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Item 4 (d) of the provisional agenda

**PROGRAMME AND ORGANIZATION for the
Tenth UNECE Conference on Urban and Regional Research,
Bratislava (Slovakia), 22-23 May 2006**

Note prepared by the secretariat and the delegation of Slovakia

Introduction

1. At its Sixty-third session in September 2002, the Committee on Human Settlements welcomed the proposal of Slovakia to host the Tenth Conference on Urban and Regional Research in May 2006.
2. The Conference is being organized jointly with the Council of Europe's European Conference of Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning (CEMAT).
3. At the Sixty-fifth session of the Committee the delegation of Slovakia presented the overriding theme for the tenth conference. The theme "Sharing responsibility for more equitable development across the UNECE region" derives from the recommendations of the Ninth UNECE Conference on Urban and Regional Research "Sustainable and Liveable Cities" (Leeds, 2002)* which stressed the need to create a common vision to help overcome the increasing fragmentation among actors in civil society, the market and the public sector in achieving a more sustainable and livable city.

* See website http://www.unece.org/env/hs/prgm/hsdevt/welcome_conf.htm

4. A working group was established to coordinate the preparatory work and to elaborate background discussion papers. The following countries and organizations nominated their experts as rapporteurs: Albania, Czech Republic, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia and ISOCARP. The group of rapporteurs is co-chaired by Ms. Maria Festas (Portugal), Chair of the Committee of Senior Officials of the CEMAT and Ms. Miloslava Paskova (Slovakia).

5. The working group will prepare two discussion papers which will concentrate on two main research topics (see paragraphs 10-16) together with a number of questions to help participants direct their response papers and provide background information for the discussion.

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVE OF THE CONFERENCE

6. The Conference intends to bring together policy makers, urban planners and researchers. It aims to provide an opportunity for different actors involved in urban policies and implementation to compare their points of view. It hopes to assist policy makers in their decision-making and contribute to a better understanding of future research needs.

7. The Ninth Conference on Urban and Regional Research, held in Leeds in 2002, identified a number of conclusions and implications for research and policy. Some of these outstanding issues, requiring further research, were taken forward for the preparation of the Tenth Conference:

- Role of private enterprise in improving the liveability and sustainability of cities and actions that would support sound economic development;
- Multiculturalism, diversity and social access;
- Tools and strategies for genuine improvements of social equity in urban settings taking into consideration lifestyle choices and actions of individuals and organisations;
- What are the criteria for “good governance”, different ways of combining efficiency and democracy and different types of leadership?
- How is urban research organised in relation to urban planning? What are the roles of universities and scientific communities?
- What are viable alternative concepts of the Compact City paradigm reflecting the complexity of social and physical development of urban structures?

8. The basic objective of the Tenth Conference is to use the results of research for guidance on what practical steps should be taken to deliver more viable cities. Building on previous UNECE research conference findings, the Tenth Conference is holding its debates at two interdependent levels: the city and the urban region. This provides an opportunity for a broad range of urban stakeholders to share their knowledge of spatially complex urban development in a globalising world. Facing scarcer public resources, urban managers have to resort to alternative means of developing the public realm, involving the private and voluntary sectors which, in turn, demand a greater share in the decision-making process. Public debate between political decision makers, the professionals of the built environment and all those who contribute to the production, management and upkeep of cities – a dialogue - is thus of the essence. The perception of cities and the purpose for their users have varied greatly over recent times. Innovative concepts emanating from urban research, such as the compact city or conversely, the edge city, are influencing urban policies. The

jury is still out on the impacts of these urban trends on ways of improving urban living conditions. The Conference endeavours therefore to explore the driving forces of successful contemporary cities and the merits of polycentricity as a means to redistribute urban energies at regional level.

9. The Conference participants are encouraged to bring and share their experience of the practical solutions and challenges they face as policy makers, managers and researchers.

TOPICS OF THE CONFERENCE

10. The discussion will be structured around two topics.

Topic I: The city as a living environment and driving force for development.

Rapporteurs: Mr. Sotir Dharmo (Albania), Mr. Slawomir Gzell (Poland) and Mr. Dusan Kostovsky (Slovakia).

Topic II: How can polycentricity of territorial development improve functional integration?

Rapporteurs: Mr. Karel Maier (Czech Republic), Mr. Antonio Manuel Figueiredo (Portugal) and Ms. Judith Ryser (United Kingdom).

I. The city as a living environment and driving force of development

11. An essential attribute of the city is to satisfy material, economic, social and cultural needs of those who live, work and play there. Yet the city remains a fertile ground for conflict. Majority rule is not always an adequate approach to cope with public versus private, or minority versus pressure group interests. There is need for a coherent urban design strategy, committed local leadership and long-term engagement to prevent ad hoc solutions that may contribute to future problems.

12. Elaboration and implementation of urban strategies should be an ongoing process as reality is not static; on the contrary, there is a constant need to recognise and take account of change. The linear planning process of collecting information, developing plans and implementing them is therefore not adequate as all these stages are influenced by changing reality. In addition, implementation of plans is often challenged by the very fact that they are drawn up and supposed to be implemented at different organisational levels by different people.

13. In theory, there is an overall agreement on flexible governance and communicative planning in which all stakeholders need to be kept informed and consulted at each stage of the planning and implementation process. In practice, the question remains how to achieve it. What mechanisms and structures should be set up to make communicative planning work effectively? How can theory be turned into practice? What is the role of planners in this process? What role do different levels and sectors of government play in urban governance and planning and what role should they have in future? How can research facilitate integrated decision-making and the setting-up of partnerships, including both local people and business representatives?

II. How can polycentricity of territorial development improve functional integration?

14. Independently of their level of development, nations, regions and territories in general are facing new challenges concerning competitiveness, growth and the sustainability of their roles in the world scene. Cities are rediscovered as powerful sources of growth, innovation and creativity. Association of urban development with competitiveness, innovation, growth and accumulation of productive knowledge, led researchers to focus on the role of agglomerations and their centrifugal effects and again on urban hierarchy. Nevertheless, the aim of spatial planning strategies should be to balance competitiveness and growth with territorial cohesion.

15. Urban polycentrism offers the possibility of combining the powerful influence of cities and urban areas in promoting competitiveness, innovation and growth with more balanced models of spatial development. Polycentricity may enhance cooperation, coordination and complementarity instead of detrimental competition between cities. It can create synergy by fostering networks of cooperation and shared complementary functions even across hierarchic levels and discontinuous space. However, polycentrism should not be seen as a panacea for solving the problems generated by lack of territorial cohesion and growing territorial disparity. Alternative concepts of redressing spatial disparities and extract value from existing and potential urban assets should be explored. This should include the perception of market forces and attitudes of territorial governance and management towards urban change.

16. The debate on the role of polycentrism should not be confined to a debate on the organisation of residential systems and quality of life. It should also address the issues of generating public policies and more balanced patterns of spatial development. Polycentrism can be discussed at several levels: the transnational level at which polycentrism is a tool for more creative patterns and mechanisms of cooperation at territorial level; the national level at which polycentrism is a tool for achieving feasible networks of strategic cooperation among small and medium-size cities; and the regional level at which polycentrism can be seen as a possible way to reduce intra-regional disparities. It will focus on the roles of governments, business/private stakeholders and research in the effort to develop a polycentric pattern for the UNECE region.

STUDY TOUR

17. The Conference will be preceded by a study tour on Sunday, 21 May 2006, to give participants the opportunity to become acquainted with the problems and approaches to urban development in Slovakia. Participants will have the opportunity to meet and discuss with local authorities, researchers and planners. Further practical information will be provided in the document (ECE/HBP/SEM.54/1/Add.1).

PROGRAMME

Saturday, 20 May	Arrival of participants
Sunday, 21 May	Field visits to the developments illustrating some of the issues addressed in the discussion papers
Monday, 22 May	
9.00 – 9.55	Welcome coffee and registration at the venue
10.00	Opening of the Tenth UNECE Urban and Regional Research Conference <i>“Sharing responsibility for more equitable development across the UNECE region”</i>
11.00 – 17.00 coffee and lunch break included	<i>Topic I: The city as a living environment and as driving force for development</i>
	Rapporteur’s introduction
	Presentation of response papers followed by discussion
	Summing up of the discussion by the Rapporteurs
Tuesday, 23 May	
9.00 – 13.00 coffee break included	<i>Topic II: How can polycentricity of territorial development improve functional integration?</i>
	Rapporteur’s introduction
	Presentation of response papers followed by discussion
	Summing up of the discussion by the Rapporteurs
13.00 – 13.30	Conclusions of the Tenth Conference
13.30	Closing

DOCUMENTATION

18. Conference documentation consists of:
- Programme and organization (ECE/HBP/SEM.54/1);
 - Information note to the participants (ECE/HBP/SEM.54/1/Add.1);
 - Discussion paper: “The city as a living environment and as driving force for development” (ECE/HBP/SEM.54/2);
 - Discussion paper: “How can polycentricity of territorial development improve functional integration?” (ECE/HBP/SEM.54/3).
19. Discussion papers will be available in the three UNECE working languages in early 2006

at the following website: <http://www.unece.org/hs>.

RESPONSE PAPERS

20. Country delegations, international organizations, researchers and NGOs are invited to prepare response papers to demonstrate the challenges in policy implementation and give examples of recent research and its findings. Response papers should address issues as well as respond to selected questions put forward in the discussion papers.

21. The response papers should be prepared in English. Authors are welcomed to submit also the translation into Russian, French or Slovak for distribution. Papers should be submitted in electronic format to the UNECE secretariat by 30 April 2006; they must not exceed 2,600 words (about 5 pages at single space, Times New Roman 12).

ORGANIZATION

22. The Conference will be held in three UNECE languages (English, French and Russian). Arrangements will be made for the projection of slides and Power Point presentations.

DATE AND VENUE

23. At the invitation of the Government of Slovakia, the Conference will take place in Bratislava on 22 and 23 May 2006 and it will be preceded by field visits on 21 May. The exact venue and details about hotels, transport, cost and method of payment will be communicated at a later stage, together with the registration form (ECE/HBP/SEM.54/1/Add.1).

COST

24. The Conference and the study tour are free of charge, but all participants are expected to pay for their own travel to and from Bratislava, their accommodation and living expenses (lunches will be provided by the host authorities).

VISAS

25. Participants should, if necessary, apply for visas to the Embassy of Slovakia in the country in which they reside. Invitation letters will be sent by the host upon registration.

PARTICIPATION

26. The Conference is open to representatives of UNECE Member countries and international organizations taking part in the work of the Economic Commission for Europe, as well as members of CEMAT and accredited NGOs. Under article 8 of the Commission's terms of reference, European countries non-members of the United Nations admitted to take part in UNECE work are also welcome to participate. All participants must be accredited by their appropriate government authority or by the international organization concerned.

FURTHER INFORMATION

27. Those wishing to obtain further information from the host authorities should contact: Ms. Miloslava Paskova, Director of Department, Ministry of Construction and Regional Development of the Slovak Republic, Prievozska 2/B, 825 25 Bratislava 26, Slovakia, tel. +412 2 58317 429, fax + 421 2 58317 577, paskova@build.gov.sk.

28. At a later stage an information note to the participants will be issued as an addendum. It will provide detailed information on:

- Registration
- Hotels and costs
- Study tour
- Programme