

## **Bridging theory and practice in postgraduate education on development and planning: Gdynia Urban Summer Schools 2016-2018**

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**ABSTRACT:** In this article, the authors discuss results achieved by the Gdynia Urban Summer School (GUSS) organised annually (between 2016 and 2018) in Gdynia, Poland. The GUSS was meant for young practitioners from various professions such as urban and regional planning, urban design, architecture, civil engineering and transport planning. The objective was to give workshop participants practical interdisciplinary experience and to develop skills for lifelong learning. The way to achieve this is through learning by doing but, at the same time, breaking the daily routine and typical patterns of thinking, thus exchanging ideas and design experiences within a group of practitioners. The 'interactive method' adopted at the summer school is frequently applied in spatial planning, whereby the search is facilitated for an *outside of the box* approach or for unobvious answers to problems identified by local experts. An international group of young planners worked in a studio setting under the guidance of international experts. The host city of Gdynia, in return, received a finished product in the form of the final presentation and the report.

### INTRODUCTION

The prologue of the Gdynia Urban Summer School (GUSS) was the International Society of City and Regional Planners (ISOCARP) Young Planning Professionals (YPP) workshop associated with the ISOCARP annual conference, which was held in Gdynia in 2014. Both the conference and the YPP workshop were devoted to the subject, *Rethinking the water-city interface*. The key tasks of this YPP workshop were to rethink the city-water interrelationship to propose a new form for reconnecting city and water, and to develop specific proposals for different parts of the city waterfront. The participants were considering building a common waterfront strategy for the whole Gdańsk metropolitan area encouraging the uniqueness of different parts of the city waterfront and inhabitants' involvement in the process of shaping them [1]. After noting the mutual benefits and high evaluation of the workshop by participants, the city of Gdynia authorities, the Society of Polish Town Planners (TUP), Gdańsk University of Technology (GUT) and the ISOCARP decided on continuation of the workshop in the format of the GUSS as an activity of the Polish ISOCARP National Delegation.

The first edition (of the three consecutive ones) of the GUSS started in 2016. The GUSS was devoted to the subject, *New approach to urban housing*. It was organised according to the ISOCARP Young Planning Professionals workshop format [2] in collaboration with the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) as the 7th AESOP European Urban Summer School. The workshop was organised along with the International Conference on *Urban Housing* hosted by the City of Gdynia. The aim of holding the workshop was to develop an innovative approach to urban housing, which later on could be disseminated widely, including the presentation during the conference following the workshop. As the representatives of Central and Eastern European planning societies were present at the conference, the workshop on the new approach to housing policy was intended to become a bank of ideas for them.

In 2017, the following international Gdynia Urban Summer School was organised under the title, *Variants of the city of Gdynia development in relation to the considered railway connections: Gdynia city centre - Gdynia Obłuże/Oksywie*. In general, it repeated the scheme of the previous event. Again, it was organised in the ISOCARP YPP workshop format, and associated with the international conference, *Urban Mobility*, where the workshop results were presented.

Participants of the workshop tried to answer the question: how might the new transportation axis (train line: Gdynia centre - Gdynia Oksywie/Obłuże) reshape the structure of the city of Gdynia? So the participants were asked to define and consider possible variants of servicing the districts of Gdynia Obłuże and Gdynia Oksywie with public transportation (rail, bus, bike, car, water transport connections), and to elaborate the methodology enabling the optimum transportation variant, taking into account the best possible connections between (and within) city districts, development potential of the areas, and the best location and management of interchange zones (public transport stops). Consequently, the young practitioners defined the crucial development areas along the new transportation axis and elaborated scenarios of possible ways of their development as an urban design task [3].

The GUSS *Tomorrow of cities*, which was held in 2018, was also associated with the international conference, but the format and methodology differed from that of the previous events. Searching for the scenarios for the future city development, a foresight analysis was carried out during the workshop. Foresight analysis, being an ability to think ahead and consider future scenarios, and create models of future eventualities, was led according to methodology described by Conway [4]. The theme of the GUSS referred to century-old theoretical models of cities; for example, Sir Ebenezer Howard's Garden City; Soria y Mata's Ciudad Lineal (Linear City); architect and city planner Tony Garnier's Industrial City. None of these models describes the present situation of the urban environment. Moreover, they are a far-reaching simplification of reality. But they influenced the way of thinking of a contemporary city structure, as a place of life, work, education and leisure.

Echoes of some of these ideas can be found today in self-supporting districts, linear structures along transportation corridors, zoning or high-rise buildings. All of these models are quite old and the reality today is highly different from that described above. So, responding to a need to create new models of city development, the GUSS was aimed at debating the visions and scenarios for cities of the future, discussing adaptive changes of human beings to the new environment and technological changes, and considering the way cities would function within the next 50 to 75 years, both in a global and European perspective. Therefore, the task of young planners was to create a model of the future *any-city* (taking Gdynia as a reference case study), and considering the role of a downtown in the model.

Within the three years of the Gdynia Urban Summer School, both format and subject of the workshop evolved towards being more abstract and universal. Young planners taking part in the GUSS, although coping better with solutions to local problems, were highly interested in the issues connected with changing reality, such as changes in social conditions; the behaviour of people with or in new transportation; and designing in the space dominated by virtual reality. Because of this, the search for a reference to the needs of people in the new reality and the capture of emerging trends in transport, urban planning and architecture was a most important component of the GUSS.

The aim of this article is to discuss widely the results of the GUSS from 2016, 2017 and 2018, in the context of bridging the theory and practice of urban planning as the method of postgraduate education in the process of lifelong learning. It also aims at drafting the possible scenarios of future replicable models of postgraduate education in partnership with professional organisations, municipalities, and other representatives of the public and private sectors.

#### SUMMER SCHOOLS AND POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION IN URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

The GUSS emerged in the context of the many years' experience of planning schools and international urban planning workshops, drawing upon the inspiration, good practice and working methods. The organisers of the GUSS were involved in many events of this type led by worldwide planning organisations. The format of the GUSS was strongly inspired by the programme of ISOCARP YPP workshops, organised annually starting from 1991. The goals, assumptions and results of this programme are described in detail on the Web pages of the ISOCARP [5]. The second important source for the GUSS workshop programmes was the AESOP, which organised a series of European Urban Summer Schools (EUSS) between 2010 and 2016.

The range of subjects and approaches taken during the EUSS was quite wide. The first EUSS, held in 2010 in Wrocław, Poland, covered the contradictions and synergies between heritage and sustainability within the perspective of urban transformation. The published results of the EUSS [6] financed by the UN-Habitat co-organiser of the event, reached a wider audience than just the participants of the summer school. This first summer school was also a good laboratory for co-operation with partner planning organisations involved in the event. Among them was the International Federation for Housing and Planning (IFHP) and the ISOCARP, who played a prominent role.

For the second EUSS, which took place in Lisbon in 2011, the topic selected was that of space and how it affects the quality of life [7]. In London in 2012, during the third EUSS, *scarcity in the urban context* was discussed. The publication of the proceedings was possible [8] thanks to the integration of the Young Planning Professionals Award (YPPA) into the EUSS. The EUSS held in Madrid in 2013 was devoted to the theme, *Strategies for post-speculative cities* [9]. The following EUSS (2014), held in Tours, France, continued the topic of the first schools with the specific focus on *Heritage conservation and sustainable urban development* [10]. In 2015 in Bremen, the relationship between water and city was discussed [11].

The aim of AESOP EUSS was to promote and exchange ideas and to foster a debate, among representatives of the new generation of urban planning professionals, on important contemporary planning issues. Members of the AESOP (European universities teaching planning) hosted the event and offered teaching resources at the summer schools. The person responsible for the event, the head of the EUSS, defined the topic and selected the local case studies illustrating the discussed problem. In comparison, in the case of the GUSS and YPP workshops, the events are hosted by the city authorities, who decided on the subject of subsequent summer schools. The topic of the workshop proposed by the city resulted from the present needs of the city for spatial planning practice.

A few conclusions can be drawn from the experience of organising summer schools in different countries, within different formats of inter-institutional collaboration and with a diverse variety of participants. First, intensive attention



to the challenging task definitely helps to develop teamworking skills that include work distribution between members of the team and communication abilities, but also it contributes to a more sensitive perception of different perspectives and opinions, culture and efficiency of the debate and clarity of the arguments. Participants also learn that in different places, planning systems attribute greater weight to different aspects of planning, and what creates specific planning cultures [12][13].

Second, the great value for the participants, but also for the tutors, is the perception of variety of territorial contexts of the same spatial phenomena which makes everyone aware of the complexity of the urban process. This is crucial in understanding and diagnosing territorial evolution, but also in planning policies for the future. For tutors the summer school is also good training in different pedagogies and teaching methods, which is useful not only for the host but also for the tutors involved.

Moreover, urban planning summer schools can bring together many professional organisations, which deliver training to young planners and, in this way, increase capacities and create synergies. The summer school brings value to the city, which, by hosting the summer school, has an opportunity to develop independent scenarios for future urban development.

## BRIDGING THEORY AND PRACTICE OF URBAN PLANNING: GDYNIA URBAN SUMMER SCHOOL

In the GUSS a number of institutions were involved. Gdynia Urban Summer School, hosted by the city of Gdynia, was realised in partnership with the ISOCARP, Gdańsk University of Technology (Department of Urban Design and Regional Planning), the TUP and the AESOP. All of the institutions have a rich and long-lasting experience in the process of teaching urban planners and architects at different educational levels.

The target audience for the GUSS were junior international planners from various professional backgrounds, such as architecture, civil engineering, spatial planning, transportation planning and real estate management. Most of them had professional degrees in planning and a few years of planning practice. Participants were supposed to have some basic planning skills and to be under the age of 35.

In each case, the international group of 25 to 30 participants (including a few local ones) were coached by two international and two or three local tutors. Additionally, the international speakers of the conference taking place in parallel with the workshops were invited to comment on the results of the young planners' proposals. During the GUSS, participants had an opportunity to receive feedback on their proposals from the planning specialists (for example, transport planners) and, most of all, from city authorities and the planning office of the city of Gdynia.

Such feedback from tutors (regarding spatial planning theory and paradigms), invited experts (representing specialised knowledge from a particular planning field), and city authorities (in terms of city policies and financial capabilities) made the young planners start thinking in an interdisciplinary way and take into account differing factors in the practice of urban planning. Therefore, an important objective of the GUSS was to make international planners aware of their responsibilities while shaping and developing settlements, and when combining the practice of planning with the principles and practices of effective contemporary urbanism. The other goal of the GUSS was to make participants aware of the social responsibility of the planning activities proposed by them in the urban space.

The principles given to participants that constituted a set of guidelines for shaping the urban space during the GUSS were defined as: high quality of life and human wellbeing; functionality and effectiveness of solutions; public transport-oriented solutions and walkable urban environment; resilient and pro-ecological solutions. Satisfaction and wellbeing of people were treated as a significant factor in the people-environment interaction.

Themes of the sequentially occurring GUSSs focused on the key urban development problems of Gdynia, as well as on the Gdańsk metropolitan area strategic networks in the context of contemporary urban development concepts and paradigms. Resulting from the present interests of the city of Gdynia, they differed substantially: *Rethinking the water-city interface* (2014), *New approach to urban housing* (2016), *Variants of the city of Gdynia development in relation to the considered railway connections - Gdynia city centre - Gdynia Obłuże/Okseywie* (2017), *Tomorrow of cities* (2018). Hence, the chosen subjects referred to highly different planning scales (see Figure 1). Therefore, young planners were encouraged to work simultaneously at the regional, metropolitan, city, district and even neighbourhood scales. This cross-scale approach is different from usual planning practice, giving participants a reference horizon allowing for the holistic and systemic understanding of the problems of planning.

The theme and scale of the project site defined the type of problem, planning approach and, consequently, also the educational methods applied in running the workshops. The linear shape of both city and regional type of planning problem (ex Gdynia waterfront zone and the system of associated public spaces, as well as the new railway system and development next to the new railway stops) evoked the longitudinal design solutions accompanied with the nest-type of urban design on a local scale. Planning problems spatially dispersed within the city area, but representing one thematic layer (*New approach to urban housing*) demanded deep background studies on existing strategies and policies of cities. An holistic type of problem which included as an important factor the time horizon (*Tomorrow of cities*), required as a first step, abstraction from the design space and a value-oriented design approach.

These differences in types of problem created the need to find other educational approaches during each of the GUSSs. The continuous space of linear projects demanded a project-based learning model (*Rethinking the water-city interface*, Gdynia new railway connections), the sectorial approach quite freely connected to the area (*New approach to urban housing*) shifted slightly towards problem-based learning, while the last type of planning problem (*Tomorrow of cities*) was based mostly on problem-based learning. The last-mentioned workshop required participants to prepare theoretically earlier (*do their homework* before coming to the GUSS).

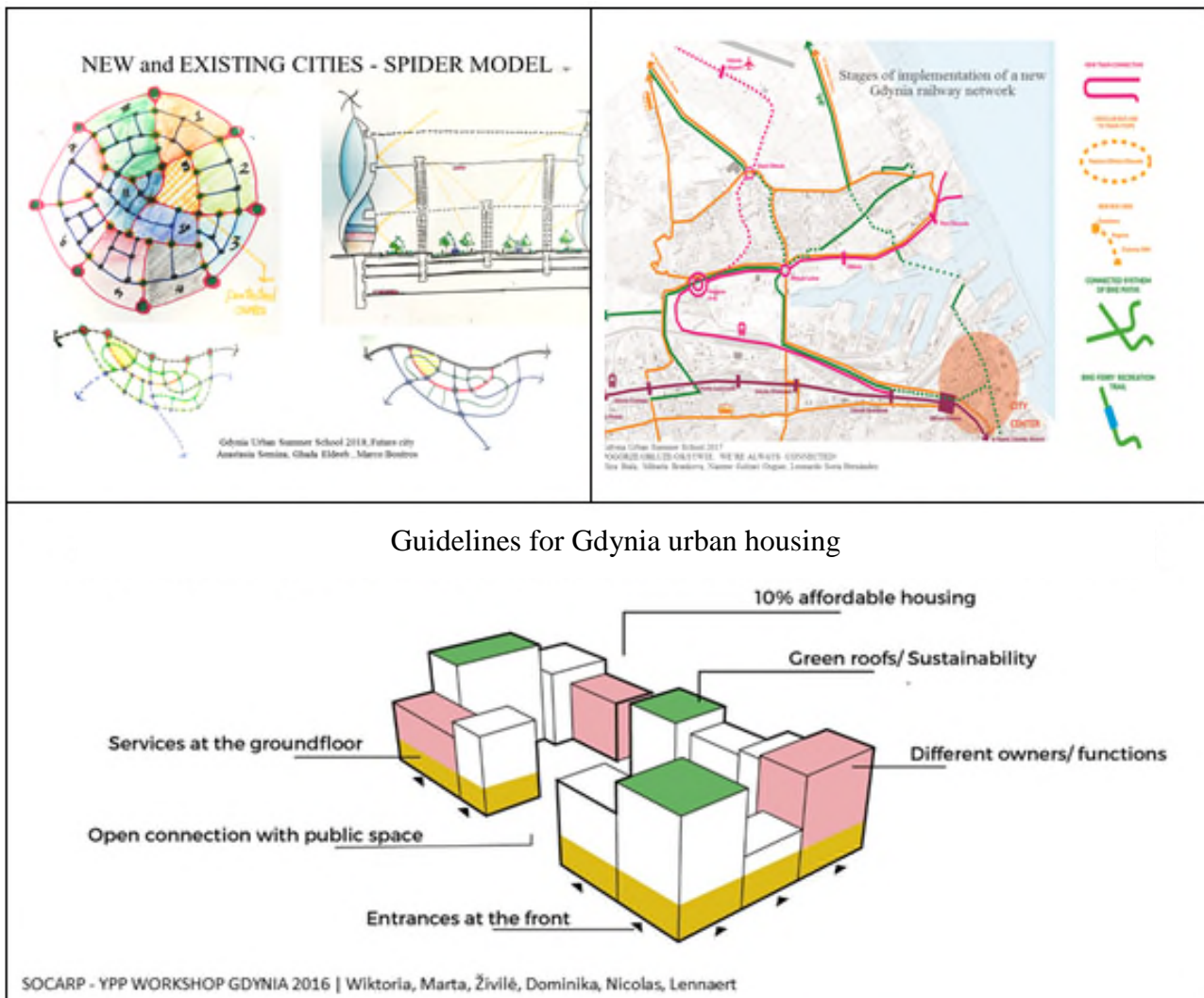


Figure 1: Differing scales and approaches represented by results of the GUSS: *Tomorrow of cities* (2018) top left, *Variants of the city of Gdynia development in relation to the considered railway connections i.e. Gdynia city centre - Gdynia Obłuże/Okseywie* (2017) top right, *New approach to urban housing* (2016) bottom.

In teaching urban planning, project-based learning (a student-centred pedagogy in which students acquire deeper knowledge through active exploration of real-world challenges and problems) is one of the most common practices, next to traditional methods, such as lectures and exercises. Methodologies based on problem-based learning rely on learning about a subject through the experience of solving an open-ended problem. However, as Gonzales states *...technical and regulatory complexity of urban planning requires the student to acquire an important prior knowledge in a short period of time which makes it essential to accompany the workshop with strong theoretical support* [14].

Therefore, the GUSS workshop programme was structured as follows:

- *homework* - a task to be completed by each participant before the workshop;
- theoretical reflections by tutors and invited guests on the current state of planning and development;
- inspirational discourse on the contemporary condition of humans, science and art;
- comprehensive analysis of the site, including regional and city-wide scales and spatial-socio-economic contexts (both in a traditional and non-traditional approach to site and problem analysis);
- discussion organised in a format depending on the problem:
  - charrette style;
  - brainstorming;
  - foresight;

- real-life stakeholders' participation in the discussions, including municipality officials, site owners, local communities;
- interdisciplinary feedback from specialised experts;
- theoretical reflections, practical outlooks and local issues (by tutors and conference invited guest speakers);
- public presentation and discussion of results at the associated conference.

This mixed and cross-scale, cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral approach allowed participants to think *outside the box*, and take into consideration a wider context and different layers of planning practice, involving both technical aspects, as well as human wellbeing. The process is beneficial both to the participants and to tutors. At the same time, the city authorities are provided with new, unconventional ideas, which might open new paths for city urban planning.

Results of the design process within the GUSS are: deeper understanding of the site; identification of possible solutions; conceptualisation of a new urban development paradigm; ability to combine solutions of a different nature (engineering, design-based, socio-economic); better understanding of the complexity of the urban development processes; and sometimes ability to design guidelines for municipalities. The outcomes of the GUSS are presented to the city of Gdynia in the form of the final presentation and the report and/or posters.

## CONCLUSIONS

Organised annually (between 2016 and 2018), the Gdynia Urban Summer School covered various issues, such as:

- theories, concepts, paradigms;
- planning issues;
- urban and architectural design;
- social participation;
- city and regional governance;
- implementation mechanisms;
- strategic financing;
- diverse needs in cities, societies, climates.

This diversified approach to local problems demanded a non-traditional way of thinking about *old* urban development problems and a wide range of workshop tools and methods. Therefore, based on experiences of the ISOCARP YPP workshops and the AESOP summer schools, the GUSS developed an efficient methodology of combining both project-based learning and problem-based learning with cross-discipline feedback from planning experts, both practitioners and theoreticians. This education method is most effective, but has high requirements for personnel and materials, as well as an intense time schedule. The methods of education employed during the GUSS workshops enhanced participants' critical appraisal and encouraged ongoing learning within a team environment.

The *out-of-the-box* ideas and approaches delivered by young practitioners with different professional backgrounds and experiences (*creative milieu*), allowed for understanding the wider contexts for professional practice and a rethink of the old problems. The innovative and cross-disciplinary approach was helpful also in identifying new issues and problems; it allows engineering education to deal with design and socio-economic issues.

The close collaboration with city authorities, while choosing the workshop topic, enabled discussion of the practical implications of contemporary theories and bridges theory, practice and local realities. In seeing embedding of the project problem in the reality of the city, the workshop participants could treat the issues seriously. In this context, the GUSS may be considered a new standard for the education of young professionals, and it is worth considering replicability of this model during other urban planning summer schools and workshops.

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