

UCTCEA Chamber of Architects National Physical Plan Draft Document and Its Implications

The Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities, adopted by the ministries responsible for urban development on 24 May 2007, emphasizes the importance of the built environment and calls for the adoption of an integrated urban development approach based on cooperation among various administrative and political stakeholders, as well as actors from both the public and private sectors. This approach encompasses the economic, social, ecological, and cultural characteristics of cities and urban areas.

Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities, 2007.

Pursuant to Planning Law No. 55/89, which came into force in 1989, the National Physical Plan (NPP), which was legally required to be completed within two years, was prepared after a delay of 21 years over a period of 31 months and was opened for public discussion in accordance with Article 5(1) of Planning Law No. 55/89 in order to obtain the views and recommendations of Chambers, Professional Institutions, and Organizations.

During the planning process, the lack of formalized written policies in many sectors and the absence of the five-year Development Plans that had long been expected from the State Planning Organization (SPO) were identified as the most significant constraints in terms of input. It is further explained that inter-institutional working groups were established with the participation of the relevant authorities, that new policies were developed in sectors lacking written policies, and that efforts were made to harmonize existing policies with the objectives of the National Physical Plan. Information is provided regarding the vision and objectives of the Plan, which is supported by a highly comprehensive implementation and monitoring process.

The fact that the National Physical Plan, whose absence has been felt in many respects for years, has finally been transformed into a draft document open to discussion through this process is a positive development. We congratulate everyone who contributed to the preparation of this Plan, consisting of approximately 700 pages and dozens of maps, which was completed with great dedication over a period of 31 months. The emergence of a young and dynamic planning team through the National Physical Plan process is an important achievement for the planning culture of the country. Ensuring that this team is equipped with better data and information through a participatory planning structure, in which all stakeholders are involved as active actors in the process, is crucial both for fostering ownership of planning processes and for developing healthier visions and development strategies.

In the text presented to us during the Spatial Planning Policy Workshop—the only stakeholder engagement event organized by the planning team throughout the 31-month process—the following statement was included:

“A planning approach that respects the planning system, is based on partnership and shared responsibility, is open to participatory negotiation, incorporates all segments of

society (all stakeholders) into every stage of the planning process, and is transparent and accountable.”

However, it has been observed that throughout the process this statement remained merely an aspiration. The planning authority proceeded independently with its own process, finalized the draft National Physical Plan, and subsequently presented it to civil society for information.

Unfortunately, the principles of transparency, collaboration, and shared governance were largely overlooked during the preparation of the Draft National Physical Plan. The principle of “3.2.1.3 Shared Responsibility and Collaborative Governance”, set out under Section “3.2 Planning and Planning Principles”, was not effectively implemented in practice.

Considering the challenges encountered throughout the planning process, concerns that the involvement of multiple stakeholders could make the process more complex may have led to the participatory and collaborative governance principles being disregarded for reasons perceived as practical at the outset. It is also possible that political and economic power structures influenced the process in order to more easily manipulate a planning framework that lacked transparency. In either case, planning processes that do not incorporate participation and partnership ultimately risk producing plans that remain unsupported and without ownership.

As previously emphasized, the long-awaited National Physical Plan cannot afford to remain unsupported. A plan intended to establish a nationwide vision, objectives, and goals, while guiding the spatial development of society and the evolving social structure over time, must be shared, discussed, and enriched through the contributions of relevant stakeholders across the country. Otherwise, it will be inevitable to remain trapped at a point of stagnation where significant conceptual divergences persist on fundamental issues and where the vision, objectives, and goals fail to converge within the draft document, as is currently the case.

Different actors may hold differing perspectives regarding spatial policies and development strategies. However, these diverse viewpoints can only be transformed into a comprehensive and integrated societal consensus through their active participation in and contribution to the planning process.

As the UCTCEA Chamber of Architects, we hereby present a framework outlining our assumptions and perspectives on Strategic Spatial Development, with the aim of contributing to the formulation of a National Planning vision and approach that emerges through a genuinely participatory process.

“A Northern Cyprus that develops through conservation, grows through production, integrates with the world, embraces innovation, and is a place where people are happy to live and work.”

Draft National Physical Plan of the TRNC, 2012

A Development Model Focused on Improving Quality of Life Rather Than Economic Growth

Development parameters should be measured not through growth indices but through indicators of quality of life. Neo-liberal development strategies based primarily on economic growth often fail to enhance quality of life and may ultimately lead to the depletion of resources and the surpassing of ecological thresholds. As demonstrated by contemporary examples such as the city of Detroit in the United States, such approaches can result in vast, lifeless urban voids.

As part of the National Physical Plan's (NPP) slogan, the term "development through conservation" is proposed. A precautionary planning approach aimed at protecting ecological, historical, and cultural assets is presented in the draft plan as a key supporting principle. However, according to the Plan, conservation practices are intended to be placed under the exclusive authority of the planning agency, effectively transforming the planning authority into a design authority.

The proposal to establish a unit within the Town Planning Department that would provide technical support to investors, property owners, and contractors regarding design and construction; carry out development control and inspection functions; offer recommendations on environmentally sustainable design and building operation; and assume similar advisory and regulatory responsibilities, is regarded as an approach that is inconsistent with scientific planning principles. Such a proposal is considered overly centralized, susceptible to political and bureaucratic misuse, and likely to generate more harm than benefit.

Instead, scientific documentation and analysis of existing urban and architectural fabric should be undertaken, typological studies should be developed, and conservation master plans should be prepared. Transparent regional conservation policies should be formulated with the support of universities and relevant stakeholders. Such plans, however, can only be realized through participatory planning processes associated with development plans. At the macro scale of the National Physical Plan, it would be sufficient to define only the fundamental visions and strategic directions.

The UCTCEA Chamber of Architects identifies the preservation of ways of life as one of the principal issues that should be emphasized within the National Physical Plan. Sustainable lifestyles currently exist and continue, particularly in rural areas, as a result of long-established traditions. However, these communities face challenges related to inadequate infrastructure, limited accessibility, and difficulties in bringing local products to market.

In the eastern part of the country, the development areas of Yeni Boğaziçi, İskele, and Karpaz encompass both rural landscapes and coastal tourism activities, while the villages of Büyükkonuk and Dipkarpaz possess significant potential for ecotourism and agrotourism. Similarly, Güzelyurt and Lefke in the west contain numerous rural settlements capable of fulfilling a comparable role. Proposed increases in density, urbanization, and structural expansion in such areas may lead to the loss of productive agricultural lands and ecologically sensitive environments and, most

importantly, to the disappearance of sustainable lifestyles whose value continues to increase and whose loss would be irreversible.

The mass tourism model implemented in the Bafra region represents a neo-liberal instrument of consumption. The expansion of such mass tourism zones places pressure on ecological thresholds and interferes with existing ways of life. There are significant differences between the ecological footprint generated by waste from these facilities and that of sustainable ecological village models. When considering resource management at the island scale, networks of guesthouses and small-scale accommodation facilities promoted through agrotourism and ecotourism would create an active tourism potential in which cultural and historical assets gain value.

Through carefully guided tourism development, it is possible to improve quality of life without fundamentally altering existing lifestyles. Systems in which economic growth and development do not disrupt ecological balances, and where not only physical assets but also ways of life are protected, should form the backbone of the Plan.

Supporting Local Culture and Opening It to International Markets

Encouraging settlements oriented toward agrotourism and ecotourism to “integrate with the world” through participation in international initiatives such as Slow Food, Cittaslow, and similar networks would naturally facilitate a transition from growth-based indicators toward quality-of-life-oriented development parameters. The adoption of policies that support local production as an alternative to mass and globalized food production and consumption would contribute both to the sustainability of local ways of life and to the sharing of these lifestyles with the wider world.

These locally based systems of production and living can be further strengthened through the completion of rural infrastructure deficiencies and by enabling local producers to access international partnerships and markets.

Celebrating Cities and Urbanization

Parallel to a development model that supports local culture in rural areas, efforts should also be made to ensure that existing cities evolve in ways that enhance urban quality of life. Developing strategies that prevent uncontrolled rural development and the infrastructure-deficient expansion of large cities is of critical importance for the healthy growth of our urban settlements.

Rather than creating new urbanization zones and proposing new urban development areas in the rural regions of İskele and Famagusta, as suggested in the Plan, policies should encourage the more compact and efficient development of existing urban patterns. Although certain sections of the National Physical Plan (for example, NPP, Chapter IV, Section 3.1.10 – Fragmented and Dispersed Development Pattern) refer to this issue, the overall framework of the Plan contradicts and effectively undermines these principles.

In Northern Cyprus, the distinction between rural and urban areas is increasingly disappearing. In reality, we are witnessing different manifestations of what has effectively become one large rural landscape.

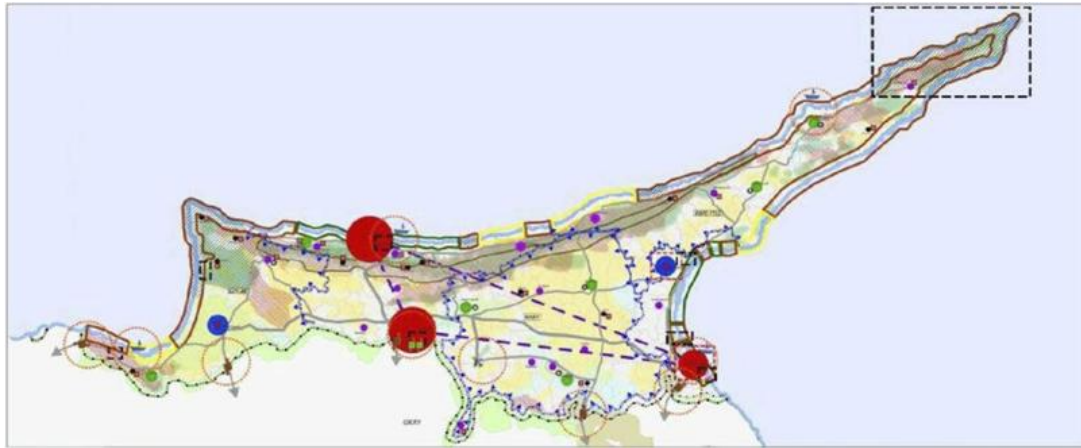
The Draft National Physical Plan also refers to the need to restrain growth in Nicosia and Kyrenia. Within the section on Spatial Strategy and under “Key Spatial Issues and Problems,” it is argued that the dominant roles assumed by Nicosia and Kyrenia, resulting from their larger share of economic development, have created imbalances across the country.

What is missing from this assessment, however, is an explanation of why Nicosia and Kyrenia have assumed these roles. In the case of Nicosia, its position as the capital city is already a clear and defining factor. Kyrenia, on the other hand, has experienced linear and dispersed growth due to its morphological characteristics and the absence of significant coastal development constraints (in contrast to Famagusta). This unrestricted and boundary-less growth—particularly after 2003—has transformed Kyrenia into a major economic actor.

Moreover, the imbalance between the northern and southern parts of Cyprus is a far more striking phenomenon than the economic disparities that exist solely within the north. Consequently, rather than seeking to slow the development of economically dynamic cities such as Nicosia and Kyrenia, it becomes essential to consider how Northern Cyprus can strengthen its competitiveness in relation to the cities located in the southern part of the island.

The experience of German reunification illustrates how regional imbalances can generate significant challenges, with many medium-sized cities facing decline and even the risk of disappearance (see the literature on Shrinking Cities). In a planning document prepared with a target year of 2031, this fundamental issue of competitiveness has not been adequately addressed, nor have meaningful solutions been proposed for this fragile situation.

The innovative transformation of our cities is essential for creating a Northern Cyprus that is more competitive on a global scale, economically resilient, and environmentally sustainable. In short, the central argument of the National Physical Plan regarding the balancing of Nicosia and Kyrenia carries substantial risks for the achievement of the 2031 vision and demonstrates the need for a fundamental reconsideration of the draft plan.



Draft National Physical Plan – Main Spatial Development Strategy Diagram

Walkable, Higher-Density Cities

The cities of Kyrenia and Famagusta continue to expand due to their problematic relationship with the coastline and the persistent desire to remain close to the sea. At the core of this tendency lies the inadequacy of urban amenities and public facilities. Access to the coastline and the interaction between the coast and public spaces are limited to specific localized points, preventing the integrated use of the coastal zone as a whole. These deficiencies in urban amenities encourage residents to move toward the urban periphery, where opportunities for direct contact with the coast are greater. For the sustainable development of both Famagusta and Kyrenia, it is essential to adopt a comprehensive approach to coastal planning and to strengthen urban density by connecting primary settlement areas through an integrated network of urban facilities and public amenities.

Although the factors influencing Nicosia differ in some respects, its pattern of urban development is not substantially different from that of Kyrenia and Famagusta. Nicosia is simultaneously influenced by westward growth pressures originating from the Güzelyurt/Lefke axis and eastward growth pressures originating from the Famagusta/İskele axis. These two growth corridors continuously expand the outer boundaries of the city.

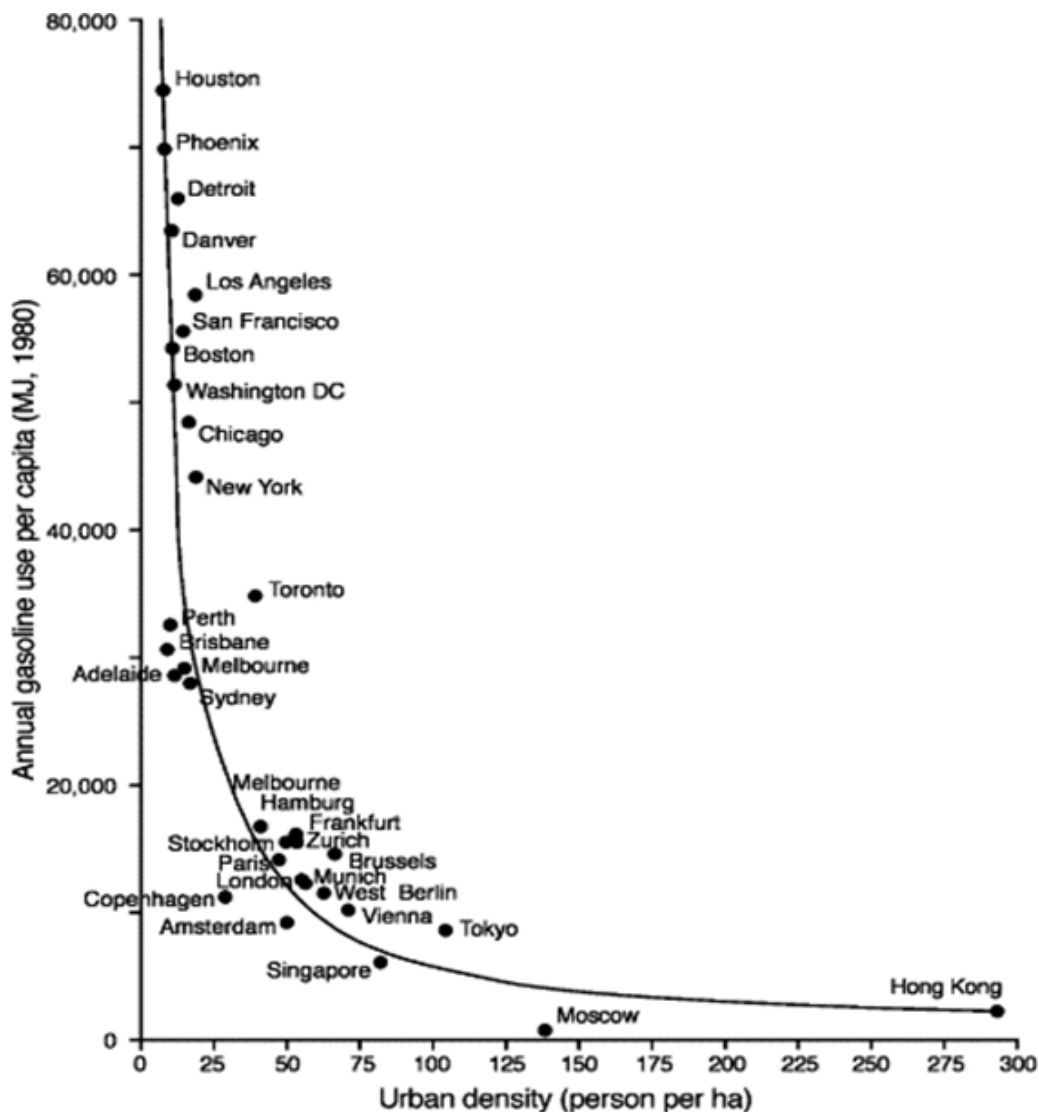
As in the other major cities, this expansion is largely driven by deficiencies in urban amenities and shortcomings in both intercity and intra-city transportation networks. Nicosia has become a city overwhelmingly dependent on private automobile use, lacking viable alternatives such as public transportation, pedestrian mobility, and bicycle infrastructure. Traffic congestion, parking shortages, environmental pollution, and, most importantly, the inefficient consumption of fuel and energy continue to push residents toward the urban fringe.

It has been observed that even discussions regarding the implementation of the Nicosia Development Plan were sufficient to trigger construction activity within designated expansion areas. The resulting increase in automobile dependency has further strained an already inadequate urban infrastructure system. The statement in the Draft Plan's Spatial Strategy, Chapter IV, Section 2.0.1, referring to the "dominant roles created by the intense demand placed on infrastructure,

transportation, and services,” together with the discussion in Current Situation, Chapter II, Section 4.2.6.4, clearly reflects a planning approach that treats urbanization itself as a problematic phenomenon shaping spatial strategies, decisions, and objectives.

While the Draft Plan proposes, under the heading of “Sustainability,” the more efficient use of existing urban facilities and infrastructure and advocates increasing urban densities, other sections simultaneously propose the creation of new settlement areas and the suppression of growth in already established urban centers. These contradictory approaches effectively undermine one another within the Plan.

Contemporary urban planning discourse generally identifies urbanization and compact urban development as essential foundations for sustainable development and efficient resource use. Research has clearly demonstrated that increases in urban density are associated with reductions in per capita energy consumption (Newman, P. & Kenworthy, J., 1989). Therefore, rather than discouraging urban concentration, planning strategies should focus on creating compact, walkable, well-connected, and efficiently serviced cities capable of supporting sustainable development objectives.



The spread of suburban development and the dispersed form of cities encourage automobile dependency; consequently, the cities of the future are increasingly seeking

denser and more creative ways of living together. The walkable city model is one of the most widely accepted approaches and has been successfully tested in cities such as Copenhagen. Walkable cities are structured around a 20-minute walking radius within which a variety of daily needs can be met. Within the framework of a future vision targeting the year 2031, one of our primary objectives should be to create cities that are connected through efficient transportation networks, are walkable, and possess sufficient density to support such an urban structure.

Cities are the centers where diverse economic activities come together to generate a nation's wealth. Rural areas, on the other hand, provide food resources and ecological assets. It may be reasonable to identify the fact that the city of Famagusta lags behind Nicosia and Kyrenia in terms of economic contribution and to seek ways of addressing this imbalance. However, constructing the entire planning framework around this objective is neither a productive assessment for the cities of Nicosia and Kyrenia nor for the national economy. Suppressing the development of these areas, which serve as engines of economic growth, would lead to serious strategic mistakes.

Instead, a coordinated and simultaneous urban development strategy should be pursued, supported by the transformation and improvement of rural infrastructure. A model should be established in which the cities of Nicosia, Kyrenia, and Famagusta develop together and complement one another. Such a model should not involve designating villages and rural settlements as new "urban development areas," as proposed for settlements such as Mutluyaka, which possess rich gastronomic traditions but remain insufficiently supported (see NPP Chapter IV, Article 2.2.4).

Economic systems within cities—including industry, commerce, and universities—should be better integrated into the urban fabric. Rather than spatial strategies that separate places of work from places of residence, planning policies should encourage the integration of living and working environments, including support for working from home. Planning visions should also be developed to strengthen the integration of universities with cities. The model of isolated university campuses functioning as self-contained enclaves, disconnected from urban and national life, disconnected from industrial development, and unable to realize their full potential to influence the social fabric of the city, should come to an end.

Universal Accessibility Rights and Cities

As noted in the National Physical Plan, the principal challenge facing our cities is not merely uneven development but, more fundamentally, a condition of disconnection. Uneven development and disparities in economic share are only secondary consequences of this broader lack of connectivity. Cities have become fragmented into separate zones and disconnected components. The disconnections observed between cities are extensions of the fragmentation found within the urban fabric itself.

Different manifestations of the division of Cyprus can be observed throughout the island's urban environments. In Famagusta, for example, the separation between the university and the city, the division between the walled city, residential areas, and

commercial districts, the disconnect between the city and the coastline, and the presence of the fenced city of Varosha, the United Nations buffer zone, and military areas collectively create a condition of total spatial fragmentation. This fragmented structure represents one of the greatest obstacles to the sustainable development of Famagusta.

The situations in Nicosia and Kyrenia are not substantially different. In Nicosia, the Walled City is often perceived and experienced almost as a separate country and transforms into a lifeless urban environment after dark. Different urban systems remain inward-looking and isolated from one another. The lack of diverse transportation alternatives and accessible mobility options prevents the formation of healthy social infrastructure and social interaction networks.

The absence of participatory transportation systems—including pedestrian routes, sidewalks, bicycle paths, and public transport systems that connect different parts of the city with public buildings and spaces such as hospitals, educational facilities, and parks—is one of the principal causes of urban fragmentation. While differentiated service areas and culturally distinct neighborhoods are both necessary and desirable, public spaces must form a connected network, supported by transportation and communication infrastructure, to ensure interaction and prevent segregation.

Elderly people, children, persons with disabilities, tourists, students, and individuals from different linguistic, religious, and cultural backgrounds should all have equal opportunities to experience and use the city. Continuous pedestrian corridors, bicycle networks, and light rail systems connecting different urban districts should be developed to strengthen urban identity and civic culture throughout the country. Likewise, intercity public transportation systems should be established to facilitate mobility between cities, improve access to employment and investment opportunities, and ensure spatial equality of opportunity.

These objectives should constitute core visions and priorities of the National Physical Plan. Accessibility should not be treated as a secondary issue hidden among subheadings (such as Chapter IV, Section 3.2.11), but rather as one of the fundamental principles of planning itself.

On a Fragile Future Dependent on Oil

The fundamental challenge facing Northern Cyprus—and indeed the island of Cyprus as a whole—is the vulnerability created by dependence on petroleum, despite the existence of carbon reserves. This dependency ignores both the reality that oil is a finite and exhaustible resource and the environmental risks associated with its consumption, as demonstrated by recent experiences involving fuel storage facilities and coastal pollution.

Alternative energy sources and models of efficient energy use must replace the economic and ecological vulnerability created by petroleum consumption. To reduce

this vulnerability, strategies should be developed in three key areas, and these should become central objectives of planning policy:

1. Transportation and accessibility systems should be transformed to reduce automobile dependency and support a model of interconnected cities.
2. Measures and regulations should be introduced to improve energy efficiency in buildings.
3. Bold investment decisions should be made to accelerate the adoption of alternative energy sources.

If a national development plan targeting the year 2031 is to be prepared, these three elements should form the foundation of the plan.

Concluding Remarks

As urban development intensifies and urban densities increase, spatial policies are becoming increasingly important. The politics of the twenty-first century are increasingly shaped through the organization and management of space. Societies define themselves through urban environments, and contemporary citizens clearly demand active participation in the shaping of their cities.

However, cities around the world are increasingly shaped by the pressures of global and local capital flows. These pressures often transform public spaces, squares, parks, green areas, and other urban assets that play a vital role in city life into instruments of political and economic rent-seeking. A significant tension exists between the demands of citizens and prevailing spatial policies. The resolution of this tension depends upon the implementation of participatory frameworks that enable meaningful involvement in spatial decision-making processes.

In our country, spatial policies continue to be planned through a centralized state structure whose authority is guaranteed by Planning Law No. 55/89. Planning strategies prepared without meaningful social participation are shaped by political and economic interests, while citizens remain excluded from decision-making concerning urban space. Scientific data is similarly underutilized. The planning authority presents even the smallest degree of consultation as a privilege while remaining reluctant to share its legally protected powers.

Within the current state structure, plans and the restrictions they impose often create disadvantages for citizens who comply with the law, while providing opportunities for those who do not. Furthermore, unlawful practices are frequently regularized by the very institutions responsible for enforcing planning regulations. Such practices generate inequalities of opportunity among citizens and can only be prevented through the effective participation of civil society organizations and other autonomous institutions in planning processes.

Considering the National Physical Plan, Development Plans, Planning Orders, and

other planning requirements at various scales, it does not appear feasible for the planning authority alone to manage, implement, monitor, and supervise such a comprehensive framework effectively. This has not been achieved since 1989, and the opportunity presented by the Draft National Physical Plan should be used to establish a new planning strategy.

The UCTCEA Chamber of Architects calls for the revision of Planning Law No. 55/89 and demands the legal inclusion of other professional organizations, universities, and non-governmental organizations in all stages of planning processes. Furthermore, the Chamber strongly recommends that the National Physical Plan—prepared through considerable effort—be treated as a foundational resource, while the data upon which the draft is based is updated and broad-based vision and objective groups are established to re-evaluate and further develop the Plan through a participatory process.

UCTCEA Chamber of Architects
Board of Directors