

The "Response Paper"

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First of all. I would like to mention, that analytical observations and concepts of Discussion papers presented for the Conference in Bratislava are of high professional interest and signify the main trends and hardships in current urban development policies in UN ECE region.

The primary objective of the sustainable spatial and urban development policy is formation of an environment, which is conducive for the human activities and ensures sustainable growth in the quality of the human life. I will shortly outline the specifics and peculiarities of my country with regards to the above-mentioned areas. The current spatial system of Armenia has been set up under the influence of the factors that characterize the planned economy and the administrative methods of management of the Soviet times and reflected the redistribution and the resettlement of the production capacities, which were developing in conformity with the role that was given to Armenia in the USSR economic system.

The principally new situation created in the country during the post-Soviet period has led to the fundamental review of the spatial development policy. The management of the spatial development centralized system has stopped functioning and instead, there are such mechanisms in use, which are leading to the normal transformation of that system.

Hence, under the growing tendencies of integration into the international institutions, a primary objective becomes the transition of Armenia to such methods of spatial planning and territorial management, which are in conformity with the guiding principles for sustainable spatial development adopted by UN and the Council of Europe.

The decentralization of the management system, the developing market relations and the transfer of the ownership of the state-owned lands to the communities greatly contribute to that.

The spatial planning principle is prevailing nowadays, where the diversity of the ownership forms is taken into account, with the application of the market tools, which govern the proprietary, including, the land ownership relations.

From the perspective of the spatial development policy formation and implementation, the currently existing situation in our country is

characterized, first of all, by the need of addressing the challenges of the transitional phase. In particular, possible efforts are made in the area of drawing and applying such principles, which are consistent with the current requirements, in terms of both their legal enforcement and practical application aspects.

There have been a number of urban development policy papers, legislative and agency-based statutes drafted and endorsed in the manner defined.

In general, there is a tendency observed in the mentioned sector in terms of drawing and implementing development plans.

What are those guidelines which based on the "Guiding principles for Sustainable Spatial Development of the European Continent" outline the scopes of the solution of the existing problems?

The analysis of the problems existing in the sector allows separating the following priority directions in the spatial development sector of Armenia.

As a basis of the sector policy, it is necessary to consider the guidelines on the formation of the base of the spatial or urban development policy papers, the improvement of the legal, including, also the regulatory and technical framework, the increase of the level of provision with housing and social-cultural, engineering and transportation infrastructures, the increase of the efficiency of the functions of the local self-government authorities in urban development.

The formation of the base for the spatial planning background papers is the main prerequisite, which, indeed, should be assessed as a basis and guarantee for the implementation of the spatial development programs and the management functions of any newly independent state. Under the availability of a number of important characteristics specific to Armenia and under their comparison, the critical importance of drawing the planning documents becomes more explicit:

- Most of the urban settlement areas in Armenia are characterized not only by their absolute altitude, but also by the segregated feature of the landscape, disintegration, their location in narrow river valleys, the under-developed communication and transportation networks, and engineering infrastructures. Hence, the issues of urban planning also gain major importance while specific aspects considering resource potential and reasonable utilization must be taken into account;
- At the same time, the territory of Armenia, while seismically endangered, is characterized also by the wide availability of externally born geological processes like landslides, collapses,

- floods, water logging and etc. They are causing huge damage to the economy and the environment of urban areas, putting the human safety at risk;
- Armenia, while being a country with exceptionally rich cultural and natural heritage, should take necessary measures to maintain those values, as well as to apply resources that are contributing to the betterment of socio-economic conditions, development of the economic activity, where creation of a new employment market is one of keys to success;
 - Armenia's unique natural heritage represents the greatest interest in terms of natural complexes representing etalon and scientific value. That is why the ideas and targets of the European Landscape Convention are as important and natural for Armenia as a strategy ensuring the sustainable development based on the parity and harmony between the interdependent needs of society, economic activity and environment;
 - A critical role in the sustainable development policy of the economy plays the tourism, which is reflected in the process of the solution of the social problems, increase of the living standards of the population, the delivery of the health and other services, information dissemination, conservation of the natural, historical and cultural potential, strengthening of the relations between the various countries and peoples.

Which are those main problems, the solution of which is a priority for the achievement of the primary objective in spatial development?

- The whole complex of sustainable development problems should be considered under the light of the spatial planning which needs to be among the priorities of national development agenda. The reassessment and evaluation of the communities and settlements, assurance of active public participation in elaboration of these strategies, and interests of communities should be always on top of agenda and should be implemented in conformity with principles stipulated by laws under the broad involvement of the public opinion;
- To reconsider the large urban clusters for the purpose of the proportionate resettlement of the territory of Armenia and to create favorable conditions for decentralization. In this regard, it is necessary to bring the main problems of the Yerevan city agglomeration into the centre of special discussions and drafting;
- Given the requirements for the proportionate organization of the territory of the republic, it is necessary to avoid any

- urbanizations and overloading, and to run a policy on the intensive redevelopment of small and medium cities, on exclusively those areas which are appropriate in terms of seismic reliability and not intended for agricultural activities;
- To make the issues of the harmonious development of the settlements as a basis for the government policy on urban development, while promoting the capital investment target areas for the benefit of the common interests of society, consolidating and encouraging the private initiative, especially in the poorly developed areas;
 - To emphasize the priorities of the harmonious complementary development of the urban and metropolitan areas, rural and urban settlements taking into account the circumstances and impacts of the changes in the natural and cultural landscapes;
 - To further promote the process of the integrated urban-ecological spatial planning in the Republic of Armenia, especially in the areas that are valuable in environmental aspects and are vulnerable in terms of eco-systems;
 - To consider as one of the most critical directions, the rehabilitation of the architectural and natural heritage, the management of historical cities and the development of institutional capacities contributing to the conservation of the exceptionally rich cultural heritage of the Armenian nation, and the orientation of those values to the increase of the betterment of the people, development of the economic activities and the creation of new jobs;
 - It is necessary that in the process of the review of the community master plans and the drawing of the new ones, one could achieve relatively acceptable and precise solutions through the intensive utilization of the areas, conservation of the landscapes, historical and cultural heritage and application of the environmental measures. It is necessary to set up an environment, which is conducive for living and working through the zoning of the areas, re-construction of the existing neighborhoods;
 - To consider the development process of the tourism, leisure and health resort complex in the country as one of the priorities in the spatial planning, which should be targeted at the sustainable use of the recreation resources, the assessment of the cultural, natural and climate characteristics and opportunities and their compliance to international standards;
 - To consider as a key issue in the process of the redevelopment of the rural settlements, to attain the objective of increasing the level of the rural population's social, household and service

delivery and other infrastructures to the currently applicable standards for the purpose of ensuring the benevolence of the population and preventing the migration processes;

- To implement the system of the industrial and production facilities, to carry out the redevelopment of the formerly built industrial hubs only after the multilateral and coordinated technical-economic justifications, concurring them with the main planning principles to avoid any chaotic relocations and undesired developments;
- For the purpose of the efficient implementation of the spatial development it is necessary to carry out an assessment and analysis of the existing legal framework, to improve the legal framework and the institutional set up of the sector based on the study of the international experience, to develop measures targeted at the optimization of the management system of the sector;
- To improve the monitoring and supervision over the implementation of the urban development activities, to introduce efficient mechanisms for the establishment and replenishment of the data bank;
- To ensure the streamlining and transparency of the urban development procedures with the condition of unreserved execution of the requirements stipulated by those urban development plans and zoning documents that are approved in the manner defined;
- To put a particular emphasis on the human safety issues during the redevelopment and reconstruction activities, in order to exclude, to the feasible extent, the risks incurring from the potential floods, landslides, fires, and earthquakes.

Underscoring the development of the national and regional documents on the top of the hierarchy of the spatial planning agenda, I would like to reiterate the documents approved by the Government of Armenia during the recent years: "RoA Master Plan on Resettlement" (national level), "Spatial Plan for the Watershed of Lake Sevan" and "Zoning documents for Areas in the Watershed of Lake Sevan for Priority Redevelopment " (regional level).

It is necessary to underline the need for the drawing of the community-based or local level planning documents, the availability of which, in addition to the above mentioned issues, will greatly contribute to the establishment of the institute of the local self government, since according to the legislation of the Republic of Armenia, all the functions of the regulation of the urban

development activities shall be carried out by the community leaderships.

The development of the local spatial planning documents, i.e. the elaboration of the master plans and zoning documents, while being considered as a mandatory responsibility empowered to the community by law, under the lack of the adequate local self-government institute and the absence of the necessary financial resources, has become an objective that is hard to attain - particularly, when one can observe in a number of communities unregulated redevelopment practices going on, which is putting the universally known objective for setting up a favorable and harmonious environment in the settlements, at risk.

The overwhelming majority of the Armenia's communities, in terms of the drawing or review of the master plans badly need upgrading, under the lack of which the functions of undertaking urban development activities, in essence, becomes more complicated.

The lack of the local or community-based spatial planning documents is creating a fertile ground for making subjective decisions, which is full of undesirable consequences, including also the hindrance of the investment making processes in the area of urban development.

In the communities, from the perspective of the investment attraction, as a priority objective, first and foremost, is the drafting and approval of the respective local level planning documents, as a "constitution" specific for the spatial development of the community.

On the basis of the community based master plans and zoning documents, the regulation and streamlining of the functions in the urban development sector would be carried out, targeted at the decrease of the level of bureaucratic willfulness and all types of corruption deriving thereof.

As mentioned, the drafting of the community level spatial plans is viewed as a mandatory authority of the community leadership. However, taking into consideration the shortage of the community budgets, the state budget of the Republic of Armenia has financed more than 30 community's Master Plans during recent three years, ensuring the full participation of the local self government bodies, as well as the proactive civil participation in all the phases of the work. The master plan of Yerevan was recently approved by the Government.

It is particularly necessary to underscore the importance of adopting documents for the communities from the perspective of establishment of the basic democratic principles and the fundamental human rights values in the country. Within the scopes of drawing the planning documents for the communities, an immediate and universally recognized primary significance carries the consideration given to the

wide civil participation and its collective opinion. The title "People's Participation in the Decision-Making" plays a dominant role in the procedures on the adoption of such documents, starting from the drawing of the drafting tasks ending with the approval of the plan.

At the end, I would like to state a quote from the "Ljubljana Declaration on the Territorial Dimension of Sustainable Development" adopted by the Ministers responsible for Regional Planning (CEMAT) in the member states of the Council of Europe: "The Territory is a complex system, comprising not only urbanised, rural and other spaces, e.g. industrial land, but nature as a whole and the environment surrounding mankind. It is the bearing ground and indispensable framework of human dwelling and activity, and therefore the basis of sustainable development."