COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

Distr.
GENERAL

Ninth Conference on Urban
  and Regional Research

HBP/SEM.53/2
10 July 2002

Leeds (United Kingdom), 9-12 June 2002

Original: ENGLISH

REPORT OF THE NINTH CONFERENCE ON URBAN AND REGIONAL RESEARCH
"SUSTAINABLE AND LIVEABLE CITIES"

Leeds (United Kingdom), 9 to 12 June 2002

Introduction

1.   The Ninth Conference on Urban and Regional Research took place in Leeds (United Kingdom) from 10 to 12 June 2002 at the invitation of the Government of the United Kingdom.   It was preceded by a technical visit to the cities of Leeds and Bradford on 9 June.

2.   Representatives of the following countries took part in the Conference: Armenia, Austria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Hungary, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, United Kingdom, and Yugoslavia.

3.   The following non-governmental organizations were also represented: International Society of City and Regional Planners (ISOCARP) and World Fire Statistics Centre.

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4.   The Conference was opened by Mr. Peter Bide of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, on behalf of Lord Rooker, Minister of Planning, Housing and Regeneration. In his welcoming address he highlighted the common purpose of participants – to share experience and expertise and learn from each other to create towns and cities of which all can be proud. He gave a view of the major issues for the Conference: how to make our urban environments safer, more attractive, more sustainable and more prosperous, from a British perspective. He outlined the problems: a predominantly urban society that has become polarised with too many people socially excluded and people leaving towns and cities. He furthermore mentioned the steps being taken to counter this: preventing sprawl and re-investing in towns and cities; creating safe, comfortable urban environments that people want to live in; and creating opportunity by narrowing the gap between the poorest neighbourhoods and the rest through a programme of neighbourhood renewal.

5.   Ms. Christina von Schweinichen, Deputy Director of the ECE Environment and Human Settlement Division, drew attention to the propitious timing of this event on the eve of the World Summit on Sustainable Development ten years after the Rio Conference.

6.   Mr. John Zetter (United Kingdom) and Ms. Miloslava Paskova (Slovakia) were elected Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson, respectively. In his opening statement the Chairman emphasized the importance of the meeting for centralizing the policy relevance of recent urban and regional research. Sustainable development lay at the heart of securing successful changes on the economic, environmental and social fronts. In the 21st century, this had a significant international dimension, which UNECE represented.

7.   The rapporteurs were invited to introduce the discussion on their respective themes based on their introductory papers:

Theme I: Urban society and economy: achieving social equity through effective planning
                    policies and tools (HBP/SEM.53/4)
Rapporteurs: Mr. David FELL (United Kingdom)
                    Mr. Vladimir K. STORCHEVUS (Russian Federation)

Theme II: Improving urban performance: urban structure and ecosystems (HBP/SEM.53/5)
Rapporteurs: Ms. Ileana BUDISTEANU (Romania)
                    Ms. Anne SKOVBRO (Denmark)

Theme III: Governance and urban organization: integrated decision-making
                    (HBP/SEM.53/6)
Rapporteurs: Ms. Anne QUERRIEN (France)
                    Mr. Ingemar ELANDER (Sweden)

8.   As a basis for discussion, the Conference had before it discussion papers prepared by the rapporteurs and the Summary Paper (HBP/SEM.53/3). Furthermore, it had before it response papers which dealt with questions related to the three themes of the Conference. Armenia, Cyprus, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Spain, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, United Kingdom, Yugoslavia and the Advisory Network had prepared response papers.

9.   In addition to this material, participants had an opportunity during the technical visit around the cities of Leeds and Bradford to become acquainted with the challenges and the approaches to urban development in these cities.   Both cities provide ample illustration of the potential to create sustainable and liveable cities and to resolve the related problems.   Despite economic growth, unemployment persists and some parts of the city areas are among the most deprived in the United Kingdom.   The study tour looked at economic redevelopment in central Leeds and at new sustainable public transport links to the city centre.   The tour included examples of the re-use of the historical fabric in both Leeds and Bradford to create vital, dynamic and novel mixed-use development, and contrasted 19th century model industrial developments with 21st century equivalents.

CONCLUSIONS

THEME I - URBAN SOCIETY AND ECONOMY: ACHIEVING SOCIAL EQUITY
THROUGH EFFECTIVE PLANNING POLICIES AND TOOLS

Introduction and context

10.   In considering the liveability and sustainability of cities and towns, it is imperative to bear in mind wider forces.   Conference papers and discussions highlighted how, for example, economic globalization, population migration and climate change impact upon urban areas and actors.   Cities are not, therefore, complete masters of their own destiny.   Strategies and plans that fail to take this into account – by incorporating insufficient flexibility, for example – are at a disadvantage.

11.   Various inequalities – economic, social, ecological – arise from the interplay of forces at the various levels (including the level of individual behaviour).   The reduction of these inequalities may lie not in a series of essentially ad hoc adjustments (such as housing improvement schemes, improved transport infrastructure, skills training) but may reside at a deeper, systemic level.   Some response papers suggest it is appropriate, therefore, to consider the underlying institutional and legal frameworks within which urban actors conduct their economic, social and environmental activities.

12.   More generally, it is important to bear in mind that a behavioural approach is not a _replacement_ for other techniques for urban and regional monitoring, analysis, research and planning.   Rather, it is _complementary_ to the more established techniques of land-use planning, fiscal management, urban design and so on as mechanisms for promoting social equity.

13.   Research and policy development intended to address the behavioural aspects of urban life should, therefore, take careful account of these underlying issues.

Underpinning issues

14.   A definition of sustainable development based upon consideration of risks was proposed and discussed.   Strategies to identify acceptable levels of risk – environmental, economic, social – could provide a stable and rational basis for achieving sustainable development.   There was a

view from the Conference that a better appreciation and understanding of risk – and how risk is perceived – would be a valuable contribution to the creation of liveable and sustainable cities.

15.   Although the Eighth Conference agreed that "compact urban areas with good transport links contribute to sustainable development", it is clear from the response papers that a more extensive, widely held and secure definition of sustainable urban development remains elusive.

16.   Nevertheless, while definitions remain debated, the very direction and purpose of potential research is more difficult to prescribe.   It therefore remains the case that, as at the Eighth Conference, "research into the socio-economic aspects of sustainable development is less advanced than research on physical and ecological aspects".

17.   There was some discussion about the way in which political and cultural factors influence behaviour. Political and cultural circumstances vary considerably between different countries, cities and regions. The Conference noted that these factors form an important part of the context for considering the behaviour of agents in urban settings, and should not be ignored when devising appropriate (local) tools and policies intended to bring about more sustainable and liveable cities.

18.   What is also apparent from experience and research across the ECE region is that different priorities apply in different countries and different cities at different times.   Those significant urban changes are, inevitably, less concerned with the more "sophisticated" elements of sustainable development when they are facing more basic challenges such as the aftermath of war, natural calamity or prolonged under-investment.

19.   A challenge going forward is, therefore, to ensure as far as possible that the strategies adopted by cities to address these more "basic" challenges do not contain within them the seeds of further, more "sophisticated" trouble in the future.   For example, housing policies that take account not merely of the need to upgrade the quality of the existing stock but also tackle illegal housing development will be better positioned to deliver socially equitable and sustainable urban development than those that remain concerned solely with a short-term fix.

Information and perception

20.   There are a variety of ways of gathering intelligence on the behaviour of actors in an urban setting.   Response papers suggest that mechanisms to do so are most frequently put in place when new schemes or plans are initiated.   Such mechanisms then provide for effective feedback on the new scheme or plan, thereby enabling those responsible to monitor performance and amend and adapt the schemes or plans in a timely way.   Effective evaluation is a vital tool of policy implementation and development.   But for full effectiveness, as a number of response papers indicate, ongoing and timely monitoring and interim evaluation provide the ability to learn lessons as one goes along, rather than simply at the end of a process.

21.   Of course, gathering reliable data on the behaviour of agents and actors in the complex environment of a city is not straightforward.   Disentangling cause and effect, and the multiplicity of forces that could be influencing behaviour – particularly those influencing social

equity - requires careful and precise methodologies. The response papers suggest that a variety of such research methodologies have been deployed.

22.   The need for these research methodologies is especially pronounced in the many instances where behaviour is not currently perceived as a valid component of analysis. Narrowly focused plans evaluated in narrow ways may deliver narrow, but misleading, results. Ensuring that a new transport plan, for example, delivers not just enhanced mobility and access at an aggregate level, but does so in a fashion that addresses social and environmental equity, requires careful methodological consideration.

Importance of the economy

23.   The Conference agreed that, in two key senses, economic considerations underpin the entire issue of liveable and sustainable cities. First, unless there is a sound economic system within which governments, businesses and individuals can function, then social and ecological issues, and more general issues of equity, cannot effectively be addressed. It remains unclear, however, from both theory and research, what system of regulations, incentives and civic norms best enables a city to address simultaneously the full range of social and ecological objectives. The Conference discussed the impact of fiscal systems, particularly concerning land. The concern, on the one hand, is that some kinds of system distort an economy in such a way as to militate against sustainable development; and, on the other, that inconsistencies and competition between land and tax regimes in different cities can have a range of negative effects.

24.   The second sense in which the economy is fundamental is that unless urban actors have sufficient resources at their disposal, it is highly unlikely that they will be able to effectively promote its social and ecological equity. These resources are typically thought of as being financial, but might just as reasonably be considered in terms of human or natural resources.

25.   In either case, it is necessary to establish how such resources can be managed and made available. The Conference focused strongly upon the notion that, as far as possible, these resources should be self-generated by cities, often from a variety of sources, and that cities should have responsibility for managing and financing projects.

Planning and integration

26.   It is clear from the response papers that in many of the former command economies, after a period in which "planning" of all kinds was profoundly discredited, land-use planning is gaining renewed status.   In particular, the potential of land-use planning to influence directly behaviour is again becoming accepted.   Furthermore, contemporary land-use planning is much more open to community involvement than traditional approaches.   The behavioural dimension is thus more explicitly incorporated than previously.

27.   There is also evidence from the response papers and discussions that policy formulation is increasingly "joined up", with better relationships between, for example, land-use and transport planning, and regeneration and social inclusion.   In the case of transport, which the Conference discussed at some length, the methods by which land-use planning can focus development at locations well served by public transport were endorsed.   Behavioural

considerations – how and why individuals make the transport choices that they do – also need to be understood.

28.   More generally, there are tensions between the need to segment policy and research in the interests of effective management and the need to link policy and research in the interests of securing a holistic approach.   These tensions pose challenges for researchers, policy makers and, indeed, urban agents themselves.

Outstanding issues for further research

29.   There has been insufficient attention paid to the role of private enterprise in improving the liveability and sustainability of cities, and to the interaction between private enterprise and the State.   Although there is widespread agreement that a sound economic underpinning is essential to sustainable cities, more research is required into how this translates into practical actions vis-à-vis actual businesses.

30.   Issues of multi-culturalism and diversity continue to receive insufficient attention, perhaps reflecting the more general bias towards the physical and ecological dimensions of sustainability.   Similarly, physical access (i.e. transport) issues receive attention, but social access is an area requiring more investigation.

31.   In some cities, issues of violence and terrorism are a present threat to liveability.   More discussion of this issue, and research into the ways in which such threats affect the behaviour of citizens, is required.

32.   There has been only limited research into the ways in which the lifestyle choices and actions of individuals and organizations can lead to inequitable outcomes across society as a whole.   Perhaps more significantly, there is little hard evidence showing which tools and strategies have delivered verifiable improvements in social equity in urban settings.   This hard evidence needs to be gathered and disseminated. In general, there is a need for clearer guidance from urban and regional researchers to policy makers and practitioners on what practical steps should be taken to deliver more sustainable outcomes.   International comparisons and dissemination of case studies and best practice are effective ways of achieving this.   In so doing, careful attention must be paid to the applicability of lessons in different circumstances.   Appropriate typologies are required to achieve this.

THEME II: IMPROVING URBAN PERFORMANCE: URBAN STRUCTURE
AND ECOSYSTEMS

Introduction and context

33.   Papers and discussions at the Conference underlined the importance of achieving more sustainable and liveable urban development.   It is widely recognized that built form influences the sustainability and liveability of cities, and can improve urban performance.   The Compact City paradigm has, with different definitions, influenced urban and planning policies in several ECE countries.   However, the response papers also showed the importance of taking into account the local context and community priorities when applying compact city policies.   Many national

planning policies aim to increase the mix of land uses, in order to generate a culturally more diverse, livelier and socially equitable urban environment. An important point in this respect is to bear in mind the association with other sectoral policies.

34.   The definition of urban sustainability and liveability emerging from the Conference was that it could be measured by a city's ability to provide its inhabitants with conditions and choices to provide adequate quality of life.   These include high quality of both natural and built environments; good living and working conditions, including people's needs and right to housing, work, social services and infrastructure; preserving cultural identity, based on individual choice and community life; and opportunities for participation in decision-making.

Urban sprawl and the compact city paradigm

35.   Urban sprawl is a generalized trend, affecting all European cities to various degrees, its influence being stronger in large cities. While the population stagnates or decreases in most European countries, cities expand and occupy more and more agricultural land and green space. This phenomenon may be a reflection of the international character of urban development and uniform patterns of consumption and lifestyles.

36.   Most European cities reflect in their spatial structures their historical development, as well as recent changes in the way and extent to which urban space is being used. Currently, cities present a heterogeneous structure, with distinct components presenting specific challenges. The process of transformation in traditional urban structures is a very complex one. It is accompanied by new land use patterns, by new social requirements and by new environmental considerations. There is competition between resources and resource-generating developments – development may create one sort of resource whilst using another, particularly substituting social and economic resources for natural ones.

37.   Urban sprawl is generated by a number of mechanisms: developers currently seem to favour development on greenfield sites, as it is generally cheaper and easier to acquire and develop greenfield land; economic incentives that promote low-density development such as lower property prices for new developments on the urban fringe offering increased affordability; and competition between local governments to raise property taxes. Sprawl is generally created by illegal housing development in Central and Eastern Europe and by speculative housing development in Western Europe moving out from the centre. Yet, there is evidence of increased densities in some inner-city urban areas, as particular groups of the population move back to the city core.

38.   Current definitions of a compact city do not reflect the complexity of phenomena taking place in and around existing urban areas. To enlarge the conceptual framework of the compact city more research is needed: to improve information and statistical systems; and define new indicators that take into account – in a more integrated way – the complexity of the ongoing general spatial development patterns of urban structures. New design proposals should be assessed from a sustainable perspective, in terms of new land uses, social demands for privacy, more private free spaces, and contact with natural elements, without losing contact with traditional urban values and their cultural, social and economic potential.

39.   The strong driving forces that trigger urban sprawl will require concerted action to reverse the trend, including an array of economic and regulatory instruments, education and awareness-raising. Land-use policy is only one instrument among the others needed. From a regional perspective, the aim is not to reduce mobility, but to provide a polycentric development pattern adapted to different lifestyles and offering the choice of a wider range of alternative transport modes.

Housing and urban regeneration

40.   In some countries urban sprawl is generated by illegal building and informal subdivisions of land.   These areas often face serious problems of infrastructure provision, lack of security of tenure, and the need for further improvement of buildings and living conditions. Specific housing policies are required, both to integrate them into urban and social structures, and to minimize the negative effects on the built environment.   Such policies include assistance programmes to low-income groups, and credit and tax subsidies for housing improvement.

41.   In many countries there is a marked trend toward encouraging and facilitating owner-occupancy through various incentives. This disadvantages the rental sector and sometimes leads to its decline.   It also impacts negatively on the younger groups of the population, who do not have the means to become first-time homeowners.

42.   Affordability should be tackled from a broader perspective, taking into account the redistribution of housing, minimum housing standards, life cycles of various tenure groups of the population, mutual assistance (of families, social groups) etc. Housing programmes should take into consideration the changing social structure of the population and provide correspondingly for new needs, particularly those of an ageing population and of single-parent households.

43.   Housing programmes are in many countries generally oriented towards first-time acquisition of a dwelling. However, governments use a wide variety of instruments to assist various population groups (tax deductions, tax relief on interest payments, general interest-rate subsidies, etc). Yet most of these instruments benefit middle- and higher-income households and fail to help lower-income groups.

44.   The rehabilitation of the housing stock of multifamily structures built in the second half of the 20th century and the regeneration of brownfield sites are particular challenges for most European countries, in particular the countries in transition. To tackle these issues, adequate financial and institutional arrangements have to be put in place. Some urban regeneration experiences show the benefits of the renewal processes (higher tax income, higher level of social protection). To make those experiences successful, consideration should be given to preserving a balanced social mix existing in some inner-city areas.

Urban development densities as instruments to shape urban forms

45.   The conference papers and discussion suggested that urban development densities may be used as key policy instruments in improving liveability in urban areas. Densities should reflect the relation between infrastructure and facilities on the one hand and building and population numbers on the other.

46.   In **_central areas_** density should be related to the concept of "carrying capacity" (as in environmental analyses) – using alternatives, restrictions/compensations, etc.   Renewal operations and subsequent increases in the density of buildings, population and use, should be accompanied by corresponding increases in facilities.   In brownfield regeneration an employment-housing balance should be sought.   Tackling rising land prices and gentrification needs a range of new instruments – planning, financial, legal and fiscal.

47.   It is important to stress the need to identify available vacant land for urban activity development in order to create mixed land uses and also to increase the revenue base.   The inability of urban authorities to bring forward sufficient and affordable urban land is constantly generating pressure on sites in traditional urban cores, leading to frequent land-use changes and speculative pressures on land.

48.   **_Suburbs and peripheral areas_** require policies and planning that promote the introduction of mixed and varied uses; an integrated transport and land-use system; the location of activities that support urban life and improve the image of such areas (shopping, leisure, parks, etc.); and the retention and creation of open spaces for public use.

Transport and urban form

49.   There is evidence that urban structure influences the volume and mode of transport.   (On the other hand transport facilities influence urban structure.)   Increasing urban sprawl has impacted on travel behaviour, creating longer travel distances and increasing the need for travel, largely met by the use of the private car.   Numerous transport policies have been promoted with a view to improving transport infrastructure in urban areas.   They have included innovative transport management systems: a wide use of the separation of traffic flows; introducing alternative and new transport modes for public transport and encouraging private non-motorized transport; and integrating land-use and transport planning.

50.   Effective land-use planning, at different levels, has the potential to reduce demand for transport.   A better mix of land uses, supported by an adequate institutional setting, clustering development around transport nodes may reduce the need for transport and provide better accessibility to higher-density areas.   However, local solutions cannot compensate for the larger-scale trends of excessive consumption of agricultural land, natural and green areas.   A regional perspective is crucial in relation to integrated land-use and transport planning, in terms of initiatives, organization and plans.   Better understanding of patterns of movement of jobs and housing is also needed to provide more effective integrated land use and transport strategies. Finally, integration of the local context in terms of urban structure and culture is crucial in order to provide sustainable solutions.

Urban structures and ecosystems

51.   Continued urban sprawl has led to losses of greenfield land and often valuable natural sites.   There are an increasing number of examples of integration of greening with an ecological perspective in relation to land-use planning.   These examples should be studied more thoroughly. On the other hand, regeneration within the urban core and increasing density have resulted only in a few cases in creating local eco-cycles.   Redevelopment projects rarely integrate recycling

facilities and more green space of ecological value. Integration of eco-cycles in urban renewal and new housing developments are related mostly to a limited number of pilot projects.

52.   An essential question is when and how to move from pilot projects to integrated eco-management in relation to urban planning. A key issue here is the relationship between the city and its hinterland, its 'ecological footprint'. One barrier in this respect could be the lack of cooperation between central and local governments. Maybe new legislation on strategic environmental assessment (SEA) implemented in many countries will change this. As well as operating on a wider spatial base than environmental impact assessment, SEA also considers social and economic issues alongside ecological and natural environment issues. However, there are already examples of plans trying to integrate ecological and greening issues at different levels of government.

Urban planning instruments

53.   There seems to be a conflict between strategic perspectives on urban development and some urban planning instruments. Local planning instruments are in most cases of a reactive character, unable to keep pace with changes in demand. They need to be more flexible, and more easily amended; able to accommodate complementary policies outside land use; and be in accordance with the wider interests of all involved.

Outstanding issues for further research

54.   The papers and discussions at the Conference revealed there is still a need for research into:
   (a) The conceptual framework of the Compact City that takes into account the variety of contexts and the relevant driving forces of urban development, paying attention to social and economic behaviour;
   (b) Viable alternative concepts of the Compact City paradigm reflecting the complexity of the social and physical development of urban structures;
   (c) The identity of cities and the values attached to urban landscapes, streets, public spaces;
   (d) The relationship between social equity and the need for a liveable and sustainable urban environment;
   (e) Addressing from a more complex perspective (economic, social, organizational, financial) the issue of inner-city regeneration, brownfield development and large housing estate regeneration;
   (f) Developing sophisticated housing policies based on a broader concept of affordability;
   (g) Developing more robust and comprehensive indicators, and the statistical base to support them, to reflect the complexity of real cities in monitoring urban development.

55.   It is generally agreed that identification of best practice in tackling urban development, particularly through new programmes of mixed land use and housing regeneration, will be beneficial for all ECE countries.

THEME III: GOVERNANCE AND URBAN ORGANIZATION: INTEGRATED
DECISION-MAKING

56.   The urban fabric is the product of historical processes. Involved in these processes were
constellations of actors that - although defined by different cultural contexts - belonged to one of
three spheres: civil society, market or State. Thus cities were created by decisions and actions
taken by national or local governments, banks and firms, and citizens and citizen associations.
Urban planning tried to improve coordination and to regulate land use and building performance.
But without integrating the main stakeholders into decision-making, and without consensus
among them, the urban fabric became anything but the product of a rational, comprehensive
plan. Sustainability was not an issue and livability was less important than concentration of
capital, wealth or workers. The environment was spoilt, natural resources were devastated, and
space for recreation and pleasure became scarce. The poor became, and still are, concentrated in
areas with unequal opportunities.

57.   In the 1980/90s "demand overload" and the "fiscal crisis of the State" caused severe
problems for central as well as local government, i.e. there was "ungovernability". Local
governments in the countries in transition were burdened with new responsibilities without
receiving the necessary resources. In addition, globalization in its various aspects eroded the
ability of central and local governments to govern in the traditional, linear way. Reality became
more complex, diverse and uncertain. Politics responded by becoming more flexible,
differentiated and fragmented, at the same time provoking attempts to create coordination
through new policy networks and coalitions. In other words, there was _governance_.

58.   Urban governance suggests an extensive involvement of relevant partners.   It tries to
coordinate all stakeholders in private/public partnerships, open all decisions to democratic
debate, and seek efficiency through consensus. Thus, normatively, urban governance signals a
strategy of overcoming social polarization and political fragmentation, and making the city an
inclusive organization, where actors representing local government, private business and
voluntary organizations work hand in hand to create a city that is both sustainable and liveable.

59.   Citizens and users, in their diversity of class, income, gender, ethnicity, age, etc., should
be both the major agents and the ultimate targets of urban policies.   If citizens are not regarded
as crucial actors in decision-making and implementation they will express their discontent by
protest or apathy.   They may leave the place, or even express their frustration by violence.
Thus, there is a demand for governance more open to all parties, not limited just to the wealthy
or skilled.   Such participative governance helps identifying problems before decay and
dereliction have already become established, offering prevention rather than cure.

60.   The division of cities into areas of included and excluded citizens has become a major
concern of policy makers at all levels, as have the attempts at creating towns and cities that are
competitive and ecologically sustainable. Looking broadly at urban policy-making in Europe
one is struck by the co-existence of strategies indicating the presence of parallel, and sometimes
competing, and conflicting, partnerships or coalitions of actors and interests. We seem to be
facing a situation where urban governance is increasingly fragmented and dispersed, either to a
myriad of partnerships created in a more or less ad hoc manner, or to competing coalitions
promoting economic growth, ecological sustainability or social inclusion and justice. Cases

where policies for economic efficiency, ecological sustainability and social justice are being effectively coordinated are rare or non-existent.

Creating a common vision and a shared planning framework for all urban stakeholders

61.   The discussion stressed the necessity to create a common vision to help overcome the increasing fragmentation among actors in civil society, market and the public sphere. This common vision should cover all levels of urban life – national, regional, city, municipal and neighbourhood - and become mainstream, i.e. take into account the broader framework of local policy debates and elections, not just being technical planning exercises.

62.   Information about ecological, economic, social, spatial and all other relevant aspects of the urban environment should be given to citizens, firms, and voluntary organizations, in a variety of ways, including exhibitions, public hearings, local referendums, etc. Consultation and involvement should not be offered until the project is already set up. All stakeholders need to be kept informed at all stages of the planning and implementation process, and they should have a real opportunity to express their demands. Local politicians and planners have a special responsibility to open the floor to groups that are commonly excluded from the urban policy agenda.

Decentralization and relevant areas for good governance

63.   As urban areas grow by agglomerating different communities they extend far beyond the limits of particular administrative units. Therefore, to reflect the overall urban environment, urban planning has to cover areas which may not be the same as those covered by formal administrative structures. One way to tackle this is to create new institutions spanning the particular urban area that has been identified. Another way is to coordinate the relevant regional, subregional and local authorities, and to initiate particular project arrangements on urban regeneration, preservation of natural resources, protection of the cultural heritage, etc.   It is essential that these contracts involve the affected community associations; universities; private companies; local authorities, etc.

64.   In the process of European integration the transborder problem is crucial.   The characteristics of the transborder regions present great difficulties as statistics and other sources of information mostly have a national focus, implying a hierarchy of urban functions from the central to the local.   Regionalization, decentralization and dissemination of functions in the urban fabric represent a new vision, breaking the national borderlines, sensitive to local and regional cultures and histories despite the various national contexts.

65.   Larger urban projects are commonly targeted at selected areas with national programmes providing the main sources of funding. As plans are prepared at the local level, this easily creates tensions between different levels of government. The move towards local urban planning can be seen everywhere but the prospect of success is better in countries where local authorities have a wider scope of discretion.   When local administrations do not have sufficient legal leeway, money and staff, there may be a frustrating gap between vision and the capacity to fulfil it. This makes it all the more important that central governments should redistribute welfare resources and reduce inequalities left by history and natural conditions.

66.   Combining national welfare with local planning is not an easy task.   Interventions by central governments and international organizations are sometimes necessary to counteract threats to the historical and natural heritage caused by exploitation. Promoting tourism and other ways of strengthening the competitiveness of a town or city is often done without taking due consideration of local history and culture. Planners could help opening new windows of opportunity in this respect, and making proposals in line with principles of ecological sustainability, respect for cultural values and social equity. Documenting the conflicts and opportunities involved in such processes, and their outcomes, is an urgent task for planning and research.

Governance and planning

67.   Urban governance as a broad umbrella concept includes many actors, sectors and levels in the public as well as the market and civil society domains.   The discussion highlighted the complexity of intergovernmental relationships and drew attention to the fact that integrated decision-making is easier said than done. Thus, there are great problems of coordinating different public actors, e.g. different ministries, central and local government, regional and federal government, transborder governments, etc.   Although the need for creating partnerships including business and voluntary organizations was recognized, the discussion rather centred around the relationships between different sectors and levels of government.   This was especially striking with regard to the countries in transition, which are still largely in the process of building a new institutional framework of government. For the Western European countries it is evident that government still has a very important role to play within a broader governance framework.

68.   With regard to urban policy it is obvious that long-term commitment on the part of central government is often missing, and that measures are very much ad hoc. Although many projects have been successful on their own terms, there is no clear idea of how to integrate this experience into current and ongoing practices when the projects have finished.   Lacking a comprehensive, coordinating project leadership, responsibility for urban policies is split between actors on different levels and sectors.   Creating successful coalitions or partnerships between public, private and civil society actors thus seems to depend on strong leadership by locally elected representatives or appointed project administrators. However, this does not always occur. Unfortunately, mechanisms for integrating ad hoc project experiences into ordinary urban policy-making and implementation rarely exist.

69.   Planners are in charge of coordinating projects. Promoting citizen participation, being sensitive to business demands and, at the same time, trying to pursue the public interest requires great skills of mediation on the part of the planner. Planners take on new ideas selectively, and add bit by bit to their repertoire of possible lines of action. In an urban governance culture they have to be more flexible than before, prepared to adapt to different circumstances, sometimes using traditional, rationalist methods, sometimes negotiating with private business and other stakeholders, and also trying to start a dialogue with ordinary citizens. Although these are forms of action that have always been used by planners, they are today integral parts of a more sophisticated tool kit.

70.   Communicative planning includes a strong consensual element, also reflecting a current trend in democratic theory, where deliberative and discursive democracy have become the catchwords. At the heart of the deliberative model lies the idea that in decision-making everyone has to be heard, and a decision that is perceived as fundamentally wrong should not be made. However, it should be borne in mind that adherence to deliberative democratic ideals does not exclude the recognition of conflicts in real-life planning and politics. On the contrary, the focus on consensus in planning practice is an expression of the need to handle these very conflicts.

71.   A possible role for the planner, in a world where politics seems to become increasingly fragmented, is to act as a mediator between different groups. Thus, the planner may contribute to broadening the knowledge base for planning. Bringing different standpoints and arguments onto the agenda may clarify what is at stake, and lead to a better understanding of the nature of a conflict. Sometimes different opinions go back to fundamental differences of interest that cannot be resolved through discussion. However, sometimes contradictions may be less antagonistic than they first seem, and in these cases planners as mediators may help the process run more smoothly. Taking the extra time to negotiate a consensus may be efficient in the long run, eliminating conflicts that might otherwise arise during the implementation stage.

New role of urban researchers

72.   Visionary urban planning represents a great challenge to urban researchers, who are called to document this vision approach through analysis of the social and economic context, the resources of the place, the skills of the people, etc. They are asked to translate these analyses and give access to citizens and their associations, helping them to debate and make their choices. Thus, urban researchers may play an important role in giving transparency and accountability to urban planning, explaining to the stakeholders the causes of the problems they see, and pointing out some of the possible solutions and windows of opportunity at hand. Action-orientated research may even contribute to making urban planning more inclusive. Politicians may be suspicious of a critical approach in planning, although they should not. On the contrary, in an era when apathy and distrust tend to erode the political system, politicians should welcome any attempt at making the system more democratic in terms of participation, accountability and openness. In other words, they should warmly welcome a communicative approach in planning.

73.   In most countries urban policies have been carefully monitored.   The record so far shows both success and disappointments.   In urban regeneration, physical improvements are commonplace, while social ambitions have largely failed.   Social polarization is an ongoing process, especially in terms of ethnicity.   On the other hand, business leaders and other wealthy groups say they are subjected to too many costs.   Citizens take individual actions against planning measures either by blocking developments through legal processes or by building illegally.   Experts frequently try to apply too uniform criteria for successful development of places with unique characteristics; they are accused of not taking sufficient account of historical backgrounds of local areas and imposing 'one-size-fits-all' solutions.   All these misunderstandings demonstrate the need for increased effort in providing accurate and robust information to inform and underpin decisions.

Outstanding issues for future research

74.   Questions of governance for future research include:
- What role do different levels and sectors of government have in urban governance and planning and what role should they have? How do they perform in terms of openness, accountability and integrated decision-making?

- What is the relationship between citizen participation and representative politics in urban governance and planning and what should it look like? Are all groups and individuals affected by a particular policy also given the opportunity to influence the formulation of this particular policy?

- How do the positive experiences gained from urban policy initiatives become integrated into mainstream urban politics and planning? Is a long-term, strategic approach to urban policy being developed by the relevant government organizations or is policy just project-orientated and ad hoc?

- What are the criteria for "good governance", the different ways of combining efficiency and democracy, and the different types of leadership involved? International comparisons between the achievements of different towns and cities and different administrative models - i.e. the documentation of different "city profiles" - should be promoted to monitor and assess the outcomes of urban visions as expressed in the context of Habitat II and its aftermath.

- How is urban research organized in relation to urban planning? What are the roles of universities and scientific communities? How can research facilitate integrated decision-making and the setting-up of partnerships including both local people and business representatives? How can urban research be organized so that it does not become biased in favour of established decision makers?