

## XVI N-AERUS Conference

# WHO WINS AND WHO LOSES?

Exploring  
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transformations  
and actors in the  
cities of the South

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## **COLLABORATIVE AND PRACTICE ORIENTED LEARNING ON DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT IN POST-SOCIALIST TRANSITION COUNTRIES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The paper presents a case of knowledge production as a result of international cooperation between two academic master programs, Integrated Urbanism from the Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade, Serbia and Urban Management from the University of Technology Berlin, Germany, under the support of GIZ/AMBERO-ICON project "Strengthening of local land management in Serbia".

The focus is on a ten-days workshop, which addressed the issue of disaster risk management in the circumstances of post-socialist transition. The aim of this paper is to describe the complex process of collaborative and practice oriented learning during the workshop which took place at the Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade, Serbia and Serbian municipality Obrenovac.

The specificity of this learning process is in its orientation towards practice, understood as a network of multiple actors from different disciplines and sectors who participate in knowledge production. Besides the students, mentors from both faculties and junior tutors, local policy makers, experts from local institutions and public companies, representatives from civil sector and local community also participated in the workshop. As a final result of the workshop, the students have developed a comprehensive report as recommendations for local disaster risk management.

This paper presents the key student activities where collaboration and interaction were employed. It points out the analysis of the students' common work and discussion on their evaluation of the workshop and effects of collaboration with other participants in the process.

The innovative way of knowledge production through collaborative and practice oriented learning processes presented can serve as a model of education for specific and complex issues which can be applied in the future in other courses and faculties. In addition, the experience indicates the need for further application and research on the collaborative model that enhances effective interaction, as well as practical and problem-oriented way of teaching and learning.

#### **KEYWORDS**

Integrated urban development planning; Adaptability; Education quality; Evaluation of learning process; Students' view

## INTRODUCTION

In April 2015 a ten-days workshop "Resilient Cities: Urban Disaster Risk Management in Serbia" took place. Participants were final-year students of the academic master program Integrated Urbanism from the Faculty of Architecture in Belgrade, and second-year students of the academic master program Urban Management from the Technische Universität Berlin (TU Berlin) under the guidance of a joint group of mentors from both faculties. The cooperation between these two study programs was established with the support of GIZ/AMBERO-ICON project "Strengthening of local land management in Serbia", which has been successfully implemented in selected cities and municipalities in Serbia since 2010 with the goal to promote new EU instruments of sustainable development in order to expand and strengthen capacities in the field of urban planning. The cooperation between the two faculties was initiated with the aim of reflecting on the issue of climate change and its influence on the development of cities in the context of disastrous floods that struck Serbia in the spring of 2014.

The GIZ-AMBERO project has initiated an agreement with the municipality of Obrenovac, which was most seriously affected by the floods in 2014, to work on its case in order to better understand the problems at stake and to develop ideas for possible solutions. TU Berlin and the University of Belgrade were invited to jointly conduct an analysis and develop first ideas for possible solutions for the municipality of Obrenovac. Hence, twenty-six students from the Urban Management Program of the TU Berlin, together with eleven students from the Integrated Urbanism Master Program at the University of Belgrade, had the opportunity to work together on a common project which culminated in a ten-days workshop in April 2015. The students of the Urban Management Program (TU Berlin) and of the Integrated Urbanism Program (University of Belgrade) are a very heterogeneous group representing eighteen different nations (Afghanistan, Australia, Bosnia, Brazil, Chile, China, Columbia, Greece, India, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Lebanon, Serbia, South Korea, Spain, Uganda and Venezuela). In addition, the students from the Urban Management Program possess multidisciplinary professional backgrounds (university degrees in urban planning, architecture, engineering, geography, economics, political science, management, journalism and public health) and have practical experience in the public as well as in the private sector in their respective home countries. The Serbian students from the Integrated Urbanism Master Program have professional backgrounds in architecture, spatial planning, design and landscape architecture, but for the most part with limited practical experience.

Mutual work of the two study programs with the support of the international project, grounded in the reality of the local context enabled the creation of a specific methodological approach to the learning process which led to diverse outcomes and built complex knowledge among students of both master programs.

## EDUCATION OF THE URBAN PLANNER PROFILE IN POST-SOCIALIST TRANSITION COUNTRIES

Political changes in Serbia in 2000, transition to the democratic system of governance and market economy, as well as orientation towards including Serbian society in European and world trends, changed the essential framework of urban planning and spatial development. A newly created socio-

economic framework led to changes in the concept of spatial intervention and stipulated change in professional approaches to spatial and urban planning. This opened the field for building new knowledge and developing expert profiles that would be able to answer to the new, complex practical challenges in the transition country.

Knowledge and skills acquired through professional practice in a socialist system were no longer applicable in the changed circumstances of global development processes. In the socialist system traditional education of urban planners grounded in architectural study programs and acquiring knowledge from engineering sciences, required strengthening of expert capacities necessary for understanding the complexity of new economic and political circumstances. One important circumstance is Serbia's orientation towards European integration, which implies harmonization of its legal and institutional framework with European regulations and standards. Seen from the point of view of urban planning and spatial development, main aspects of this harmonization include decentralization and strengthening of the role of local administration, development of public-private partnerships, strengthening of citizens' role in decision-making on the direction of urban development, appreciation of entrepreneurial initiatives and incentives for the market-based development, and facing the issue of climate change and its consequences.

The Department of Urban Planning at the Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade recognized the need for adjusting the field of spatial development in the transitional Serbian society and accordingly the need for the development of a suitable educational profile which previously did not exist. The first of its kind in the field of urbanism in Serbia, the master program "Integrated Urbanism", adjusted to social circumstances of post-socialist transition and at the same time a network with similar programs at leading European universities, was created. One of the main objectives of this study program is networking with relevant institutions, organizations and individuals in Serbia with the aim to exchange experiences and knowledge and to create a platform for collaborative learning. Learning in a specific local context in order to understand socio-economic aspects of spatial development represents an important aspect of the educational process.

#### MASTER THESIS PREPARATION CONCEPT WITHIN THE INTEGRATED URBANISM MASTER PROGRAM

Student's master thesis represents a platform for students of this study program to show off acquired knowledge and skills. Since the study program was based on the idea of promoting new knowledge and establishing a new framework for professional work, the process of preparing a master thesis required the elaboration of an innovative approach to learning and promotion of results. A strategic decision was adopted stipulating that a master thesis should rely on new knowledge that was being introduced in the field of urbanism in Serbia through international organizations. The cooperation with the international GIZ-AMBERO project Strengthening of Local Land Management in Serbia (in the following GIZ-AMBERO) was established. The cooperation between the Integrated Urbanism Master Program and the international project was initiated with the aim to get international support for introducing new knowledge based on European urban practices into teaching courses and for the education of experts in accordance with the changed socio-economic context in Serbia. Master thesis projects were based on completed results achieved in cooperation of GIZ-AMBERO with local municipalities in Serbia. Reliance of students' works on the results in Serbian municipalities produced under the patronage of a European organization essentially grounded the content of tasks in the framework of a new planning paradigm, thus ensuring the legitimacy of the course topic.

The cooperation with GIZ-AMBERO enabled a direct contact with experts from local self-government and helped to position students' tasks within a scope of concrete problems of local urban development. In addition to the support for the newly-established study program, which became part of the agenda of the international project, the quality of the achieved results improve the visibility of the teaching process and respond to the interest of the wider professional public in new master program. . Consequently, a space opened for the inclusion of interested experts from main planning institutions in Serbia in the process of preparing master theses. A so-called consulting team was formed, consisting of experts in the field of urbanism from most relevant institutions in Serbia, such as relevant ministries (e.g. the Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure), a science institute of national importance (the Institute of Architecture and Urban and Spatial Planning of Serbia), a national body for issuing professional licenses (Serbian Chamber of Engineers) and a city planning institution (the Urban Planning Institute of Belgrade), which in the reviewing phase of the teaching process participated in improving the quality of students' final master theses. The consulting team was introduced in the work with students with the aim to position students' works within practice-oriented framework and circumstances in which their professional peers operate. The experience of the consulting team members significantly influenced the creation of a practice-oriented for final master theses solutions.

Thus, the conceived process of a master thesis preparation with the participation of mentoring committees, members of consulting team, and experts from local administration, basically created a space for a high quality professional dialogue. New knowledge, acquired through the adoption of resolved issues in local context, was discussed, elaborated and modified through the work on students' tasks. On the one hand, mentors presented theoretical knowledge in the field of a new professional paradigm. On the other hand, the knowledge was accepted and tested through practical experience of renowned members of the consulting team, and in addition, the knowledge was elaborated and confirmed in the local context by experts from local administration. In that way the process of preparing master theses represented a platform for collaborative theoretical and practical learning, both for the students themselves and for the experts.

The experience gained in the course of the preparation of master theses by the first generation of the Integrated Urbanism Master Program students was adopted as a method for the promotion of new knowledge and development of the profession, while the next steps marked its further advancement. Positive reactions of wider professional public to the achieved results<sup>1</sup> confirmed the success of the created model, thus contributing to its informal adoption as a platform for preparing a master thesis. Besides that, the process of preparing a master thesis opened up a space for strengthening professional capacities, which contributed to gaining trust of the international organization in the study program, and to recognizing possibilities for further cooperation.

#### COLLABORATIVE AND PRACTICE ORIENTED LEARNING MODEL

The presented process of preparing a master thesis is mainly oriented towards creating professionally well-founded solutions, and the quality and complexity of achieved results are associated with contribution of many different participants. Building up knowledge is directly dependent on the thematic framework which is chosen so as to represent up-to-date professional experiences and issues

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<sup>1</sup> At the annual professional manifestation 23rd International Urban Planners' Exhibition held in November 2014 in Belgrade, students' master theses were awarded the second prize in the category of students' works.



important for the profession worldwide, corresponding at the same time with contemporary problems in urban practice in Serbia. General thematic framework provides a platform for a permanent communication process between all participants in the course of the production of a master thesis. Knowledge is built up in the process of creating solutions through the exchange of professional experiences in different fields. Diverse organized discussions, such as meetings, group debates and workshops, provide a wide platform for work and create a place for an open professional dialogue. A special contribution to diversity and quality of communication is made by the support of the GIZ/AMBERO which serves as a patron of cooperation and a guarantee of the relevance of the thematic framework.

Within the presented structure of the process of production of master thesis multifarious levels of collaboration can be recognized, which unwind in different directions between all participants, as follows:

- within a mentoring studio– between students, as well between mentor, students and members of the mentoring committee;
- between different mentoring studios – since joint student discussions and consultations are organized, during which communication between all participants (mentors and students) occurs;
- through the interaction with experts from local self-government – which takes place during consulting meetings with representatives of local administration departments, with the aim to position students' tasks in a real spatial framework and within the scope of concrete problems in the community. Apart from basic communication between students and experts, a professional dialogue between academia and practice takes place;
- through the interaction with consultants – which is of special importance for establishing a dialogue and building mutual professional knowledge on new subjects based on European and worldwide practice;
- through the interaction with the international organization – where thematic and spatial framework is agreed upon, which enables the introduction of contemporary topics and problem-solving approach, and provides further development of the network of participants.

Foundation of the work on the local context and essential cooperation of experts from local level in the preparation of master theses represents a special platform for the exchange of knowledge and mutual learning for all participants: the students who in this way create answers important for practice and develop direct professional experience, and the experts in the field of practice and in the field of academia. In the reviewing phases of the preparation of master theses, specially organized workshops with all participants provide the framework for professional dialogue between professors and members of the consulting team, and at the same time platform for development of their professional capacities. Such communication represents a part of the learning process, and the final exhibition organized at the end of the process, represents a showcase for achieved results and a place to summarize impressions, i.e. reflect upon the implemented process.

## **IMPROVEMENT OF THE MASTER THESIS PREPARATION CONCEPT THROUGH THE COOPERATION WITH THE TECHNISCHE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN (TU BERLIN)**

## METHODOLOGY OF THE COOPERATION PROJECT

The municipality of Obrenovac was heavily affected by the floods in May 2014 and is currently in the process of rebuilding and recovery – economically, socially, physically and psychologically. The scope of the collaboration was to jointly understand the related challenges and to develop ideas and concepts for enhancing the resilience of the municipality through disaster risk management.

Conceptually, the study project was oriented along the framework for resilient municipalities developed by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) and more particularly on the guideline “How to Make Cities More Resilient?” (UNISDR 2012). This framework proposes a process of five steps to make cities more resilient: 1. Preparing to Incorporate the ten essentials, 2. Diagnosis and Assessment of the City’s Risk, 3. Developing a Safe and Resilient City Action Plan, 4. Implementing the Plan, 5. Monitoring and Follow Up. The project’s approach has been developed on the basis of that and has followed the first of these proposed steps in order to produce inputs to the continuation of this process.

Serbia, like many of its neighboring countries, is located in a disaster-prone area. Faced with extreme flooding events in May 2014, Serbia was severely challenged to provide appropriate responses on the local level due to at least two factors: 1) An emergency situation calling for urgent help in the most severely flooded areas around the Rivers Sava and Danube and 2) A strongly centralized political and administrative system with a weak local level due to limited availability of resources, decision-making authority and technical capacities. The latter is a reflection of the dynamics at stake in a post-socialist context. Within this setting, there is a pressing need to consider how to improve disaster risk management on multiple levels in order to create more resilient municipalities in Serbia as defined by the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (2012).

The overall working process started in February 2015 and was divided into three phases. During the preparation phase, the Urban Management students studied a comprehensive selection of materials on related topics such as disasters in Serbia, the governance system, post-socialist transition, local land management etc. Moreover, ten small groups of students analyzed the ten essentials specified by the UNISDR (2012) as key topics for creating resilient municipalities: 1) Institutional and Administrative Framework, 2) Financing and Resources, 3) Multi-hazard Risk Assessment, 4) Infrastructure Protection, Upgrading and Resilience, 5) Protect Vital Facilities: Education and Health, 6) Building Regulations and Land Use Planning, 7) Training, Education and Public Awareness, 8) Environmental Protection and Strengthening of Ecosystems, 9) Effective Preparedness, Early Warning and Response, and 10) Recovery and Rebuilding Communities. The research of these topics included a general study on state-of-the-art approaches, secondary data on the current situation in Obrenovac as well as guiding questions for the upcoming field study. In parallel, the Integrated Urbanism students developed essays on the ten essentials and further investigated the local context in relation to these issues. In the second phase, a joint workshop with all students and the four cooperation partners took place in Serbia between April 17<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> 2015 at the Faculty of Architecture (University of Belgrade) and in the municipality of Obrenovac. During the workshop, the students continued their work in mixed groups. The first half of the workshop was dedicated to the analysis of the current situation in Obrenovac. To this end, the preliminary findings of both the student group from Belgrade University and the student group from TU Berlin on the ten essentials were presented, discussed and combined. Moreover, these findings were complemented through refined guiding questions, which were used to gather further primary information through fieldwork in Obrenovac. Hence, the students visited the municipality to study the area and to meet different local stakeholders from the public and private sector as well as

from civil society. Through different methods such as interviews, observations and surveys further information was collected by the different groups for each of the ten essential topics. After completion of data collection and analysis, the findings for each essential were presented, discussed and assessed in a comprehensive and integrated SWOT analysis, which combined all findings from the ten essentials in one general framework. Based on this, five topics of key priority were identified for which conceptual ideas were developed during the second half of the workshop. Thus, five new and mixed student groups were formed to work on: 1) Institutional framework, 2) Resilient open space, 3) Resilient infrastructure, 4) Resilient vital facilities and 5) Resilient housing. The task was to develop a series of conceptual ideas for enhancing the resilience of Obrenovac through disaster risk management with the focus on each of these five key topics. Finally, the results were presented in Obrenovac to the Mayor, administrative staff members and other local actors involved in the process and feedback was provided.

After the finalization of the workshop, the mixed student groups further elaborated and consolidated their proposed concepts according to the feedback provided by local stakeholders. Moreover, both analytical findings and conceptual proposals are documented and published in the final report (Fokdal/Zehner forthcoming). The objective of the report is to present the concepts as a contribution to open up a debate on disaster risk management and resilience in Obrenovac.

A group of mentors and associates from the Faculty of Architecture in Belgrade together with the best students from the Integrated Urbanism Master Program researched in parallel the Resilient Cities subject and grounded the acquired knowledge into scientific framework as part of the preparation of master theses. The results of their work were presented at a national conference dedicated to the subject of Risk Management, and published as a conference proceedings (Čolić and Bugarski, 2015; Milovanović Rodić and Madžarević 2015; Maruna et al., 2015).

#### IMPROVED COLLABORATIVE AND PRACTICE ORIENTED LEARNING MODEL

The model for collaborative and practice oriented learning, established as a part of the basic structure of preparing a master thesis at the Integrated Urbanism Master Program of the Faculty of Architecture in Belgrade was significantly enriched through the collaboration with the foreign university. The established model for preparing a master thesis – based on a practical example and with the cooperation of different actors (Maruna and Čolić, 2014) – represents a continuation of the approach oriented toward the cooperation with local experts and practical examples based on contemporary problems. Practical experience through joint work represents a basis for gaining direct knowledge, while dialogue is an incentive to reexamine actions, gain new insights and introduce new solutions. Through an active interaction the students acquire appropriate models – specific knowledge and skills, communication skills, attitudes and opinions, values needed to fulfill joint goals and certain forms of intercultural communication and behavior (Čolić, 2009).

Realized benefits of the established model can be seen in two levels of interaction – exchanging knowledge and creating solutions – between students and professors of both study programs. With the insight into different academic practices and professional approaches to new subjects in this field, the existing academic and professional knowledge, above all professors', was expanded. Insights into different curricula and teaching approaches in the learning process and in the work with students, were gained, exchanging at the same time teaching experiences of different professional and cultural surroundings. In addition, knowledge and experiences of students from different study programs and professional contexts were intrinsically improved through joint work on the same subject. Joint work

on finding solutions created a platform for testing and modifying acquired knowledge on relevant subjects concerning climate change and disaster risk management, EU planning context, contemporary problem-solving practice, realistic needs of local institutions and administration.

For international students who participated in the joint workshop, the local post-socialist context represented a challenge and created difficulties in understanding. Namely, the socialist system of management which did not imply a centralized planning system was singled out as Serbia and ex-Yugoslavia-specific when compared to other countries of the Eastern Bloc. Decentralized planning was a specific characteristic of the period of local socialist governance, with some oscillations. With regard to that, a process of problem-understanding and searching for appropriate solutions required careful reflection on the subject and reexamination of the existing knowledge in order to find applicable solutions. The very process of finding solutions represented a highly complex platform for learning and in-depth reexamination and improvement of the existing knowledge.

## **RESULTS OF COLLABORATIVE AND PRACTICE ORIENTED LEARNING**

For the requirements of testing the established model of collaborative and practice oriented learning, a survey was conducted among students of the Integrated Urbanism Master Program. The key question concerned students' evaluation of the learning process, which was supplemented with work in mixed groups through collaborative learning for this generation of the master program students. A questionnaire was prepared and students from Serbia were interviewed in order to gather their opinions on the implemented manner of preparing master thesis and project. Questions were structured in two parts, general<sup>2</sup> and specific questions, which were concerned with the work in the workshop under the umbrella of the cooperation. In the specific part of the evaluation students stated their viewpoints on the level of integration of the workshop in master theses and the project as a whole. Comments were also made on the interaction between students within teams, on gaining new knowledge and better understanding of the subject, acquiring skills, on the representatives of local institutions, local experts, professors and members of mentoring committees, and on their effectiveness and attitude toward students.

The data were analyzed using mixed methods – quantitative and qualitative analysis. The quantitative method is used for measuring the level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the applied model, and to point to the nature of perceived changes as a result of learning, while the qualitative analysis aims at understanding students' perception of the learning process they were engaged in. The application of mixed method results in understanding and explaining capacity development (Čolić, 2014).

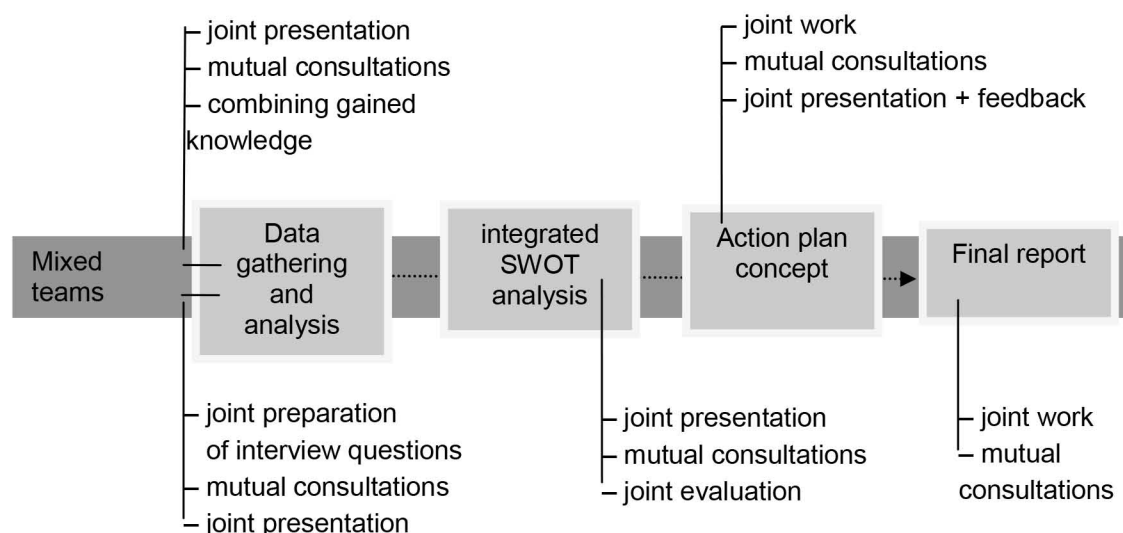
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<sup>2</sup> The general part is a standard questionnaire for evaluation of the master program containing: overall evaluation based on the quality of content; organization of work and comprehensibility of the subject matter and concepts; inclusion and encouragement of students (emphasizing conceptual understanding and critical thinking, interrelatedness of thematic units); cooperation between teachers and students; organization, content and evaluation (the importance of the chosen topic, selection of tasks that strengthen understanding, transparency and implementation of a fair grading procedures); evaluation of literature and commenting on tasks and the exam (challenges, duration, frequency, benefits and success in testing conceptual understanding).

## RESULTS ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The goal of the evaluation was to get feedback on the implemented learning method and results. The focus was on the estimation of students' interaction, gaining new knowledge and better understanding of the subject, acquiring skills, and on the effects of the cooperation with the representatives of local institutions and experts.

The main task of the workshop was to draft a concept for the action plan so that steps in recognizing the problem, as well as in defining the proposed solution equally determine positions of key mutual activities [fig.1].



[fig.1] Key joint student activities during the workshop

The activity of joint preparation of questions for interviewing local partners was evaluated as the most successful activity during the workshop by students. Activities of mutual consultations within a group that precede preliminary discussions, as well as activities of joint preparation and presentation of papers got a somewhat lower score. According to students' evaluation, the weakest cooperation within individual teams occurred with regard to the activities of joint work on a group task.

Evaluating the effects of the achieved collaboration through the prism of gaining new knowledge and better understanding of the subject, students gave the highest marks to the very selection of the subject and tasks that arose from it, which enabled them to gain deep understanding of the problem and insight into the right direction for finding adequate solutions. Provided information on the subject, attitude toward work in the workshop where a student learnt more than he or she would have if traditional teaching methods had been applied, regarding the importance of the cooperation with students of different education profile as an added value, all scored high. The lowest scores are concerned with attitudes toward greater understanding of the subject due to interaction with other students, better preparedness for next steps thanks to other students in the group, and gaining knowledge on an unfamiliar subject from students of different education profile.

While evaluating the overall work in the workshop, students drew attention to the following:

- "Organizing the workshop in the cooperation with TU Berlin was of great importance. Students had the opportunity to test and measure gained knowledge against the knowledge of students of other nations, cultures and different way of thinking, but also against the people who belong to practical field. Thus the organized workshop enabled us to exit closed rooms in which the work on master thesis would have been merely simulated."
- "I think that this kind of approach “promote” thinkers instead of people who reproduce knowledge."
- "Collaboration and group work helped me discover my potentials (in that kind of surrounding) and master the skill of balancing independent (individual) and team work."
- Cooperation with the representatives of local institutions (administration, public enterprises, civil sector and citizens) proved to be “an utmost positive experience” because it “enabled raising questions and explaining problems that appeared as unfamiliar in the course of team work”.
- "Cooperation with local experts from relevant institutions contributed to schoolwork being more closely connected to real life and reexamined from practical point of view."

Considering students' perception it can be concluded that the offered model for collaborative and practice oriented learning, realized through international cooperation on the example from contemporary practice enabled a positive and successful experience. Mainly used to accepting knowledge from a teacher, students also saw the results arising from the interaction with other students, which is important for gaining new knowledge and better understanding of the subject. They recognized a different work method in the workshop where they got opportunities to learn more than they would have if traditional teaching methods had been applied. They perceived the collaboration with students of different education profile as an added value. Tasks they worked on enabled them to get the insight into the essence of the subject, its applicability and better connection between theoretical knowledge and real problems.

Also, their perception of acquiring new communication skills, negotiation and active listening skills, participation in the creation of joint solutions within a group, as well as “mastering the skill of balancing individual and team work”, is likewise important. Besides collaboration between students, the cooperation with the representatives of local institutions and experts from practical field was recognized as an important element of the teaching process. It enabled transferring practical knowledge and experiences and clarifying dilemmas; it contributed to “schoolwork being more closely connected to real life and reexamined from practical point of view”, which gave students additional motivation. In the end, students recognized the importance of individual responsibility and the position of teachers as facilitators of the learning process.

## CONCLUSION

Through the process of preparing master theses for the Integrated Urbanism Master Program an arena for collaborative reflection on contemporary issues and knowledge, based on worldwide practice, important for the development of a new generation of urbanists and strengthening of the profession's capacities in Serbia was created. Above all, an essential change in preparing a master thesis, which redirects the process from mentor to subject matter, was adopted, enabling the development of

innovative teaching methodology. A mechanism for communication between all mentors, with the aim to choose a joint subject was created, establishing in the first place an understanding on the thematic framework and a dialogue on problem-centred questions within academia, and disseminating it afterwards to a wider professional public. Thus, the work directed toward mastering the subject through the due process created a stable basis for discussion and for finding solution. With the inclusion of a wide network of participants in drafting master theses, an arena for the communication and the process of collaborative and practice-oriented learning which implies mutual intellectual effort to understand, comprehend and create a solution, were created.

The orientation of the study program toward building a wide network of relevant participants in the process of preparing master theses as a platform for practice-oriented student work established a methodological approach of collaborative learning and created a platform for a quality professional dialogue. Besides that, the work on the same subject greatly contributed to the learning process and quality of master theses of students from different study programs and professional contexts. The cooperation with the foreign university on preparing the master theses, in general significantly enriched the learning process for both students and professors. Positive results achieved through the application of this model represent a foundation for its development in next cycles of the master thesis preparation and widening the network of participants. In this way the legitimacy of the curriculum was confirmed, and the trust of wider professional public in the quality of the study program and importance of the education of a specialized profile in the field of urban planning in a post-socialist context was increased.

The presented results reaffirm the need to apply and research potential teaching methods further, in order to establish effective interaction and practice and problem oriented classes. Collaborative and practice oriented learning, soundly created and implemented, contribute to better learning results, enable gaining experience through team and/or individual work on resolving real tasks and projects, all of which shapes students' ability to perceive problems and find solutions.

The aim of the applied model of preparing master thesis was to achieve a higher quality of papers relying on contemporary subject matter, concepts and methodologies in accordance with international and European policies, in the cooperation with external experts and representatives of local institutions, and collaboration with international students. The very comments of the interviewed students show that the program conceived on these foundations has an important role in further improvement of the quality of Integrated Urbanism Master Program since it contributes to achieving a higher level of academic knowledge, providing at the same time an opportunity to develop professional competences. The process of master thesis preparation through the collaboration and practice-oriented approach became a building stone for reform and adaptation of existing planning approach in post-socialist reality.

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