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Transformations of urban space after the fall of Socialism

The green space as a driver of sustainability in Post-Socialist urban areas: the case of Almaty City (Kazakhstan)

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Introduction

- 1 At the beginning of the 21st century cities – and above all the largest cities – became the centers of problems associated with environmental degradation and socio-economic polarization (UNCHS, 2001). The process of urbanization causes the escalation of complex problems inherent to cities and stimulates urban studies devoted to sustainability issues on the city level all over the world. There is a recognition that urban sustainability – environmental, social and economic – must be tackled through holistic and integrated approaches, and that local governments must be at the center of efforts to tackle such issues (Tsenkova, 2003). Responsibilities transfer from the state governance to the city administration can be considered as an important step towards power decentralization and social life democratization. These processes are important particularly for post-soviet cities, since they are experiencing profound transformation associated with the transition from the planned economy to the market economy. In this context, building the effective green-infrastructure in post-soviet cities characterized by common features has great importance for the environmental and social development.
- 2 The spatial aspects of urban greenspaces in post-socialist cities are an interesting point due to their specific settlement structures and historical (industrial, architectural, cultural and natural) heritage. During the Soviet era, the promoting social equality was the main ideological foundation for the development of urban planning strategies and planned investments. City planning was considered as not only an integral part of national economic development, but also as an essential part of the planning strategy

planning aspects of the urban area development, a number of measures to improve the environmental situation and the quality of life of the city's population can be proposed. The most resistant to anthropogenic pollution tree species, such as canadian poplar and silver maple can be recommended for the industrial zones of Zhetysu, Turksib and Alatau districts, as well as along the busiest highways of Almaty city. The expansion of areas occupied by conifers can be also considered among the priorities for optimizing the greenspace structure all over the territory of Almaty. The set of ecological functions of green spaces, such as resistance to anthropogenic pollution and ability to absorb contaminations, together with the assessment of anthropogenic pressure, create a sufficient basis for recommendations on green space structure improvement. Connecting planning decisions with ecological dimension of quality of life can create a strong basis for sustainable development of the city of Almaty.

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