote location. Growth itself is losing its overall meaning as indicator of urban development. In the future development of urban areas, «location» will have a more ambiguous meaning. It is a question of comparative advantage determined by the degree of access to new technologies and the use of knowledge-intensive production. In these conditions, access to new technologies should be facilitated to correct situations by linking isolated large areas in different countries.

34. The particular characteristics of unfavoured cities are related to their demographic and industrial structures, the dominance of obsolete and environmentally damaging physical structures, poor accessibility, and the lack of higher education and a significant research basis. Cities which were important centres of

business in earlier, more industrial and national-oriented phases of the economy have begun to lose economic status vis-à-vis «new» urban conurbations. Several large cities which were traditionally thought of as «national» centres turn out to be weaker centres of international business.

35. Globalization affects all categories of cities. However, its influence is stronger and more permanent in larger cities, or in some natural resource –and recreation– oriented cities. It contributes to the polarization of society, to the concentration of certain economic activities and control functions, and to a higher relevance of strategies adopted by multinational enterprises which act in a «global» kind of way, ignoring local issues. Some effects also emphasize short-term solutions, such as loss of confidence in planning and scarce application of spatial impact techniques, or insufficient attention to haphazard effects on urban settlement due to a lack of regional planning.

36. Urban competition takes place when investments and interest are attracted to large urban development operations. There is competition between cities in the context of international division of labour, new technology, consumption of cultural activities, new urban professionals, and support from the State. Increased centralization of corporate-linked functions has changed the dimensions of the urban hierarchy. Openness, flexibility and mobility are changing the way the «European space» is perceived. In this perception, it is presented as being «smaller» and subject to the influence of many external actors: visitors, potential investors, etc.

37. Cities also cooperate with other cities trying to grow stronger in a tougher international competition. Excessive competition between cities and local «fervour» risks creating new border effects. It is already clear that cities try to redefine their role in relation to the region and the State. There is also competition within urban regions, such as the competition between city-centre shopping areas and out-of-town shopping malls. This kind of competition may produce conflicting growth areas in the urban structure.

38. Environment, culture, place promotion, public space policy and high-

standard residential areas have become «new» factors that cities market in their competition strategies. Local authorities are becoming more flexible and give more opportunities for things to happen.

39. Recent globalization has shifted the focus of economic activities to a multinational level, i.e. in the nature and organization of transnational activity, from flows dominated by raw materials and manufactured goods to flows of services, capital and information.

40. Globalization has caused a variety of new «production-side trends» equally distributed worldwide. The way these products are being physically developed shows very similar patterns of organization of space. These trends include increased vertical integration among development companies, the house-building industry, investors, real estate companies and architectural practices. There is an increased involvement of corporations and financial institutions in producing urban space through large urban renewal projects involving increased public-private cooperation. The tendency is to convert traditional production landscapes into new kinds of «consumption landscapes» as well as offices and high-standard residential areas.

41. In this rapidly changing situation, urban land-use planning faces the difficulty of keeping pace with changes in demand. The different levels of urban management and regulations are replaced by «polymorphous» organizations. At the same time the rational and growth-oriented urban policy is replaced by ad hoc planning instruments and processes. It therefore becomes necessary to react and adapt to unforeseen opportunities. This and other similar phenomena demand a redefinition of the role of urban planning, increased cooperation with the private sector, stronger citizens' participation, and improved relations with regional administrations.

42. The globalized economy and the internationalization of urban local development are also producing new world views and cultural sensibilities, reflected in many urban projects and international practices concerning the funding of urban programmes, which introduce many similarities.

43. Globalization induces parallel trends at local level. The internationally uniform patterns of consumption are becoming widespread and generally accepted. At the same time cultural identities, religion, «green thinking» and different subcultures are reinforcing contradictory values and behaviour.

44. In the globalized economy, urban policy encourages economic growth so that cities can retain their competitive advantage in the international competition. At the same time urban policy has to deal with the effects of negative investments caused by economic growth, like industrial wastelands, environmental hazards, social tension and increased socio-economic polarization. In many cases urban governments are unable to maintain urban social cohesion, since cities are looking for new economic strategies and their hierarchical status is changing according to various regional and global flows.

45. Today, the cities, considering themselves as «developers» and «protectors», lack resources to cover all social demands. They are being forced to transfer service delivery to profit-seeking private initiative. Nevertheless, maintaining the redistributive policies of social cohesion is perceived as essential to correct polarization and segregation. Urban social well-being is considered a necessary condition also for the economic efficiency of the city. The public authorities should guarantee the security in every part of the cities and avoid its subdivision in security-guaranteed precincts. Planning itself should approach the basic objective of urban space safety, as well as avoid social polarization.

46. The increasing need for social and health-care services will enlarge the responsibilities of the public sector. This means that the public sector will still be an important economic base in the future, not only helping some cities to maintain and renew their employment opportunities, but playing a key role in providing specific economic territorial advantages, such as research, educational resources and services. There will also be an increasing demand to replace some public services by semi-public and/or private services.

Theme II: Conflicts between major trends in spatial urban development and the requirements of sustainable urban development

47. Urban development is a process within society in which economic growth has very specific imprints on the physical environment. At present, this is observed as an increasing consumption of energy and natural resources, loss of biodiversity, conversion of natural and agricultural areas, encroachment on urban green structures and high emissions of pollutants. The increasing construction of floor space, conversion of land for development and construction of transport infrastructure are strongly related to economic growth. In part, these trends in the spatial development of cities are a result of the strategies of companies and public authorities to facilitate and boost economic growth and the accumulation of capital. The trends are partially caused by the growth in household consumption and by the fragility of the economic situation (which calls for choices and compromises, sometimes to the detriment of environmental long-term options). This increase in consumption is facilitated by the economic growth, but is at the same time a condition for this growth, because an increase in the production of services and commodities requires a demand for these goods.

48. In many ECE countries, migration which accompanied industrial development and characterized the process of urbanization, has generated unbalanced internal structures in the cities. At the same time, the spatial expansion of cities has generated a high consumption of natural areas and farmland, increasing energy use and overall emissions from transport as a result of higher mobility. The social and demographic imbalances generated by the urbanization process are still present in many cities, particularly in the deprived neighbourhoods, characterized by a lack of social facilities, low quality of environment and buildings, inadequate planning and management.

49. Urban expansion should not primarily be seen as the result of population increase. It also happens when residents and businesses abandon the city

centres or inner-city areas. These processes are still taking place in many cities, either due to the excessive price of housing or to the increased number of people who can afford individual housing or due to local culture or social demand (and in many cases, low-density and private multifamily housing) on the outskirts, or due to business decisions to locate in other places. These processes are intensified by the increased mobility and particularly by the higher levels of car ownership and by the provision of transport (road) infrastructure by the authorities. On the other hand, there are trends of a return to economically attractive inner areas. Apart from increasing the pressure on open space in central areas, the resulting densification in central parts of the city, in combination with urban expansion, influences the suburban areas lying in between. In these areas, the decrease in population and job density results in inefficient use of land and an eroding base for local social services.

50. The decrease in population in inner cities, often accompanied by poor socio-economic conditions for most of the remaining inhabitants, and by the high costs of building improvement (difficult to be borne by local budgets and unattractive for developers) have in many cases generated, in city centres or in some inner-city areas, deterioration, abandonment and loss of identity. It is worth noting that both these processes and the corresponding improvement programmes are present in all stages, throughout the ECE region. The situation requires a more proactive attitude on the part of local authorities, towards partnership with other public actors and with the private sector, in reaching city-centres/inner-city development programmes/projects. The context of general prosperity often incites the private sector to detect new opportunities and to initiate and lead development operations.

51. Considerable progress has been made concerning the housing conditions, characterized, *inter alia*, by the increase in floor area. Apart from the general economic growth, this process was generated by population growth, by State or local community investment in social housing, and by incentives to promote homeownership. One of the problems that

many countries are facing is the state of the housing stock built from the 50s to the 70s, as well as that of utility infrastructure from the first half of the century. Attempts have been made to establish the infrastructure and routines to achieve closed cycles of e.g. nutrients and water at the lowest level possible. Although many apartment buildings have been renovated, some housing areas and buildings still fail to meet present standards of health, safety and comfort. In the countries in transition, the situation is particularly difficult. Huge efforts are needed for maintaining, upgrading, renewing or replacing a large proportion of neglected multifamily housing. Postponing necessary work may, in the end, prove even more expensive.

52. The trend in housing types nowadays is towards low-rise and low-density housing, leading to more dispersed cities. The resulting increase in land consumption affects agricultural land, natural landscapes and biodiversity. Due to the longer distances between functions, the amount of transport as well as investments and operation costs (including huge maintenance and later renewal costs) of transport and utilities infrastructure are also increasing. Moreover, it is very difficult for public transport to compete with the private car in such a structure.

53. The transition from industrial to post-industrial cities can have negative impacts on the environment: the sensitive areas, both on a regional and on an urban scale, are threatened by new or amplified nuisances and problems. They are generated by the proliferation and the dynamics of tertiary sector activities, mainly retail and those trades using office space, or by tourism and leisure.

54. The spiralling increase in traffic is difficult to master, as more transport infrastructure is built and more dispersed locations are chosen. Increasing road capacity to relieve congestion in urban areas has proved to generate even more car traffic. Increased car traffic is also generated by a dispersed location of residences and commercial buildings, in particular low-density development on the urban fringe. Such development also implies that more urban land is needed, with utilities and social services. This is

often difficult to supply, in terms of both time and cost (goods with «non-elastic» supply). Avoiding low-density sprawl is a major task for urban planning in most ECE countries.

55. It is also necessary to underline that the prevailing lifestyles and priorities among the population may constitute an obstacle to policies to encourage more sustainable consumption patterns.

56. Admittedly, positive examples of policies and strategies aiming at a more sustainable urban development can be found. In some cities, urban sprawl has been slowed down or even stopped through policies of densification. In other urban areas, considerable progress has been achieved in constructing less energy-demanding buildings or replacing polluting energy sources with clean and renewable energy. Also, recycling schemes have been implemented successfully in some local communities, and in many cities there is an increasing focus on the urban green structure. In some cities some policies have been implemented to limit traffic and to encourage alternative modes of transport (bicycle, pedestrian).

57. In the absence of comprehensive strategies, single measures to promote sustainability are often implemented at the expense of achieving other environmental goals. For example, in cities which have managed to limit urban sprawl, there often is an increasing pressure on inner-city green areas. Virtually, no cities – not even those which have achieved considerable success in other aspects of sustainability – have seriously addressed the challenges related to traffic growth in urban areas. Building new and wider urban expressways and regional highways is a strategy followed by a dominating number of cities in ECE countries, both as a means to favour development and in order to relieve congestion.

58. Urban spread may be of two types: planned urban extensions and relatively unplanned urban sprawl. Both consume the limited land resource with a consequent loss of farmland and natural areas. Planned urban extensions can instigate some of the impacts of unplanned urban sprawl (emissions, energy use and social inequity) by explicitly linking the new development

to public transport and providing access to services by modes of transport other than the car.

59. In summary, the following trends are important features characterizing the physical development of human settlements, each likely to generate conflicts with the requirements of sustainable development:

- *The size of population in the largest metropolitan areas* makes it difficult to establish closed circuits (of e.g. nutrients) and increases the probability of overloading local recipients – conflict between urban growth and environment quality (water, air, soil).

- *Urban sprawl* leads to a loss of farmland and natural areas and increases the energy use and overall emissions from urban transport – conflict between urban sprawl and use of land as a limited resource and environment quality (air, climate).

- *Intra-urban decentralization of workplaces and central functions such as commercial or leisure centres, administrative offices* (except for local public service functions) as well as decentralization of residences from inner to outer areas of the city, contribute to the increased use of the car and higher energy use and emissions from traffic – conflict between decentralization of urban functions and new locations, on the one hand, and energy consumption and quality of the environment (air and climate) on the other.

- *Increased floor space per capita* in residences as well as commercial buildings implies a higher need for construction materials, energy for heating, as well as conversion of undeveloped land into building sites – conflict between an increase in comfort and conservation of land, energy and building materials.

- *Increased proportion of single-family houses* mainly in low-density areas contributes to a higher conversion of undeveloped land as well as energy consumption and air pollution – conflict between an increase in comfort and conservation of land and energy, as well as air pollution.

- *More road infrastructure and higher parking capacity* reduce the competitiveness of public transport, influencing the modal split between car and mass transit; this

process sometimes implies a conversion of urban green areas or demolishing of existing buildings – conflict between increased individual mobility and environmental quality (air, noise), energy conservation and the protection of built areas, together a reduction in urban green areas.

- *The inner-city development* allows sometimes, for economic reasons, over-use of land, generating acute local traffic problems and degradation of existing neighbourhoods – conflict between unmastered densification and local environmental quality.

- *Conversion of inner-city green areas and fragmentation of the green structures* of cities implies a reduction in recreational areas and ecosystems and may limit the possibility of establishing closed circuits – conflict between intensive use of inner-city open space for building purposes and the environment quality.

60. *The trends dominating the physical development of cities in the ECE countries are clearly not in line with the requirements of sustainable development.* The main picture is of a steady loss of green areas in cities (natural and/or agricultural areas), increased private transport and increased energy use for transport and heating and cooling. Many urban development processes aim at economic growth as an overriding goal. Sustainable policies and implemented projects are still few and far between.

61. This conclusion may appear to contradict the statement of the World Commission on Environment and Development: that economic growth –also in the developed countries– is a strategic condition for a sustainable development. But at the same time, the Commission states that the growth must be given a qualitatively different content, disconnecting it from the increasing consumption of natural resources characterizing it so far. Economic growth should aim at wealthy and integrated cities and not lead to divided cities with pockets of poverty. Some leading economists have expressed their doubt that such disconnection of economic growth from natural resources consumption will be possible.

62. In this context, urban development

in ECE countries may be regarded as a «critical case» where the hypothesis of environmentally sustainable economic growth might be tested: maintaining economic growth without the negative environmental impacts.

63. There is a need for the consequences of different aspects of the projected spatial urban development (notably construction of residences, commercial buildings and transport infrastructure) to be assessed in terms of energy use, emissions, conversion of natural areas and loss of farmland and inner-city green structures. If the projected urban development is found not to be in line with the requirements of sustainable development, relevant policy measures to change current trends should be discussed, as well as any institutional changes necessary for the implementation of these measures. Otherwise, if the present course of urban development can not be changed, it should be made clear that even more extensive compensatory measures will have to be taken in other sectors of society.

Theme III: The role of key actors in the formulation and implementation of sustainable urban development policies

64. The concept of sustainable development is defined, understood and interpreted in different ways in various countries and by officials on different levels of government as well as by others involved in policy formulation. This is in part caused by the considerable variations in historical, socio-economic and institutional backgrounds across Europe. On the other hand, notable similarities and contrasts may also be observed between regions across or within national borders.

65. *Differences in historical traditions and cultural perception* of the relationship between man and nature are important in trying to understand differences in public opinion and attitudes as well as the variations in national approaches and strategies chosen to move towards more sustainable human settlements planning and development. Examples of such influential factors are the degree of legal protection of private land and home ownership, and attitudes towards State

intervention, planning and regulation, and the relationship between the public and the private sphere of life in general.

66. There will also be differences because of the variations in *environmental* and *socio-economic conditions*. The specific environmental situation sets the agenda for national and local environmental action. Differences in social and economic standards determine the content and the scope of sustainable development policies. Environmental problems range from typical local problems, e.g. as caused by industrial pollution, to environmental pressures of a more general nature, like urban sprawl. Even if land-use and pollution control are effective, a high socio-economic standard of living can lead to consumer patterns that exercise considerable pressure on the environment.

67. Political and institutional factors account for critical differences in sustainable development policies. Countries with long-standing traditions of local self-government have chosen policies and organizational approaches to promoting sustainable human settlements policies that are quite different from those with more centralized systems of planning and governance. Countries in transition to market economies face implicit tensions between their aspirations for economic growth and the need to consider social equity and environmental concerns, in many cases leading to the neglect of the latter.

68. Strategies and policy measures to promote sustainable development are primarily formulated at the national level. Countries with a strong tradition of local government have developed comprehensive national policy documents based on local implementation. Other countries seem to rely more on framing policies for specific sectors and programmes, often influenced by cooperation with international agencies. In these countries policies seem to be «problem-oriented» rather than pursuing more comprehensive, integrated approaches. Their structure of policy implementation is more centralized and hierarchical, following the structure of the central government sectors, with little planning and decision-making power left at the lowest tier of government. The

variations in the role of –and trust in– local agencies are also reflected in the notable differences in the scope, comprehensiveness, formal functions and power of planning.

69. Despite differences in national situations and contexts, the general principles of sustainable development have affected the formulation of national policies for urban and regional planning. Generally, objectives are formulated in ways that recall the concepts of the World Commission on Environment and Development in terms of social equity, environmental sustainability and the need for precautionary action. However, the links between the social and the environmental aspects of sustainable development often seem to disintegrate in practice.

70. Also, environmental concerns seem to be treated as distinct from socio-economic development and questions of distribution and equity. The social equity aspects of sustainable development are often limited to the question of distributing benefits and burdens between present and future generations. The challenges of equity between present generations –notably between the industrialized and developing countries– are generally overlooked. There seems to be a reluctance among decision makers to fully accept that the present level of consumption in wealthy countries may severely endanger the possibilities of securing acceptable living conditions in poor countries, without overstretching the global environmental carrying capacity. The principles of sustainable development should encompass all types of urban policies aiming at safeguarding acceptable levels of social welfare services that can be sustained in the future and are not in conflict with sustainability at the global level.

71. Integrated policies and strategies for more sustainable urban planning and management are generally not much developed. In particular, this is the case for the planning of closed circuits of flows –water, materials and energy. Too much attention is still focused on the primary problems of air and water pollution and its abatement and control.

72. A similar 'time lag' in addressing problems is also observable in transport planning. In countries experiencing serious environmental problems caused by private

car traffic, there is often a noticeable gap between the official goals of reducing the use of private cars and the actual measures taken at the local level.

73. Policies for the planning of natural resources and green structures still seem to be largely directed towards national legislation for the protection of nature and landscapes of high value. Policies to protect biological diversity and planning for the preservation of urban green structures still seem to be in an initial phase. Obvious difficulties are experienced in treating the green structure of urban areas on an equal footing with buildings and infrastructure, in particular on private land.

74. As far as land use and urban form are concerned, policies to increase urban density, e.g. to apply the concept of the compact city, do not enjoy general support. While urban sprawl is regarded to be a major problem in some countries, the general ideas of densification seem to be questioned in others. Again, historic and cultural traditions, as well as the availability of land, may explain such differences. To advance more ecologically sustainable and socially viable urban development, national and local governments will have to gain control of land use, including the planning and regulation of property and development rights, or provide a legal framework in which the market can move towards sustainability.

75. With respect to technical infrastructure other than transport, there is a clear connection between the strength of national economies and the degree of infrastructure development and standards. While the main aim in some countries is to provide basic infrastructure to alleviate pollution, others have embarked upon schemes to improve the existing urban infrastructure and use it more efficiently. Significant differences can be observed in the organization of responsibilities for planning and providing infrastructure. While this is basically a task for local authorities in some countries, other countries rely more on the control of central and regional State agencies, reflecting variations in government systems and traditions.

76. However, differences in compliance

with environmental goals are also attributed to the notable variations in the organizational and administrative framework for policy implementation. Environmental policies and strategies are often poorly coordinated. Responsibility for environmental policies is often shared between different ministries as well as between national, regional and local institutions. In some cases this is due to fragmented and uncoordinated legislation, in others to the apparent tension between traditional economic development policies and environmental concerns. Although national policies increasingly seem to address global and local environmental concerns, these policies are still of a very general nature, reflecting political ambitions and rhetoric rather than commitment and action. Therefore, control over the formulation and implementation of policies should improve policy integration across sectors and levels of government. NGOs and others should take part in the formulation of policies.

77. Effective planning at all levels should be recognized as a key factor in implementing policies and strategies for more sustainable urban development and social organization. National legislation, policies and strategies for urban planning and development should be based on fundamental planning principles that truly reflect the concept of sustainable development, e.g. as laid down in the *ECE Guidelines on Sustainable Human Settlements Planning and Management*. In doing so, governments will have to take due consideration of the national context, in particular the socio-economic, cultural and environmental situation in the urban areas, and set priorities according to the need to seek social equity, viability and democratic participation. Also, national legislation and procedures for environmental impact assessment (EIA), complying with international conventions, should meet the requirements set by the principles of sustainable development and precautionary action, e.g. in their range of application, definition of assessment and evaluation criteria as well as regarding rules for public participation.

78. Urban policies and strategies for the advancement of sustainable development

should be based on the principle of policy integration at all levels of government. To achieve a more sustainable urban development, cross-sectoral approaches to urban problems are needed, including cooperation between public and private sector actors. There is a need for improved legislation on public-private partnership. *Planning legislation, policies and procedures* should be developed to promote more coherent and coordinated planning and management of social and technical infrastructure, including the protection of urban green structures and biodiversity, as well as effective means to promote collective and non-motorized modes of transport. Policies to improve integrated land-use and transport planning in urban areas should be given high priority.

79. Local authorities, NGOs and private sector organizations are crucial to the successful implementation of policies and strategies for sustainable development. National and regional policies should encourage and support their activities. In particular, such policies presuppose involvement and actions taken at lower levels of government. Governments should consider the role of local authorities in the implementation of national development and environment goals and policies, and in this context assess the relevance and appropriateness of their current legislation and central-local government relationships. The division of tasks and responsibilities between different levels of government should be reviewed in the light of the need to strengthen the role of local authorities in the implementation of national policies for a more sustainable development. Stronger local competence and capacity and more accountability may be required.

80. Governments should take active steps to increase people's knowledge and awareness of ecological threats and the issues of social viability and sustainability in order to improve public participation in planning. *Local Agenda 21*, as well as the *Habitat Agenda*, where appropriate, should be used as main vehicles to address these problems throughout society, paying particular attention to reaching out to the young. The need for such processes to specifically address issues of gender and social equity should be accentuated.

81. Research plays a fundamental role in the development of policies and plans and in educating all those involved or who will become involved in the planning process, to facilitate sustainable development. Links, networks and cooperative ventures should be fostered between researchers and practitioners from different disciplines, organizations and countries. During the discussion a number of proposals for research topics were put forward. They are presented below under five main headings:

(a) *Issues of sustainable urban development*

- The meaning of urban public space and green areas;
- The influence of large projects on urban sustainability;
- The relationships between physical urban structure, population structure, people's socio-economic resources, their values and lifestyles and their environmentally relevant behaviour;
- The effects of sustainable urban physical structures on the economy;
- The role of natural resources in the urban environment;
- The improvement of housing conditions and consequences for sustainable development;

(b) *Issues of globalization and international trends*

- The role of supranational organizations in urban development;
- The role of the private sector in urban development and the role of the public sector in the development of cities;
- The social polarization and dualization of urban regions and new trends in urban labour markets;
- The role of urban sub-cultures;
- The changing patterns of urban systems;
- Networking of cities across the borders;

(c) *Planning procedures and methodologies*

- Adopt a new approach to planning: integrate urban planning within the frame of strategic planning;

- Taxation procedures as a policy to redistribute the benefits of urban development, and direct development and actions in a more sustainable way;
- The role of scientific knowledge in the formulation and implementation of environmental policies;
- Establish a system of quantitative and qualitative indicators to monitor urban development in a comparative perspective; also using geographical information systems in the development of indicators;
- Different models of sustainability in different sizes and types of cities;
- Long-term forecasting to analyse and visualize future problems of urban development;

(d) *Policy evaluation*

- The effects of policy instruments supporting cities in their efforts to achieve sustainable development and social equity;
- The consequences of the current growth-oriented urban development on the environment;
- Evaluation of experiments with the application of sustainable development principles in designing human settlements;

(e) *Actors and their roles in planning and development*

- The relation between urban expansion and administrative boundaries;
- Public attitudes to urban settlement forms;

- The effectiveness of research networks and links in stimulating development of planning policy and its implementation;
- Methods and practice of participation in urban development.

82. The delegations of Finland and of the United Kingdom offered to organize the ninth Conference in 2002 on one of the subjects indicated above. Their proposals will be put forward at the fifty-ninth session of the Committee on Human Settlements in September 1998.

ANNEX

The Brundtland Commission's concept of sustainable development

Sustainability is a concept originating from the science of ecology. It refers to the conditions necessary for ecosystems to be sustained in the long term. A major contribution of the Brundtland Commission has been to merge this concept with that of *development*, with emphasis on the satisfaction of basic human needs in the development process. The Commission defined *sustainable development* as follows: «*Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts:*

- *The concept of "needs", in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and*
- *The idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.» (Our Common Future 1987).*