

EDITORIAL: FIXING FOUNDATIONS, BUILDING RESILIENCE, DEVELOPING CAPACITY – UKRAINIAN RECOVERY PLANNING AS A PART OF THE COMMON EUROPEAN PROJECT

Oleksandr Anisimov¹, Dominic Stead²

Ukraine faces some of the most extreme conditions to have been experienced in Europe since the Second World War, including the loss of human life, depopulation, forced migration, the destruction of settlements, natural and agricultural areas, and the lack of access to basic services (e.g. water, electricity). These extreme conditions require huge, concerted efforts to promote the country's recovery, as was also the case in Europe in the second half of the 1940s, when countries were rebuilt after being ravaged by war. At that time, new planning practices were developed in many countries in parallel with the establishment of new arrangements of the welfare state, including public housing, education and healthcare provision, on a scale unimaginable just one or two decades earlier.

While Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction have been discussed at length, little attention has so far been devoted to the implications for the role of spatial planning in the rebuilding process (with some minor exceptions: Maruniak et al., 2022; UN-Habitat Urban Recovery Framework Thematic Papers, forthcoming). The spatial dimension has largely been absent in political and expert debates, as though geography and the built environment hardly matter, which is certainly not the case.

Less than five years ago, pre-war territorial and administrative reforms reshaped the governance and land ownership landscape in Ukraine (Anisimov et al., 2024; Umland and Romanova, 2024). While these shifts have created new opportunities for locally led economic growth, they have also presented new problems and challenges for regional development, nature conservation, and land degradation (Anisimov et al., 2025). These reforms have also increased the dynamism of governance and land management. Understanding the spatial governance context is highly important for the EU and its member states, as Ukraine's accession to the EU is likely to pose new challenges in the implementation of directives and regulations with direct impact on land.

At the same time, it also signals new opportunities for spatially bound policies, such as nature preservation, agriculture, housing, energy policy, and the Green Deal overall, to work on a continental scale. Influenced by EU political and funding priorities, Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction debates have already begun to consider how they can be aligned with EU goals such as sustainable transition, stronger and more secure borders, social cohesion, climate adaptation, food security, societal resilience and strengthening democracy. To address the housing reconstruction topic, a symposium 'Rebuilding a Place to Call Home' was organised and hosted in 2023 by PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (Anisimov et al., 2023). Since then, the symposium has become an annual event organised by Kharkiv School of Architecture and other partners, providing an important opportunity for researchers and policy-makers to meet and exchange knowledge.

1 Aalto University, oleksandr.anisimov@aalto.fi, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7229-2290>

2 Aalto University, dominic.stead@aalto.fi, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8198-785X>

The third iteration of the symposium in 2024 was convened in Lviv around three main themes on the future of spatial planning: (i) governance for recovery; (ii) planning tools and learning; and (iii) knowledge in and for planning. Within the first theme, attention was focused on the mechanisms and specifics of the current spatial and regional management, and configurations of power that can enable or prevent effective recovery efforts in future. Under the second theme, researchers were invited to share first-hand experiences in designing and elaborating plans and digital tools. Within the third theme, attention was focused on formal education arrangements, extra-curricular studies and citizen-science approaches informing understanding and analysis of spatial planning and shaping proposals for future reforms. While some contributions addressed one of the specific themes mentioned above, others spanned several themes, providing intersectoral and cross-disciplinary insights.

Over 120 participants took part in the 2024 symposium (60 in Lviv, 60+ online), including four roundtable speakers, 12 panel members, and three invited external presenters. This special issue provides an edited collection of written contributions presented by the invited panel presenters to offer international readers a well-rounded overview of spatial planning in Ukraine, with a view to linking the findings to the broader European research context. Adding to understanding about planning and territorial development in the largest country in Europe is timely, particularly in relation to the future of EU cohesion and urban policies. In addition, the collection provides an opportunity for mutual reflection between Ukrainian scholars and their international counterparts, raising new issues and insights that may be overlooked in national debates.

On the theme of **governance for recovery**, Malchukova's contribution focuses on the needs of re-scaling and fine-grained recovery measures after occupation in Kherson Oblast (region). Delving into findings of a case study, she considers the local capacity and sharing of governance responsibilities, including options for combining multi-level governance and more direct governmental involvement in order to address deficiencies and setbacks in municipalities. The article by Ohorodnyk et al. examines Chernihiv Oblast with the aim of assessing the relevance of the existing planning framework for the local conditions, pointing to a need to review the 'napoleonic' symmetrical structure of the planning system, with every municipality adhering to the same scope and form of planning documents. Building on the analysis of governmental priorities and economic planning documents, Shevchenko and Kuzmunchuk develop a capacity assessment framework of Ukrainian cities under current conditions for integrative strategy development.

On the theme of **planning tools**, Kercuku et al. provide a critical look at the prospects of Mykolaiv municipality, focusing on the issues of governing the shrinking city. Their view is particularly directed towards a sober assessment of the underlying trends, backed by new data. Golubtsov offers an in-depth overview of the landscape planning instrument in Ukraine. Building on the wealth of practical experience, the paper highlights trail-blazing projects across the country, and major implications on the functional land-use plans, as well as the concrete examples of successful soil and nature conservation. Some of the most advanced spatial thinking and computing methods related to the resilience of urban systems are presented by Dale et al. on the cases of Kryvyi Rih and Nikopol, urban communes heavily impacted by the Russian invasion. They bring to the fore a condition in which an uptake of digital instruments is not only an obligation, but a powerful constructive force when combined with sufficient capacity and skills.

On the theme of **knowledge and learning**, the contribution by Lozynskyy et al. concentrates on analysing the variety of existing curricula in the broadly considered 'spatial planning'-related disciplines. Integrating findings from neighbouring countries' university systems, the paper showcases comparative findings to inform local debate. Schwartz et al. present a rich description of the activities of the bridging project between German and Ukrainian Universities, aiming to change and challenge the pre-existing notions and educational approaches. Their contribution reflects on the new ideas and concepts from the German planning system, the principles of the new and old Leipzig Charter and Integrated Urban Development. Kopacz-Gruzewska focuses her attention on opportunities for digital participation and citizen-based data-driven approaches for producing planning documents. This contribution reviews EU-level digital infrastructure requirements with the view of evaluating current development in Ukrainian legislation and offering pathways for future development.

Taken together, the nine contributions to this special issue help to inform the reader about contemporary spatial planning in Ukraine, and identify a number of key messages and conclusions for both academics and practitioners. Ten key messages and conclusions are presented below.

First, integrated planning represents a promising approach for addressing short-term recovery and long-term resilience. Recovery efforts should balance urgent needs (e.g. housing, infrastructure) with broader resilience and sustainability goals (see contributions from Dale et al, Kercuku et al., Schwartze et al., Malchykova, Ohorodnyk et al., Golubtsov).

Second, environmental integration and landscape planning appear to be gaining importance. For example, Golubtsov shows that landscape planning, influenced by German methodology, is now formally required in comprehensive plans. There is some variability in implementation, but when landscape and spatial planners collaborate early, environmental goals are more likely to be meaningfully integrated.

Third, digitalisation and geospatial data use are crucial but have been unevenly developed and used to date. The role of GIS, spatial data infrastructures, and digital tools is widely acknowledged and requires deeper integration in planning practice (see contributions from Dale et al, Kopacz-Gruzlewska, Shevchenko & Kuzmynchuk, Ohorodnyk et al., Golubtsov). GIS is a promising means to enhance landscape analysis and decision-making under time and resource constraints.

Fourth, local institutional capacity is often a limiting factor in policy implementation. There is often a mismatch between policy intent and implementation capacity, especially in hard-hit or de-occupied areas (see Malchykova, Ohorodnyk et al., Golubtsov, Lozynskyy et al.). The lack of awareness, training, and methodological clarity can hinder the effective rollout of newer planning instruments (e.g. landscape plans). Moreover, the dearth of pre-existing research in the sphere of planning in Ukraine heavily hampers the quality of current planning, limits the imagination and depth of solutions to urban development and/or shrinkage.

Fifth, effective planning requires coordination across actors and scales. Various contributions in this special issue highlight the need for inter-level and inter-sectoral coordination (e.g. Lozynskyy et al., Malchykova, Ohorodnyk et al., Golubtsov). Golubtsov suggests that early-stage coordination between planning teams can lead to more substantial integration of landscape objectives than late-stage stakeholder consultation.

Sixth, there are increasing calls for participation, transparency, and public engagement to be deepened. Within spatial planning, limited public involvement is a recurring concern among many contributors (see for example Dale et al, Schwartze et al., Kopacz-Gruzlewska, Malchykova, Ohorodnyk et al., Golubtsov). Low awareness and symbolic consultation can both undermine the impact of planning. In this regard, projects and tools have been piloted, requiring local political support and changes to the current practices from practitioners.

Seventh, efforts are needed to improve standardisation, monitoring, and methodological support in spatial planning. Contributions from Shevchenko & Kuzmynchuk, Ohorodnyk et al., and Golubtsov stress the need for standardised indicators, monitoring tools, and clear methodologies for urban resilience, spatial planning, and environmental objectives. Monitoring implementation against nature protection and landscape preservation goals is currently missing and should be a future research and policy priority.

Eighth, legal reform is crucial, but must be matched with training and resources. Legal progress has recently been made, but this was undermined by weak technical and human capacities and lack of institutional training (see, for example, Lozynskyy et al. Malchykova, Ohorodnyk et al. and Golubtsov). There is a need for project subsidies, training, standardisation of planning schemes and graphics, and platforms for sharing success stories to make spatial planning instruments credible and effective. Various authors have highlighted that the impact of reforms over the last four years has yet to unfold, so it is still too early to clearly see the new spatial planning system and its implications.

Ninth, bottom-up initiatives generally need supportive top-down frameworks. Various contributions conclude that hybrid governance models, mixing decentralised innovation and centralised support, are best suited to some of the current challenges (e.g. Lozynskyy et al., Schwartz et al., Malchykova, Ohorodnyk et al.). Golubtsov recommends national support mechanisms (e.g. clearer laws, methodology) in combination with local ownership of environmental goals. There is plenty of space for both innovation and supportive knowledge creation in designing a new generation of planning approaches and plans, pushing the boundaries of what authorities and professionals currently do.

Finally, the Ukrainian experience offers transferable lessons for post-conflict spatial policy. Ukraine's context, shaped by decentralisation, war-related disruption, and ongoing planning reform, generates valuable insights into post-conflict planning (see contributions by Malchykova, Shevchenko & Kuzmynchuk, Ohorodnyk et al., Golubtsov). Developing cost-effective resilience measures and inserting sustainability-oriented components in existing planning processes can guide other countries navigating similar reconstruction challenges. While many important decisions on the reconstruction of destroyed cities and districts are yet to be made, the necessity to build planning capacity towards recovery efforts before they begin in practice is present in most contributions. This supports an overarching crucial point for recovery efforts across the globe, often guided by unfounded market expectations – that policy goals without public governance capacity will hardly ever materialise.

Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our thanks to several individuals and organisations who helped to make this special issue possible:

Contributors of the symposium in addition to the authors of this special issue: David Evers, Hanna Bondar, Iryna Matsevko, Anton Kolomeytsev, Oleksandr Shevchenko, Yaryna Stepanyuk, Niina Rinne, Charlotte Mohn, Melanie Steinkemper, Fabio Bayro Kaiser, Mykola Tregub, Raine Mäntysalo, Sebastian Dembski and Taras Belyaev.

Olivier Sykes, Transactions Editor, for supporting the publication of this special issue.

Bertie Dockerill for proofreading and editing.

Olena Nefyodova and Natalia Lehka for interpretation services at the symposium.

The symposium sponsors: UN-Habitat Ukraine Urban Lab, Aalto University Department of Built Environment.

Thanks to the Ukrainian Catholic University and the Lviv National Academy of Arts for hosting the symposium.

References

- Anisimov, O., Fedoriv, P., Tkachenko, O., Lawson, J., & Buitelaar, E. (2023). Rebuilding a place to call home. Sharing knowledge for the recovery of Ukraine. The Hague: PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency.
- Anisimov, O., Smirnova, M., & Dulko, I. (2024). Establishment of a New Planning System in Ukraine: Institutional Change Between Europeanization and Post-Socialist Path Dependence. *Planning Theory and Practice*, 25(4).
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/14649357.2024.2414973>
- Anisimov, O., Vlasenko, Y., Stead, D., & Smirnova, M. (2025). Caught Up Between War, Localism and EU Land Policy Regulations. Unravelling Local Land Use Decision-Making in Ukraine. *European Journal of Spatial Development*, 22(3), 1–37. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16635072>
- Maruniak, E. O., Palekha, Y. M., & Kryshchuk, T. V. (2022). Planning of spatial development in times of war and reconstruction: a vision for Ukraine. *Ukrainian geographical journal*, 4, 13–22.
- Umland, A., & Romanova, V. (Eds.). (2024). Ukraine's Decentralization: Challenges and Implications of the Local Governance Reform after the Euromaidan Revolution. *ibidem*.