

NATIONS UNIES

ОБЪЕДИНЕННЫЕ НАЦИИ

UNITED NATIONS

**COMMISSION ECONOMIQUE
POUR L'EUROPE**

**ЕВРОПЕЙСКАЯ ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКАЯ
КОМИССИЯ**

**ECONOMIC COMMISSION
FOR EUROPE**

SEMINAIRE

СЕМИНАР

SEMINAR

COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND
LAND MANAGEMENT



Distr.
GENERAL

Tenth Conference on Urban
and Regional Research

ECE/HBP/SEM.54/4
27 July 2006

Bratislava (Slovakia), 22-23 May 2006

Original: ENGLISH

**REPORT ON THE TENTH CONFERENCE ON URBAN AND REGIONAL RESEARCH
“Sharing Responsibility for Our Region:
Redefining the Public Interest for Territorial Development”***

Introduction

1. The Tenth Conference on Urban and Regional Research took place in Bratislava (Slovakia) on 22–23 May 2006 at the invitation of the Government of Slovakia. The conference was organized jointly with the Council of Europe’s European Conference of Ministers responsible for Regional Planning (CEMAT). It was preceded by a technical visit to the cities of Pezinok, Modra and Trnava on 21 May.
2. Representatives of the following countries took part in the conference: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, France, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and Ukraine.
3. The conference was attended also by a representative of the Council of Europe, a number of independent researchers, and representatives of the Housing and Urban Management Advisory Network (HUMAN) and of the following international non-governmental organizations: International Society of City and Regional Planners (ISOCARP), the international association Rurality-Environment-Development and the Regional Environmental Centre (REC) for Central and Eastern Europe.
4. The conference was opened by Mr. Stefan Kužma, Slovakia’s Secretary of State for Construction and Regional Development. In his welcoming address he stressed the importance of spatial planning policies and particularly strategies that promote polycentric development of

* This document was submitted on the above date because of processing delays.
GE.06-

Slovakia to achieve sustainable development goals such as balanced economic development of settlements, including rural areas; preserving natural resources and cultural heritage; and promoting social integration and cohesion.

5. Mr. Vitor Campos, Director General of the Directorate General for Spatial Planning and Urban Development, on behalf of the Secretary of State for Spatial Planning and Urban Affairs, Portugal, and of the Presidency of CEMAT, expressed satisfaction that the conference was being held in collaboration with UNECE. He viewed the conference as an opportunity in efforts to establish a better common understanding among member countries of CEMAT and UNECE of shared goals of territorial cohesion and sustainable urban communities.

6. Ms. Christina von Schweinichen, Deputy Director of the UNECE Environment, Housing and Land Management Division, expressed appreciation for CEMAT's collaboration in providing substantive input in preparation for the conference. She informed participants that the outcome of the conference would feed into the programme of the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management on improving urban environmental performance when elaborating guidelines on spatial planning.

7. Mr. Peter Benuska (Slovakia) was elected Chairperson and Ms. Maria-Jose Festas (Portugal) was elected Vice-Chairperson.

8. As a basis for discussion, the conference had before it discussion papers prepared by the Rapporteurs. Furthermore, country representatives and experts had prepared response papers on issues which dealt with questions related to themes of the conference. Response papers were received from Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Croatia, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, the Republic of Moldova, Slovakia and Turkey, as well as from independent researchers and Rurality-Environment-Development. The Rapporteurs were invited to introduce the discussions on their respective themes based on their introductory papers:

Topic I: The city as a living environment and driving force for development; Rapporteurs: Mr. Sotir Dhamo (Albania), Mr. Slawomir Gzell (Poland) and Mr. Dusan Kostovsky (Slovakia).

Topic II: How can polycentric territorial development improve functional integration? Rapporteurs: Mr. Karel Maier (Czech Republic), Mr. Joao Mourato (Portugal) and Ms. Judith Ryser (United Kingdom).

9. In addition to this material, participants had an opportunity during the technical visit to become acquainted with polycentric developments in the most urbanized areas in Slovakia between Bratislava and Trnava and adjacent smaller towns like Pezinok and Modra. Participants heard about the challenges and opportunities these smaller towns face owing to polycentric development as well as their proximity to the capital city of Bratislava. Their main function as recreation centres with growing cultural and gastronomic offerings, the latter based on growing wine production, is now widely recognized. They are also becoming residential areas for families employed in Bratislava. In Trnava the study tour also looked at the impact on spatial development plans of a major investment (in a plant) by a car manufacturer. Potential future benefits and challenges were discussed, as well as their potential economic and social impacts.

THEME I: THE CITY AS A LIVING ENVIRONMENT AND A DRIVING FORCE FOR DEVELOPMENT

A. GENERAL TRENDS

10. Cities in the UNECE region are facing challenges which are specific to each country; however, there are common trends, which are influenced by the last three decades of neoliberal approaches. These include a reduced role for government combined with fewer rules and regulations for private-sector activities in the market. This approach has affected the physical and spatial metamorphosis of cities to various degrees; some cities declined despite their historic value, while others have prospered.

11. Since the Second World War, governments in the UNECE region have been involved in various forms of housing delivery and urban planning, either through statutory planning instruments or subsidies taking up most responsibilities in the sector. Nowadays, the effects of the minimalist role of the state in housing and urban planning, which is predominant in most countries, are also visible in the former socialist countries.

12. The neoliberal approach has influenced the planning and management tools. Policies moved towards releasing “energies” of the private sector through enabling strategies. However, difficult questions arise as to who really benefits from these strategies, without taking into account equity and sustainability goals. The “rolling back” of the state in the neoliberal economic agenda has led to a physical and social polarization and/or fragmentation of the cities. This is evident not only in transitional countries but also in the most advanced economies.

13. Related to countries in transition, significant trends influencing the national economies as well as the economic conditions of individual inhabitants, their life styles, preferences and the like had major impacts on the social and urban pattern of cities.

14. Following are some changes that have seriously affected cities’ development:

(a) The closure of unprofitable plants was catastrophic for cities which relied totally on those industries, as inhabitants started to abandon cities and towns, or stayed behind without any chances of employment.

(b) The privatization of productive plants created a need for new skills and newly trained and educated staff, provoking a change in the social structure and wealth of society. On the other hand, poverty started to increase in absolute and relative figures, and often a small group of individuals become rich.

(c) Land privatization and restitution became the most important “planning instrument”, resulting in mass distribution of lands by municipalities. This is due to the fact that land property was restituted without limitations or restrictions on its use. Cities became denser, but without long-term plans or short-term control.

15. Due to political or economic decisions, some cities started to lose attractiveness and therefore population. These effects were more visible in the new towns and cities dependent on one industry. Even some cities with a longer history were, due to their geographical location, left

in the periphery of development. On the other hand, cities with strategic locations became points of attraction, whether because of their tourist potential, or because they were close to main roads, borders or harbours, or because they were capital cities or engaged in some specific economic activity.

16. The urban sphere also suffered from *physical problems*, such as uncontrolled spreading of human activities or urban sprawl, insufficient physical infrastructure, decayed housing stock, changing transport patterns, waste management, etc., *environmental problems*, such as disappearing of natural areas and biodiversity, *socio-economic ones*, such as lack of job opportunities, unemployment and the resulting deepening social inequality, increased criminality; weakening of social contacts, limited societal services related to areas as education, health, and cultural activities resulting in problematic disparities in the socio-economic structure of the population.

B. NEW PLANNING – DIFFERENT APPROACHES

Interrelationship between the city and its surroundings

17. When considering the sustainability of city systems, focus should be put on the interrelationship between a city, its environment and the surroundings. The perception of city development in close connection with overall human problems brings new challenges inherent to all those interrelationships.

18. During the discussion a clear differentiation of approaches were highlighted among countries. The concept of network building and attributing functions to each city in a network drew particular attention of participants.

19. These networks are defined as entities of larger and smaller cities including the adjacent land in between them. Cities and centres comprising such networks complement and reinforce each other strengths, so that they have more to offer together rather than they would as individual cities. The partnerships between the local and regional governments within the networks are seen as voluntary, flexible and pragmatic. National government expects municipalities to draw up agreements on how to shape the concentration policy in consultation with provinces and urban regions. Within each of these urban networks the national government designates a number of areas where urbanization will be concentrated.

20. In countries in transition, efforts seem to concentrate on legislation, planning and effective mechanisms to implement planning documents, as it was clearly spelled out in most of the response papers. However, new metropolitan poles are emerging in these countries. Even though they are not officially recognized as such by legislation – an issue stressed by most participating countries – they are playing a very important role in changing the system, i.e. their development brings changes not only within their own limits but also influences the system of surrounding settlements as part of a larger network. Participants of the conference discussed the important role that cities could play in connection with the regional, national, and international systems. In order to facilitate their role, institutional and governmental structures should be in place.

Governance

21. Over the past two decades, the general focus of international institutions and national governments regarding urban strategies has shifted from a concern within the spatial and physical dimensions towards a growing importance of governance and institutional aspects.
22. The concept of governance re-emerged with new connotations as it was reassessed in a context characterized by significant transformations, including the dominance of neoliberal policies, the withdrawal of the welfare state, economic globalization and the emergence of multinational corporations as agents with supranational powers.
23. More involvement of the government through legislation, cross-sectoral cooperation and long term planning is required in order to guarantee the redistribution of public investments, to balance the regional disparities and physical and social polarization.
24. A “society-centered” approach primarily concerned with the role of civil society in the governance process has emerged in many countries of the region. For a participatory planning and flexible governance, it is also indispensable to create an integrated organizational and institutional structure dealing with all stages of urban planning from the preparation to the implementation. In other words, there is a need for a structure, a mechanism that guarantees the involvement of all stakeholders.
25. Decentralization is another trend in the UNECE region: in countries in transition, municipalities used to be tightly led in their development, have now won a greater autonomy since the decentralization of political powers. But their financial means are often too small to give them enough real power. They have been obliged to make alliances at the local level and to create new entities composed of several municipalities. This situation is also reflected in the lack of strategic documents and planning mechanisms needed to guide local development, such as city development strategies, general urban plans, master plans and so on.

C. CITIES AS A DRIVING FORCE FOR DEVELOPMENT

26. Cities are generally considered as driving force for political and economic integration in the process of globalization, “nodes” for international coordination and for servicing of dynamic economies.
27. Cultural and natural attributes of cities increase their attractiveness by enhancing public realm, urban design and regeneration, new approach to governance, gearing efforts to stem and control urban sprawl, and/or polycentric and network-based development of the cities are particular gears of development.
28. Participants of the conference reiterated some of the key concepts related to the driving forces influencing urban planning and spatial development such as the city image including urban identity, the quality of environment, energy use and social trends such as labour costs, levels of education, safe and healthy community life, human resources, gender and generation cohesion which influence the growth and decline of the cities and their important role in the economy.

29. However, there were no answers to the basic question highlighted in the topic “How to find a balance between economically based urban development and healthy living conditions?”. This area will need more research on current attempts to implement such policies. The UNECE Strategy for a Sustainable Quality of Life in Human Settlements in the Twenty-first Century is a useful framework to that end.

30. Some countries mentioned the importance of data collection and the establishment of a set of indicators to evaluate current trends and monitor change. The sustainable development approach could be based on identification of concrete targets. Local authorities should incorporate the results of the analyses resulting from evaluation through urban sustainability indicators in the strategic development plans and programmes. Public involvement through opinion polls or other more creative means of participation is also important during assessment and policy elaboration.

31. Other countries expressed the need to emphasize human safety issues during redevelopment and reconstruction activities, in order to minimize risks from potential floods, landslides, fires and earthquakes.

Urban design

32. To make cities liveable, several strategies came up during the discussion, mainly relating to urban design. However, when designing a complex entity such as a city, seeking to integrate parts thereof or carrying out urban renewal programmes, it is important to consider both physical and non-physical aspects of the structure of urban networks.

33. Urban design should be conceived not only as small-scale design, but also as a new spatial order for larger portions of a city and where spatial and functional coordination takes place between elements which are joined up into a planned and later implemented entity.

34. The conference largely focused on urban sprawl and its dimensions. Sprawl is not only about suburbanization and redistribution of the population, but it is closely related to the movement patterns (transportation) and job opportunities. This stresses again the importance to consider equally the physical and social dimensions of planning, avoiding segregation and its negative repercussions.

THEME II: HOW CAN POLYCENTRIC TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT IMPROVE FUNCTIONAL INTEGRATION?

A. THE POLYCENTRIC CONCEPT

35. The concept of polycentric urban development is not new, but its recent introduction to spatial policy has given it new meaning. The conference findings show that new definitions and understanding of the concept of polycentricity are far from clear or consensual. This acknowledged that the meaning of polycentricity is context-dependent (e.g. different territorial and demographic characteristics of countries; their urban development patterns, institutional organization, etc.). Polycentricity is mainly applied to the meso-level of urban agglomeration focusing on intra-urban patterns. It is also used at the macro-level at the interurban scale. At the

mega-level at the intra-European scale, polycentricity is used in policies to reconcile the conflicting aims of competitive economy and socio-spatial cohesion.

36. Conference participants noted that: (a) polycentricity offers the possibility of combining the effect of cities and urban areas in supporting competition, innovation and growth with a more balanced model of spatial development; (b) polycentricity can improve cooperation, coordination and complementarity and reduce inappropriate competition between cities; and (c) it can help to create synergies by strengthening networks and cooperation between cities and their hinterland, while being able to participate in the provision of the functional complexity of urban systems.

37. Recent research suggested that polycentric national urban systems do not necessarily reduce regional disparities. Conversely, in certain circumstances more monocentric urban systems are characterized by less regional disparities. This holds particularly for the former EU-15 countries. However, in some cases, monocentric development has produced more negative impacts than positive ones. More research analysing these scenarios should be undertaken the impact of different approaches.

Pan-European scale

38. Polycentricity tackles the problem of uneven access to services for all citizens while reducing the diseconomy of spatial disparities. Despite policy efforts at the highest European level, the “Pentagon” (the area encompassing London, Paris, the Randstad, Brussels and Western Germany down to Milan with the greatest concentration of innovative and competitive production and services) prevails, not least because it alone is considered capable of competing in the global economy.

39. Polycentricity figures widely in supra-national policies. Spatial development requires interdisciplinary integration, cooperation between the relevant political bodies and authorities, and wider participation. Polycentricity may favour the developed parts of Europe, and the “core” can offer better potentials for spatial integration. In some countries, national capitals may not evolve as equal partners even in the long run, although the market privileges them against their own national hinterlands.

40. Diverse scenarios imply different costs and benefits, social, economic and environmental consequences. In practice, different scenarios may suit particular regions. Many factors influence the real shape of polycentricity, like prices of energy, political stability, etc. Therefore it is not only the decision made by governments that are shaping polycentricity. However, impacts of government policies should be looked at in more depth.

National level

41. The inertia of physical and economic structures, institutional set-up and cultural behavioural patterns will continue to play an important role in the polycentric approach. The diversity of national and regional settlement patterns can be evaluated as part of national or regional identity, and a sort of common pan-European heritage. Besides national capitals being unrivalled prime centres, a network of secondary centres usually exists, with prospects of strengthening competitiveness.

42. The level and nature of polycentrism vary within the UNECE region. Countries of the EU-15 introduced spatial policies related to core urban areas and along major transport axes. Urban networks with small and medium size cities reinforcing each other are expected to optimize the use of scarce spaces and to form a new tier of governance by means of voluntary partnerships with central government designating where further urbanization should concentrate.

43. The effort to gear cities in Southern and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia towards a European polycentric network may have detrimental effects on the human and economic potential of the rest of these countries, unless major infrastructure investments of European interest are complemented by adequate improvements in network infrastructures at a national and regional scale.

Regional and local level

44. Polycentric urban regions are most widespread in North-Western Europe. In more remote areas, the pattern of dominating centres and rural hinterlands is more frequent. In many cases, regions are weak when faced with increased mobility of people, capital and economic activities, especially where there is a lack of regional identity. European polycentric policy which might create an illusion of balanced development, whilst presiding over, or even exacerbating, polarization on a more localized scale may be avoided when more is known of the spatial trends and policies at lower levels.

45. The gap gets wider between rural territories which benefit from urban influence through geographical proximity or transport links and those without. The latter lack accessibility, but the benefits from introducing supra-regional transport infrastructure in peripheral areas may pass them by. An alternative model of development is an integrated multipolar rural territory which encompasses small towns and the hinterland.

B. IMPLEMENTING POLYCENTRIC DEVELOPMENT

46. There is considerable territorial as well as social diversity in the UNECE region. The question is how to benefit from existing diversity for the economic and social well being of societies in the region. The free movements facilitated by the European Union have no doubt contributed to some convergence. However, globalization and worldwide mobility have brought about new diversity with increased ethnic, racial, religious and class divides. They have given rise to incompatibilities, friction, rivalries and even open conflicts. They provoked defensive responses expressed in gated communities, no-go areas as well as the temptation of fortress Europe. It could thus be argued that polycentricity embedded in cooperation and solidarity does not come naturally to human societies. Concerted human action is required to implement polycentricity. What research attempts to assist is how to get from the is-state to the desired state expected from polycentricity.

47. The EU has adopted economic measures, in particular capital investment into transportation infrastructure, to create greater territorial balance and social inclusion. Research shows that these measures can have perverse effects – for example, bypass peripheral areas instead of incorporating them into a balanced territorial economy. Similarly, expanding the road network in the Dutch Randstad, the original model of polycentricity, is increasing congestion. It thus reduces both accessibility for all and equal opportunities, two stated aims of polycentricity.

48. Economic efficiency is often detrimental to socio-spatial equity. In the case of high-quality infrastructures, gaps emerge between running and maintenance costs and their limited usage, especially in less attractive territories with population and economic decline. It is difficult for countries in transition to find *post hoc* solutions for the contradictions of their uncontrolled spatial development.

49. Other than economic and physical measures are needed to fulfil the objectives of polycentricity. Changes in human behaviour and attitudes are required, such as a change from competitive ethos to a new humanism to reduce polarization and achieve greater integration.

50. At the very least it has a number of prerequisites. Implementing polycentricity depends on people who are willing to pool and share their “common wealth” and build institutions which facilitate the development of a more equitable society. They need the cooperation of the business community as well as other interest groups.

Institutional prerequisites

51. Governance is considered the key to implementing polycentricity. “Good governance” is meant to encompass the rule of law, accountability, a sense of co-responsibility and transparency, and consensus building, inclusiveness, responsiveness and public participation. Governance alone does not suffice, though, and other tools of implementation are required, such as organizational capacity, institutional innovation and partnerships to overcome contradictions between competitiveness and cooperation, complementarity and coordination.

52. Polycentricity requires different administrative and organizational structures with decision-making legitimacy. Even in the context of ongoing deregulation and privatization, governments and other public bodies can still influence the decision-making process of the business community. Any governmental decision to actively manage spatial change implies steady and continuous political leadership, long-term cooperation and a shared concept of development.

53. Partnerships are a prevalent form of modern governance. The very concept of partnership has many different interpretations, encompassing different types of partners with varying roles. It is essential to match the appropriate kind of partnership to specific circumstances of place, time and objectives. Where the public sector is being increasingly handled like the private sector, partnerships and outsourcing are gaining in significance. The transformation from hierarchy and tax-based public service provision to entrepreneurial government with a focus on enabling and contractual responsibility has institutional consequences.

54. Partnerships can take many different forms of cooperation and sharing: public-public as well as public-private, private-private and a combination of private, public and voluntary sectors. In order to prevent institutional fragmentation, it is crucial to identify the common interests of key stakeholders in the development of polycentric systems. In return, business, which operates in high-risk economic and social environments, expects public-sector spatial policy to be consistent, comprehensive, stable and transparent at all levels.

55. Networks should be considered as an instrument to facilitate the transition from competition to cooperation. Reciprocal relations of spatial units in existing spatial networks are

based on sharing. Individuals or agents can have more than one identity in a spatial network. Spatial network makes meaningless the concept of boundary. The three cities visited during the study tour illustrated the diversity of partnerships available to planning as a means of translating socio-economic aims into space.

56. The implementation of polycentric networks at the regional and/or local level will demand institutional capacity building in those regions and municipalities which have less developed administrative and cultural traditions in creating partnerships and coalitions. In highly centralized nation states this will constitute an added challenge and emphasize the link between the development of governance mechanisms and polycentric spatial development models.

57. No matter how desirable the aims of polycentricity, its implementation is bound to change power relations. It requires the empowerment of those who are most actively involved in implementation by granting them political will to legitimize their actions to achieve polycentricity. As research has shown, the regional level is best suited to implement polycentricity. The intermediary level of governance between the nation state and the local level needs strengthening. Moreover, the level in charge of implementation should be empowered to raise the necessary means through taxation and charges. The chances are slim of anyone wanting to give up power. In real life, short-term gain eclipses long-term sustainability. A serious change of cultural and behavioural attitudes would be required to implement polycentricity and overcome the paradox between competitiveness and cooperation, complementarity and coordination.

58. Cooperation based on proximity is important, especially for cooperation within a regional and cross-border context. Functional specialization and influence are more decisive aspects when considering options for transnational cooperation. Complementarity is a driving force of polycentricity. Whether complementarity can be achieved in a climate of short-term gains remains to be demonstrated.

59. Polycentricity requires multiple governmental units to cope with it. Thus, intergovernmental coordination and partnership – horizontal as well as vertical – seems to be necessary but the examples even from countries that have gone a long way with polycentricity (Netherlands) have difficulties in coordination and cooperation at the local level. It was clear that size matters – not only that of the spatial levels of polycentricity but also the size of the units in which the processes take place.

60. Polycentric strategies should be compatible with the sustainability concept. Incremental planning from small starts to more complex projects including institutional development could assist implementation. The examples of expected or estimated effects of polycentricity on sustainable development vary. It can provide socially sustainable access to urban infrastructures and services. At the local level (Functional Urban Area) it can increase social segregation through socially unsustainable residential suburbanization and sprawl. It can also help to get new economically sustainable investment and jobs to remote areas.

61. Polycentric development is a process complementary to centralization. Both processes can have positive and negative effects on society, economy and environment. It is a matter of political processes to agree on objectives and priorities, and the role of governments to develop

policies to enhance positive and minimize negative aspects of the process. Thus the states and other levels of governments have their roles to play in polycentric development.

C. KEY POLICY ISSUES

62. The response papers and the conference discussions raised a number of policy issues. Research presented at the conference captured them either as analysis of spatial and socio-economic change and their relevance to polycentricity, or as policy reactions to ongoing urban developments and how they are being handled.

Analytical research

63. Not clearly defined, polycentricity embodies different conceptual elements and may have acted as an umbrella for different conceptual debates. Nevertheless, conference participants managed to reach consensus on the fact that some sort of polycentric development is taking place. Polycentricity itself is directly linked to consensus building, which is embedded in its aims.

64. The visibility of polycentric development initiatives varies. Transport-related projects seem to be the most prominent. Scale also plays a key role in terms of visibility. Maps showed polycentric developments throughout Europe but some examples were raised of “forgotten” polycentric regions (e.g. the Veneto region in Italy). Additionally, cross-border cooperation was presented as an implementation tool of polycentric development. Yet the maps included in the vast majority of presentations failed to present any development initiatives beyond country borders.

65. Research on polycentricity is evolving steadily. A number of comprehensive studies (e.g. ESPON) are under way to diagnose ongoing development trends.

Policy and implementation research

66. Here researchers presented their findings on responses to urban development processes and political preparedness to deal with them. There was no consensus on how to best reach the goal of polycentric development. There was no clear evidence on whether top-down or bottom-up approaches are better. There may not be a single right way to address this issue. It was suggested that rural areas could be a good laboratory for a better understanding of such interaction.

67. Working towards polycentric development implies a premium on enhanced institutional capacity. Institutional and organizational capacity-building is recognized to be a slow and incremental process. The regional scale was the example used to illustrate this point. Further research which would collate, synthesize and disseminate available information about ongoing capacity-building processes could initiate the development of institutional innovation methodologies, particularly on the role of regional development agencies. Research could show how such institutions could go beyond a solely bureaucratic role and adopt an enabling, mediating stance. Another research issue was the extent to which polycentric development was having an effect on national administrative structures.

68. Functional complementarity was observed as the cornerstone of sustainable polycentric areas and should be taken into consideration in future policy development.

69. There was common agreement that there are no one-size-fits-all development solutions. Local contexts matter and should be given top importance in any spatial development strategy. Research should take diversity of local contexts into consideration. There was an interesting variety of approaches to territorial identity. Some presentations referred to the difficulty of Xcreating new territorial identities. Others alluded to strengthening existing territory “personalities” as an essential motor of development.

70. There was no clear agreement on the possibility of separating the urban from the rural.

71. Economic development was addressed in the majority of presentations. Yet several questions remain unanswered. For instance, who leads economic “development”? Are the market forces the engines and the public sector the follower or the opposite, or is no unique pattern identifiable?

72. More generally, there was a call for research which would provide less arguable outcomes. Information dissemination and communication is understood to be of great importance in this context and should not be overlooked.

73. Some issues raised in the initial conference discussion paper remained unaddressed. No presentation proposed alternative development perspectives. The role of governments in implementing polycentric development strategies was somehow set aside. So was the debate concerning the political issues that may arise from the territorial administrative changes this development model seems to catalyse. Lastly, there was no clarification of the link between polycentric development and social - spatial cohesion.

74. The debate and response papers and the UNECE conference on “Sharing Responsibility for Our Region” reconfirmed that urban polycentricity 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 may create synergy by fostering networks of cooperation and pooling complementary functions even across hierarchic levels and discontinuous space. However, polycentricity should not be seen as a panacea for solving problems generated by lack of territorial and social cohesion and growing territorial and economic disparity. Alternative concepts of redressing spatial disparities and extracting value from existing and potential urban assets are worth exploring. Reappraising perceptions of market forces and developing new attitudes toward territorial governance and management of urban change could be promising initiatives.