

## Creating shared consciousness through collaborative education: the case of municipal amalgamation in Ukraine

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**Abstract:** Since the launch of decentralization reform in Ukraine in 2014, the country has become an arena for a large-scale transformation of territorial governance and planning systems. Currently, 899 amalgamated municipalities have emerged through the voluntary merger procedure, with an overall population of 9.5 mln and total area equivalent to 38.9% of that of Ukraine. Being far more just an enlargement of territorial units, amalgamation is envisioned as a major tool for fiscal decentralization, community empowerment and re-defining the scale of social infrastructure provision. Currently, the planning process in newly created municipalities is constrained by the lack of appropriate legislation and planning tools, a severe shortage of planning professionals and low self-consciousness of municipal management in regards to objectives and potential of spatial planning. This paper discusses experimental pedagogic approaches implemented for enhancing spatial planning capacities of staff of newly formed amalgamated municipalities in the settings of post-socialist Ukrainian countryside and in the context of the ongoing decentralization reform, advocating the relevance of the blended learning formats that produce knowledge along with transformative change.

**Keywords:** municipal amalgamation; strategic spatial planning; collaborative education; ecological university

### Introduction

A so-called *decentralization reform* was launched in Ukraine in 2014 as a means of smoothing regional divisions in the country and strengthening capacity of local communities (Shapovalova, 2014). The political mission of the reform was to fulfil the key demands of the Euromaidan public protests in 2013-14 in terms of accountability of national and regional authorities, as well as to offer decentralization perspective within the existing unitary state (*ibid.*). The package included into the National project ‘Decentralization’ consists of local government reform and an overall revision of centre-periphery relations, including fiscal and budget decentralization, which leads to structural changes on local, sub-regional (*rayon*) and regional (*oblast*) levels.

The current stage of the reform (2015-19) has been focused on the establishment of a basic level of municipal self-governance through the voluntary amalgamation of territorial communities of cities, towns and villages. The enlarged municipalities, referred to as *amalgamated hromadas*<sup>1</sup>, are supposed to be formed before 2020 to become a territorial basis for upcoming local elections (Parliament of Ukraine, 2014). According to the perspective plans proposed by the government and approved on a regional level, the amalgamation of 8906 territorial communities into 1293 AH-s is envisioned, with 70% (899 AH-s) of this plan already completed.

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<sup>1</sup> Amalgamated territorial communities – Ukr., further referred to as AH-s, or *hromadas*.

The emergence of AH-s should put an end to prevalence of state administrations in terms of local decision-making and distribution of resources, as well as renew possibilities for local communities to govern land resources within the hromada territory (*ibid.*). For that, AH-s receive subsidies from the central government for upgrading local infrastructure in the first five years after amalgamation (State Treasury of Ukraine, 2018). Moreover, since 2018 the government has launched the process of agriculture lands transfer into communal ownership of newly formed municipalities (Decentralization, 2018). With the influx of resources comes a set of additional responsibilities for sustainable land-use and provision of services of general economic interest to the population, including education and healthcare. Enlarged territories and budgets bring an absolutely new level of requirements for AH executive bodies and political leadership and require long-term planning for a new territorial scale. While short-term socio-economic plans are generally available and the strategic planning process is currently ongoing in most of the AH-s, in most cases spatial dimension of such plans remains problematic.

As stated in Rudenko *et al.* (2017), the deficiencies in AH-level planning include the absence of official standards for a new planning scale, inadequate human resources to develop the plans for all AH-s and lack of detailed information on landscape qualities of the AH territories. Moreover, neither of the three planning tools available at a municipal level – general plan, zoning plan and detailed plan – make a good fit to the scale and character of the hromada area. While the introduction of AH-scaled plan is envisioned in the upcoming amendments to the national legislation, currently the only available planning tool is a ‘planning scheme of amalgamated hromada territory’ regulated by the national building norms.

Another complexity constitutes a never complete nature of the AH-s caused by the voluntary character of the municipal amalgamation procedure. The latter leads to the effect of ‘floating borders’ between the perspective plan of the AH and its actual spatial configuration, as presented in Figure 1. The reason for this phenomenon lies in the nature of amalgamation as a politically charged process in which spatial factors and landscape qualities are considered of secondary importance. According to expert estimations up to one-third of the already formed AH-s appears unsustainable in terms of infrastructure provision, managerial capacity and budgetary resources, which might lead to their re-configuration in 2020 (Decentralization, 2019). Such findings suggest that the ‘floating borders’ phenomenon will be persistent at least for a few years to come.

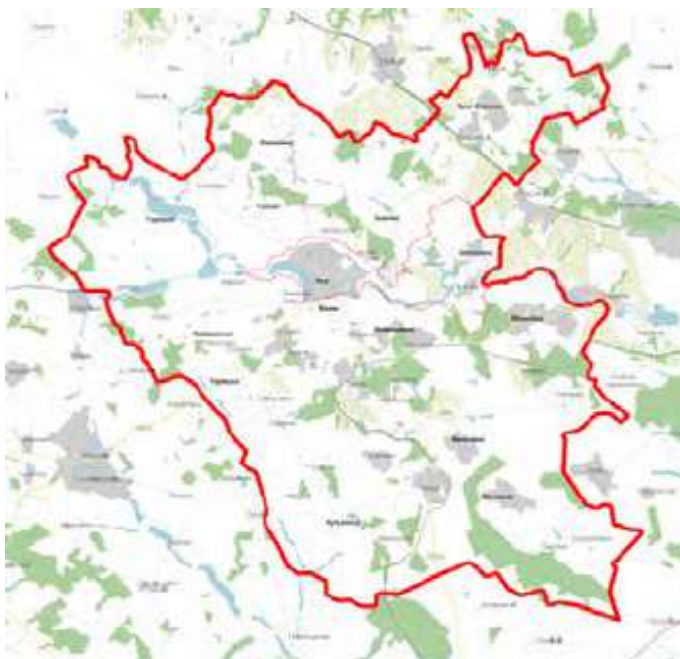


Figure 1. Perspective plan of Barska AH in Vinnytsia region (thick red border) against its current configuration (red dotted border). Image courtesy of Hanna Chernat.

The effect of voluntary municipal amalgamation on territorial governance in general and spatial decisions in particular also remains unclear. According to Swianiewicz (2018), between 2008 and 2017 territorial reforms have been implemented in 15 European countries, with municipal amalgamation becoming a mainstream solution in the decade after the global financial crisis. Meanwhile, a number of studies indicate the negative effect of amalgamations on the local democracy and uncertainty concerning actual savings in costs (*ibid.*). Udovychenko *et al.* (2017) draw parallels between the reform in Ukraine and Latvia, emphasizing the time pressure for shaping legal, fiscal and administrative background of the reform and reliance on voluntary cooperation between the local councils as factors that eventually led to flaws in spatial organisation, such as non-rational location of administrative centre or spatial fragmentation.

On a more general level, the context for local government reform is complicated by rapid ageing and depopulation in rural areas, poor general condition of basic infrastructure, alarming situation with waste management, dependence of some regions on unreliable and costly water supply schemes. Moreover, the history of Ukrainian village in the Soviet times is the history of forced collectivization and prohibition of individual farming, while its present condition is characterized by the prevalence of large mono-crop agricultural holdings and the extended ban on agricultural land sale (Prentice, 2017).

Finally, the institutional setup for spatial planning in AH-s also remains problematic, largely due to the lack of qualified specialists working on a local level. The AH-s where the central settlement is a village mostly lack a separate unit for architecture and planning within their executive bodies. Meanwhile, in hromadas where such units are at place, their activities are often narrowed down to working with a general plan, which focuses on the central settlement, largely ignoring the surroundings. The character of planning imposed by the general plan often bears the tradition of planned economy and thus remains prescriptive and in some cases unrealistic. This is partially explained by the fact that in most cases the planning tasks are outsourced to the state-owned planning institutes, which organisationally and programmatically inherit the practices of centralized planning.

The pressure of budgetary periods and newly transferred assets (lands, buildings, funds) creates a sense of urgency concerning spending without adequate long-term planning to support it. Where the strategic plans exist, they are often poorly connected to spatial dimension and thus unhelpful for decisions regarding precise land plots, buildings or public spaces. Hence, the role of planning in AH-s at an early stage of their development should not only imply regulation and control but also should suggest a long-term, spatially coherent vision for the future for all settlements and territories within a new municipality.

## **Conceptual framework**

### *Strategic and integrated approaches in spatial planning*

The ongoing local government reform in Ukraine puts pressure on management of the newly formed amalgamated municipalities in regards to generating strategic spatial development visions. The use of strategy in planning, as stated in Sartorio (2005), is a highly ambiguous concept, as the strategy has several meanings. For instance, while strategy generally implies pursuing a long-range vision, it also opens opportunities for the presence of different actors that could follow different, or even clashing, objectives (*ibid.*).

The revival of strategic planning in 1990s is generally associated with increased competition between cities (Sartorio, 2005) and rapidly blurring boundaries between municipalities, provinces, regions (Albrechts and Balducci, 2013). Strategic plans are often viewed as instruments of change and action plans, while the traditional plans are designed for stability (*ibid.*). While the possibility of identifying strategy in planning as a separate recognizable subject remains questionable (Sartorio, 2005), it is possible to grasp some of its recurring characteristics, such as the necessity to plan for a longer range, comprehensiveness in terms of wide array of actors involved, interactivity, process orientation and interconnectivity (*ibid.*).

The effect of implication of strategies in planning is described by Healey (1997, as quoted in Albrechts and Balducci, 2013) as ‘self-conscious collective effort to re-imagine a city, urban region or wider territory and to translate the result into priorities for area investment, conservation measures, strategic infrastructure investments and principles of land use regulation’. Albrechts (2004) adds ‘public sector-led’ and ‘socio-spatial’ as characteristics of strategic spatial planning as a process and emphasizes its orientation towards the future (‘what a place is and may become’, *ibid.*). Strategic spatial planning requires the decision-makers to challenge conventional wisdom and is distinguishable from traditional planning by the following characteristics (as discussed in Albrechts and Balducci, 2013):

- Shift from comprehensiveness to selectivity in planning;
- Action and process orientation;
- Ability to cope with uncertainties;
- Focus on co-production by multiple actors;
- Ability to change and reformulate the mindset of actors;
- Ability to grasp the momentum.

Hence, strategic spatial planning best serves in cases with an ambiguous and rapidly changing context for planning and where the existing decision-making perspective ought to be challenged or expanded. While the strategy allows turning planning from a regulatory mechanism into an action plan, coordination between the sectoral, spatial and temporal aspects of territorial policies remains an important factor for the effectiveness of planning overall and efficient spending of public funds in particular.

One of the European policy frameworks for streamlining such coordination is pronounced in the Leipzig Charter for Sustainable European Cities of 2007. Developed during the German presidency of the European Union, the charter is based on findings of the background study focused on integrated urban development as a policy tool and ‘*a prerequisite for urban sustainability in Europe*’ (BBR, 2007). Accordingly, an integrated approach is described as the one involving spatial, sectoral and temporal coordination of various policy areas and resources planning with the use of financial instruments (*ibid.*, p. 14). On the implementation side integrated approaches are embodied into integrated urban development concepts for certain territories that imply:

- Analyzing strengths and weaknesses of a spatial entity and its components;
- Formulating goals for particular areas;
- Increase the effect of public measures through coordination and pooling of public and private funds;
- Integrated planning for particular areas and sectors;
- Empowering citizens and encouraging corporate social responsibility;
- Supporting intermunicipal cooperation and partnership between urban and rural areas.

The vision of integrated urban development voiced in the Charter is being carried out further by the German federal ministries (for instance, see BBSR, 2017) and included into German-funded technical assistance and capacity building projects in the fields of spatial planning and urban development in the third countries. For instance, the project *Integrated Urban Development in Ukraine*, commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) is being implemented in six cities of Ukraine since 2015. While the integrated urban development policy framework largely addresses cities, the integrated approach remains relevant for projects focused on different territorial contexts but implemented by the same agent.

Hence, in the context of Ukraine, utilizing strategic planning toolkit for coordination of spatial development appears to be relevant, provided the rapid socio-economic and political change and perceived low effectiveness of the existing planning tools, such as the general plan. An integrated approach to urban development policy still finds limited application, however benefits from a strong agency provided by international technical assistance projects.

#### *Planning education in Ukraine and the new role of a university*

Education is an essential prerequisite for developing strategic visions for amalgamated municipalities and embedding new mindsets among the local actors. It is possible to split this broad term into two categories – the one referring to the professional education of planners, and the one that could be generally described as building capacities of local actors to deal with spatial issues. Regarding the former, it is important to mention that currently no separate programs in urban or regional planning are being offered by Ukrainian universities, and planning disciplines are only included into graduate programs in architecture. University programs in urban or regional studies offered by social sciences departments are also a novelty<sup>2</sup>. Hence, a lack of academic tradition that would nourish the interdisciplinarity of planning work is currently observed.

Regarding the latter aspect, it is important to highlight the absence of inter-sectoral encounters in local administrations, as well as the lack of holistic understanding of spatial planning outside its technical domain. Improvement of inter-sectoral coordination and strategic planning and management of resources thus makes one of the focuses of international technical assistance projects that support decentralization reform in Ukraine. One of the examples of such projects is *U-LEAD with Europe*, a multi-donor action supported by several of the EU Member States and implemented by German and Swedish development agencies.

The rapidly changing context for planning under the local government reform requires increased individual and collective capacity to deal with challenges and differences. A great role in such capacity building could be performed by initiatives that have both educational and transformative objectives. One of the examples of such initiatives comes from sustainability science and is conceptualised as ‘real-world lab’, a scientifically designed space of collaborative sustainability research involving intervention’, characterized by transdisciplinarity, transformative approach and inclusion of civil society (Singer-Brodowski *et al.*, 2018). Designed as spaces for learning, real-world labs employ experimental strategies for studying the local context and focus on centrality of the learner in the educational process (*ibid.*).

Along with such models for social experimentations with learning and transformative effects, comes re-thinking of traditional educational establishments and their connectedness to the environment. Barnett (2011) comes up with a list of utopian future views for contemporary universities as an alternative to increased entrepreneurialism, in particular proposing the concepts of ‘ecological university’ and ‘networked university’. Accordingly, the multiple networks that university forms with business and industrial sectors should be put to a use other than securing a better position in the academic market place (*ibid.*, p 4). Rather, the university should act in accordance to ecosystem functioning and adopt the responsibility wellbeing of its environment. Doing so, the university does not just safeguard the wider society, but actively enhances the public realm (Barnett 2009, as quoted in Standaert, 2012). Serving such purpose requires a change in the pillar structure of the university consisting of disciplinary departments into a web-like structure (Standaert, 2012). Such transition launches a set of ‘nomadic’ practices associated with openness, mobility, public character, experientiality of educational activities (*ibid.*).

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<sup>2</sup> The first intakes of such programs offered by Kyiv National University, Kyiv National Economics University, the Karazin University in Kharkiv were announced only in 2018.

The following parts of this paper will outline the case of application of strategic and integrated approaches to spatial planning in amalgamated municipalities, which takes the format of an educational program carried out by CANactions School, a non-formal educational institution based in Kyiv and Amsterdam. The concepts of real-world labs and ecological university will be further applied for evaluating the chosen educational approach and format.

## Case study

### *CANactions School*

CANaction School was founded in 2015, in response to the growing social demand for principled reform of relationships between citizens, government authorities and planning and design professionals in Ukraine. The School formulated the two key questions pursued in all of its subsequent activities:

1. Who are those change-makers who could moderate the process of building new types of connections in Ukrainian cities?
2. What tools and approaches do they need to be able to successfully deal with the complexity of the current challenges? (Thomann and Tyminskyi, 2015)

Working on these questions, the School shaped an educational approach based on shifting of professional roles from 'specialists' to 'generalists' and guided by the following principles:

- Interdisciplinary approach;
- Teamwork and experiential learning;
- Project-based learning;
- Strategic approach to urban design and spatial planning;
- Cooperation with a vast net of international experts and institutions.

The pilot educational programs of CANactions School in 2015-2016 were conducted in the format of semester-long full-time Studios, focused on the urban development contexts of various parts of Ukraine, with an aim to propose long-term spatial visions for the case cities that would reflect the outcomes of interdisciplinary research carried out by the students and complement (or oppose) the existing general plan. In the course publications, the School critically reflected on the experience of the pilot year, for instance, sharing concern for the possibility to initiate and carry out the systemic changes in cities and expressing the opinion that the impetus for the development of a city must come from the local community (Thomann and Tyminskyi, 2016).

In the following year, the School launched modular Advanced Studies in Integrated Urban Development (ASIUD) courses with an expanded vision of a study group. Unlike to the first programs targeted at professionals who participate in urban development, the student cohort was expanded by representatives of city administrations. Thematically, the focus shifted towards the concepts of integrated urban development. Such focus had been strengthened by a partnership with the project Integrated Urban Development in Ukraine, which provided links to city administrations and offered implementation prospects for student projects.

Four educational programs (two full-time studios and two ASIUD courses) resulted in a set of spatial visions and strategic urban development project models for seven Ukrainian cities. At the end of educational year 2017-18' CANactions School was characterized by bold experimentations with formats, student profiles and thematic foci, which led to educational methodology that interprets the nature of design and planning as 'continuous oscillation towards a consensual vision of the future of a certain place' (Thomann and Tyminskyi, 2018).





## Integrated Spatial Planning for Amalgamated Hromadas

In October 2018 CANactions School announced the launch of a year-long educational program focused on the application of strategic and integrated approaches in spatial planning in the context of decentralization reform in Ukraine. The aim of the program was to enhance the capacity of local stakeholders in amalgamated municipalities to handle spatial aspect of strategic planning. The program emerged from partnership between the School and the *U-LEAD with Europe* Programme, which awarded a grant for its implementation.

It was decided that representatives of 30 amalgamated municipalities will participate in the program. The broad selection was aimed to ensure representation of most regions of Ukraine, various types of AH-s depending on the status of their central settlement (city, town, village), as well as of those both with and without strategic plans. The open call for AH-s resulted in 101 applications, based on which a cohort of 30 was selected (see the regional and typological diversity of the AH-s in Figure 2).



Figure 2. Location and typological overview of 30 AH-s that participate in the program

On a local level, the participating AH was required to form a working group consisting of six members that represent various stakeholder groups (see Figure 3).

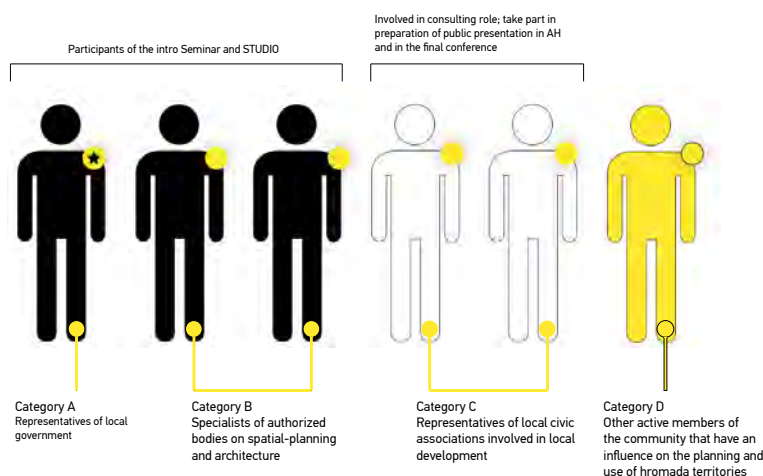


Figure 3. Recommended squad of the AH working group

Despite the observed rotations and incomplete working groups in some of the AH-s, the proposed composition generally favoured knowledge dissemination on the ongoing educational program and also formed a basis for inter-sectoral collaborations within the administration. The AH cohort formation confirmed the hypothesis concerning the lack of planners in amalgamated municipalities (see in Figure 4) and showcased the great diversity of newly formed municipalities in terms of size, population and spatial organisation (see in Figure 5).

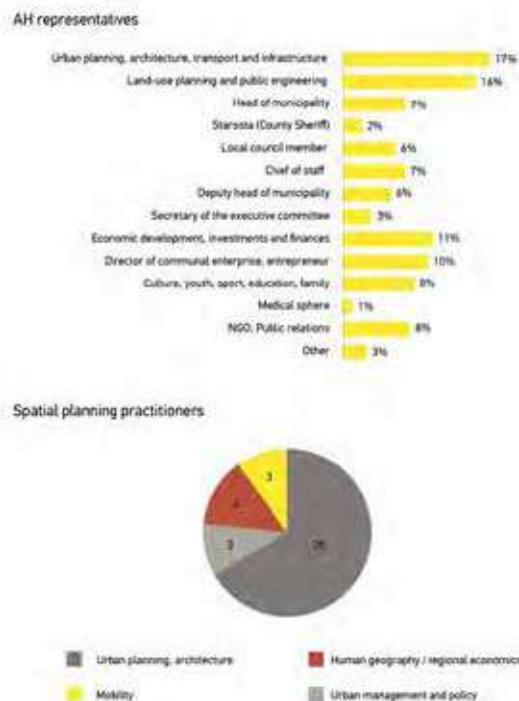


Figure 4. Professional background of program participants

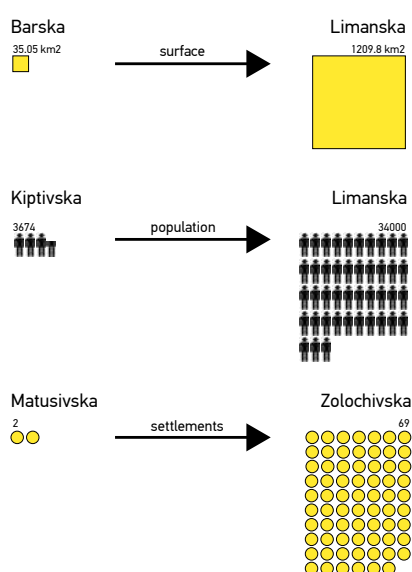


Figure 5. Diversity of 30 AH-s in terms of size, population, number of settlements.



These findings posed a challenge to the School’s organisational and methodological setup. One reaction to them was the inclusion of an additional participant cohort into the program, namely 30 ‘spatial planning practitioners’, who were selected separately through an open call procedure. As a result, an interdisciplinary group of thirty ‘practitioners’ was selected (see in Figure 4) to match the number of AH working groups with the following objectives:

- To provide for the lacking planning, design and social research skills and thus to enable the application of *learning by doing* approach;
- To help the AH working group embed a broader external perspective on local potentials and challenges that arise in the planning process;
- To help to re-create ‘the client’ and ‘the planner’ roles in the educational process, build new connections and encourage post-program cooperation.

The educational process was designed as three distinctive blocks visualised in Figure 6, where the preparatory block served to formulate a shared understanding of the strategic spatial planning and principles of integrated urban development frameworks, as well as to introduce the School’s learning principles using simulation exercises. The block also included an international fieldtrip to Sweden and Denmark designed with an aim to challenge the established mindsets and present the pressing issues of municipal development, such as addressing decay of peripheral settlements, outside the usual context. The second block (Studio) consisted of practice-oriented workshops. During this block AH working groups were introduced to spatial planning practitioners. The third block envisions delivering two public presentations of the results in May and September 2019 and includes post-production of the Studio results.

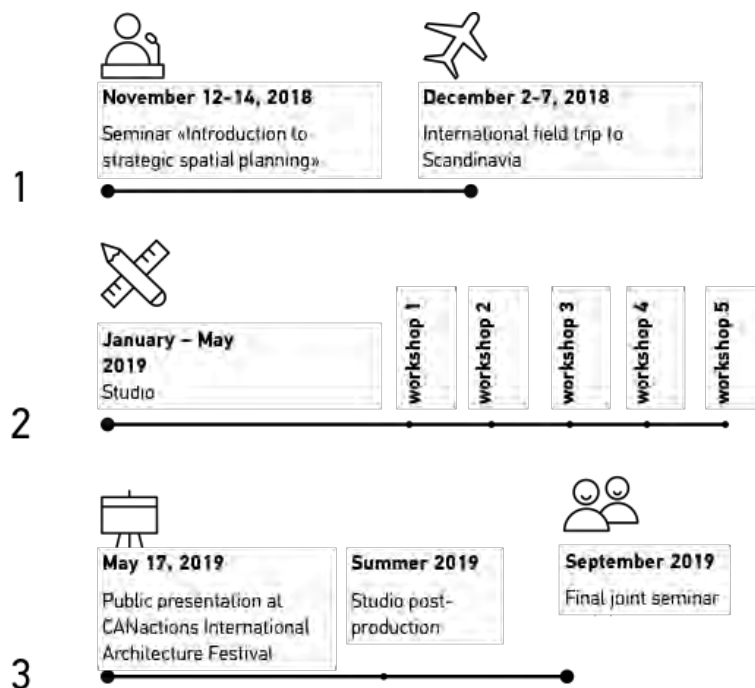


Figure 6. Educational program blocks

To ensure project-based learning each AH working group was presented with the case of their own municipality to work on; hence, 30 cases were reviewed in total. The workshops focused on production of a ‘spatial development concept’ for AH-s, created using the strategic spatial planning methodology. The aim of the concept was to achieve integrated, balanced and sustainable spatial development strategy, as well as to enhance legitimacy and awareness levels of local stakeholders in regards to spatial plans (Thomann and Tyminskyi, 2016). As a planning document, spatial development concept reflects the north-western European approach to spatial planning and has some common features with a number of instruments that are in use on regional and municipal levels of planning in other European countries, e.g. Räumliches Entwicklungskonzept (REK) in Austria, Germany and Switzerland. The key features of the spatial development concept in the context of amalgamated municipalities are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Features of spatial development concept in the AH context

<p>Coordination instrument:</p>	<p>communication tool which addresses all spatially relevant actors and provides inter-sectoral coordination among spatially relevant policies;</p> <p>pursues consensus with sub-regional and regional governance levels, as well as within the local community;</p>
<p>Spatial study:</p>	<p>strategic document at a local level that outlines the main spatial development potentials and challengers;</p> <p>describes socio-economic situation in AH-s;</p> <p>proposes a vision for all settlements and areas in AH;</p>
<p>Not a legally binding plan</p>	<p>not a statutory instrument, but must be considered in the preparation ToR of local plans;</p> <p>does not contain land-use regulations that are binding for land owners;</p>

Application of strategic and integrated approaches can be best illustrated on the basis of the Studio. The learning process took a form of a series of five consecutive workshops of five days each that took place once a month in the period between January and May 2019. Due to the size of the cohort the Studio work was split into five regional clusters, with the group size in each cluster under 30 persons. Each Studio workshop was oriented towards completing one of the parts of the spatial development concept, described in Table 2.

Table 2. Expected Studio deliverables.

Part 1. Analysis
Structural analysis of relevant aspects (socio-economic, landscape and environment, physical space etc.) is used to derive objectives and goals for future development. Spatial aspects and correlations should be presented in suitable schemes.
Part 2. Image of the future (Vision)
The Image of the future mirrors the vision and goals underlying the development concept. For communication, not only a «slogan» shall be used, but also a sketch or scheme to illustrate the idea on place together with short text for explanation.
Part 3. Concept
The concept builds the «bridge» between vision and plan. In various thematic schemes (environment and landscape, settlement, transport, economic development and working places, etc.), it shows “what” and “where” is intended. Up to three priority fields of actions are identified, of which at least one is elaborated as a “strategic project” and show-cases strategies and principles which shall be used for implementation.
Part 4. Road map
A road map for implementation shall answer the questions on the “how”, the “who” and the “when” actions are considered for implementation of the concept in plans and for realization of the “strategic project”. Specific “building blocks” of the concept should be identified and interdependencies between them explained.
Part 5. Description of the elaboration process
This part serves to explain the whole working process behind the Studio project, especially which actors and stakeholders were involved and what parent planning documents were used as base for the elaboration of the spatial development concept.

While the framework and deliverables were common for all five regional clusters, the precise methodology was developed by the teaching staff working in each cluster. Each cluster was assigned a team of one senior and two junior mentors. The requirements for senior mentor position were a track record in planning projects, pedagogic and professional experience in Eastern Europe. All senior mentors of the program were international and were supported by local professionals who served as junior mentors. Seven out of ten junior mentors were the alumni of CANactions School, which made possible the transfer of knowledge, toolkit and organisational culture of the former programs. Senior mentors defined the workshop curriculum, while junior mentors facilitated the group work, also occasionally stepping up as reinforcement to spatial planning practitioners. The organizational diagram of the Studio is presented in Figure 7.

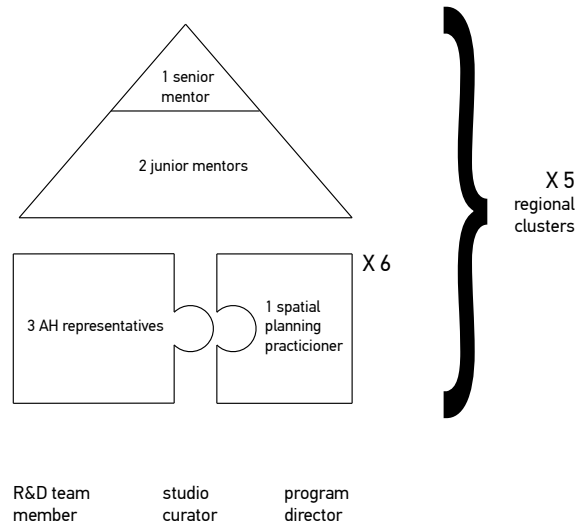


Figure 7. Studio organizational diagram

The learning process was also facilitated by the Studio set-up as a space for inter-disciplinary and also inter-municipal encounters. The group work was framed around the interaction between the AH representatives and the spatial planning practitioner, where the former acted as local informants and decision-makers, while the latter employed multiple roles of interviewers, data analysts, planners and project coordinators. In order to enable productive and evidence-based planning interactions, a dossier with the key socio-spatial data and base maps was prepared by the School for each AH. The character of group work in most cases implied producing sketches on printed base maps, thus cultivating spatial thinking and securing the involvement of all participants into planning exercises, regardless of software skills.

The Studio format largely implied regular interaction with the limited number of local actors divided into five regional clusters, several touchpoints for knowledge-sharing were introduced, including two seminars for spatial planning practitioners and the final workshop in May, which was conducted for all Studio participants in common. On a local level, the AH working groups delegates were responsible for the information flow within the local administration. In March 2019 thirty participatory events in the participating municipalities were organised as part of the third Studio workshop to test the developed spatial scenarios, involving over 1500 attendants overall. The public events were also utilized for needs assessment of the AH periphery and of various social groups.

## Discussion

It is possible to interpret this abovementioned case through the ideas of ‘networked’ and ‘ecological’ university proposed by Barnett (2011). The ‘networked’ character here is proved by the complex web of interactions between the School and actors involved into implementation of the territorial reforms. In regards to bearing the responsibility for well-being of its ecosystem, which is an essential characteristic of an ‘ecological’ university, the School engages with the described program into several ongoing debates focused on the following themes:

- Shaping toolkit and strategic framework for spatial planning in amalgamated municipalities;
- Review of spatial planning practices and regulations on a municipal level;
- Generating new connections between the actors involved into the local government reform.

The School's latest program also confirms its nomadic nature, as described by Standaert (2012), which finds manifestation in the highly flexible and adaptable format of the Studio where workshop setup, location and methodology become subjects of free modification (and multiplication) whilst the core educational principles persist.

This paper focuses on the design of a learning framework while providing little information on the programmatic essence and specific results of the course. Yet, the presented evidence can be utilized for supporting the claim regarding the relevance of the blended learning formats that produce knowledge along with a transformative change in the contexts of territorial entities that experience rapid transition. This claim can be elaborated and discussed in three dimensions:

- Creating legitimacy through non-formal planning process;
- Conceptualizing Studio as a lab that fosters interdisciplinary, inter-generational and inter-cultural learning;
- Presenting the Studio deliverables as action plans.

### *Legitimacy*

The legitimacy of planning decisions is particularly important in the context of the municipal amalgamation, as the enlargement implies a revision of centre-periphery relations and bears the risks of uneven development. Utilizing the strategic spatial planning methodology, the program benefits from its action and process orientation, as well as the focus on co-production involving multiple actors, as suggested by Albrechts and Balducci (2013). Due to high level of uncertainty, for instance connected to planning legislation and possible reconfiguration of the AH-s, the program grasps the momentum to influence the mindset of actors involved in spatial planning before such planning occurs.

The utilized methodology also allows reviewing selectively the issues that go beyond the competence of formal planning, helping to create legitimacy and analytical grounding for future political decisions. In the abovementioned case of Barska AH the working group made the decision to create a spatial development concept that stretches beyond the current AH border to use it during negotiations with neighbouring village councils (see Figure 8). On the other hand, the legitimacy of spatial ideas developed during the Studio is constrained by particular AH working group composition, lack of public involvement throughout the Studio and prevalence of the limited AH administration's perspective concerning needs and priority actions.



Figure 8. Sketch of the project map of Barska AH. Image courtesy of Hanna Chernat.

### *Studio as a lab*

While the Studio's set-up is highly situational and fluid, it is nevertheless possible to claim that its pedagogical and transformative effect stretches beyond the educational program and could be in some instances compared to one of the real-world lab. Organizationally, it replaces the hierarchical structure of AH administration with a flat working group set-up. While the power relations in most cases persist, rotation within the working group, presence of spatial planning practitioners and non-administration representatives enabled bringing upfront the new situational leaders. The variety of participants' and mentors' backgrounds was utilized to produce meaningful inter-disciplinary, inter-generational and intercultural links. The most intense exchange took place between the AH representatives and practitioners, whose role transformed from external consultants to fully assimilated working group members with a strong AH identity. The Studio settings also opened new opportunities for inter-municipal cooperation through on a basis of discovered common challenges and regional similarities.

A communication cascade had been formed within the Studio for translating spatial and strategic planning notions into everyday language. In some cases, the translation was literal due to the foreign background of senior mentors and mixed use of English and Ukrainian during Studio work. The Studio handbook prepared and disseminated by the School included a brief dictionary mostly consisting of project management and planning jargon. Throughout the program, the participants were encouraged to use non-conventional formats for communicating planning ideas, such as preparation of local newspapers and videos that disseminate the Studio findings.

Participatory events trained the participants in essential skills that are required for embedding new approaches to spatial planning in the multi-stakeholder environment and proved the potential of 'hybrid forums' (Callon *et al.*, 2001) for creating a shared consciousness through discussion of raw ideas and concepts. However, the potential of interacting with the general public was not fully utilized due to a very limited amount of fieldwork and concentration of participatory events in central settlement. It was also identified that the design of a participatory event largely determines what it achieves. This is especially the case in a 'thirsty' environment, where people not so often yet had the opportunity for bring themselves into a planning process with a potential of co-production in interventions. In general, friendly and open atmosphere in the conducted events is an optimistic sign for the potential of the applied methodology, but it does not yet proof that it will be successful in conditions outside the lab. It is nevertheless possible to argue that the modelling of the planning process merits at least as much attention as the design of structures during this process.

Content-wise, the Studio encouraged experimentation in terms of studying the effects of territorial enlargement on day-to-day functioning of infrastructure, economic and social ties between the settlements, thus utilizing an opportunity to observe the impact of an independent variable (amalgamation) on the dependent, as suggested by Swianiewicz (2018). In some cases, Studio work led to the discovery of previously unknown data sets and local spatial qualities. For instance, in the case of Zolochiv AH consisting of 69 settlements (see the integrated map in Figure 9), a strategic project had been proposed to foster the internal exploration of local crafts, landscape qualities, development challenges and potentials that are generally unknown for the residents and administration alike. In the case of Storozhynetska AH, a hitherto unrecognized timber construction culture in churches and residential buildings has become a common identity and sustainability potential for economic and cultural development.





Figure 9. Integrated map of spatial development concept of Zolochivska AH. Image courtesy of Bohdan Volynskyi

*From the Studio to action*

Utilizing the integrated approach, Studio framework implied inter-sectoral coordination of discovered socio-spatial issues and addressing them in various temporal scale, with scenarios stretching to 2030 or in some cases to 2050. A number of discovered challenges concerned providing the most basic infrastructure, such as fresh water supply, or was related to global challenges, for instance, the effects of climate change on land fertility in Southern Ukraine. In the case of Komysh-Zorya AH, a proposal for introduction of a new waste management system was developed, implying inter-municipal cooperation and reorganisation of underutilized land plots currently functioning as informal dump sites (see Figure 10). Addressing global challenges through municipal perspective would require cooperation on a regional level, which also made the participants label such projects as the ones beyond their authority. In order to address this issue demonstration projects focused on soft measures and local scale along were introduced along with strategic projects.



Figure 10. Proposal for inter-municipal cooperation in waste management project.  
Image courtesy of Lidiia Chyzhevska

Despite the ambiguity concerning implementation capacities, observed lack of expertise of Studio mentor team in some of the narrowly defined projects, such as the establishment of dairy farming cooperatives, the action orientation of the Studio helped to localize and specify otherwise abstract ideas presented on the integrated AH-scale plan. Spatial development concepts provide a useful basis for clarifying future expectations and objectives, as well as for defining priorities for action in larger and more open forums.

It is important to stress that for none of the participating municipalities a simple patent solution can be used for the development of the community or even one of their settlements. Utilizing integrated and strategic approaches, all work points to strengths, potentials and opportunities, which now have to be further processed with the necessary perseverance. What will be more important than the mere choice of the tool (spatial development concept) is the collective and thus communicative evaluation of definitions of planning goals.

## Conclusion

Based on the presented review of ‘Integrated Spatial Planning for Amalgamated Hromadas’ program, it is possible to suggest that creating shared consciousness of stakeholders regarding spatial development is an essential prerequisite of sustainable use of lands and resources in the context of territorial reforms. The selection of process design dictates the opening up of spatial planning processes for a certain politicization or the closing down of opportunity spaces of the transition phase and their isolation from the realm of public debate.

Strategic spatial planning tools offer a broad overview of strategic development potentials in a dynamic environment, non-constrained by a static framework of comprehensive planning. Learning formats that attempt to moderate the discussion of planning priorities amongst local actors and bear transformative goals in terms of mindset change should be sensitive to the specific context of areas in transition and flexible in terms of setup, location and duration of educational activities.

Practice-oriented nature of the program with both educational and transformative objectives and based on the own cases of participating territorial entities provide incentives for local actors to invest time into the educational process. Inclusion of participants with various backgrounds and professional roles and presenting the work in progress to the general public generally appeared very beneficial for practising new types of

connections and communication channels by AH administrations, while a broad selection of participating municipalities and exposure to international cases created a basis for inter-municipal cooperation.

Studio work has succeeded in putting together a wealth of analyses, ideas and measures for the newly founded AH. Discussion of these results in the various forums (e.g. working group with mentors and experts / working group in communities / working groups with other working groups.) was very fruitful, not least of all testified by elaborated project ideas, which were immediately submitted to grant programs for implementation. Whereas a professional administration can be, of course, supportive but also restrictive, the Studio as a lab showed that a small, lay-controlled community may bring forth a highly motivated individual or team who is able to create a constructive climate for discussion.

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