

Transforming City Regions: co-designing future planning education

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Abstract

This paper examines the implementation of a co-design approach in planning education, focusing on the M.Sc. Transforming City Regions (TCR) programme at RWTH Aachen University. Through workshops and interviews with focus groups, it explores how diverse students' expectations are aligned with institutional teaching and learning objectives and how interdisciplinary knowledge is effectively integrated into the curriculum. It describes and analyses the outcomes of these workshops and offers empirical insights that shed light on the future trajectory of interdisciplinary planning education and the challenges it faces. On this basis, the paper argues that fostering collaboration and feedback responsiveness facilitates continuous improvement in preparing students for the challenges of contemporary urban transformations.

Keywords

Transforming City Regions; Collaborative; Interdisciplinary; Integrative Urban Planning; European Education Pathways

1. Introduction

Contemporary urban development has reached an unprecedented scale and speed, posing profound global environmental and social challenges. Housing shortages, inadequate service provision, strained social infrastructure, and increased vulnerability to natural hazards and climate change are now pressing issues city regions face. Beyond the urban fabric, accelerated urbanisation contributes to biodiversity loss, land degradation and the need to transition away from fossil fuels worldwide. Balancing the demands of urban growth with environmental and social sustainability is, therefore, a critical imperative, requiring innovative and integrated urban planning and design approaches and pedagogies for the city regions of the future.

These challenges are also evident in the European context, as urbanisation continuously reshapes the European territory. On the one hand, the territory is undergoing significant changes from the dense urban cores of major metropolises to the sprawling suburbs and rural-urban fringes. On the other hand, the European dimension adds evolving layers of complexity as cities across the continent grapple with unique historical, cultural, and institutional contexts. This transformation requires a nuanced understanding of urban dynamics and sustainable development strategies tailored to Europe's diverse landscapes and communities.

In response to such social and spatial challenges, higher education institutions have a key role to play in educating capable young professionals who bring fresh ideas and approaches to address new challenges. As urbanisation accelerates and cities evolve, there is a growing need for skilled urban planners and designers who can navigate complex urban landscapes while integrating sustainability principles into their work. It is imperative that educational programmes equip students with the knowledge, skills, and interdisciplinary perspectives needed to address the multifaceted issues of contemporary urban development.

Against this background, the Institute for Urban Design and European Urbanism, part of the Faculty of Architecture at RWTH Aachen University (RWTH), introduced the master's degree Transforming City Regions (TCR) in October 2019 (TCR 2024). TCR is an innovative degree that consistently integrates different disciplines and planning methodologies to address European regions' complex challenges. Its core premise is rooted in the recognition of the growing territorial complexity and the interplay of structural and substantive priorities with foundations from different disciplines, underlying the need for integrative and conceptual thinking. Emphasising a project-based educational model, TCR not only provides graduates with up-to-date and in-depth knowledge, but also equips them with the tools and methods essential for tackling pressing issues in Europe's developing city regions.

Since its inception and launch, TCR has been committed to the continuous improvement of its teaching content, with a particular focus on internationalisation, interdisciplinarity, and sustainability. In pursuing this commitment, TCR has integrated key principles of RWTH's mission statement on teaching and learning. This approach emphasises, among other things, the recognition of students' diverse backgrounds and needs, the stimulation of research-led and practice-oriented teaching, and the promotion of student and staff mobility (RWTH 2023). In addition, TCR has joined the European Education Pathways exchange programme through the ENHANCE Alliance. This alliance comprises ten leading European universities that are pioneering a common curriculum for various pilot study programmes (ENHANCE 2023). This strategic involvement underlines TCR's commitment to promoting collaborative educational initiatives at an international level.

However, aligning students' expectations from diverse backgrounds with institutional teaching and learning objectives and integrating interdisciplinary knowledge into a well-defined curriculum framework is a multifaceted challenge. Therefore, this paper proposes a co-design approach to update and develop urban planning and design education curricula continuously. The co-design approach consists of three types of workshop formats. Firstly, feedback workshops were held with alumni and enrolled students to gather their experiences with specific and general teaching and learning objectives and the associated module workload. Secondly, semi-structured interviews were conducted with graduates to understand and compare their expectations before starting their studies with their achievements after graduation, i.e. learning outcomes. Thirdly, workshops were convened with the core teaching group to refine the specific and general learning and teaching objectives, revise the description of the graduate profile, and improve the links between modules. This paper describes and analyses the outcomes of these workshops and offers empirical insights that shed light on the future trajectory of interdisciplinary urban planning education and the challenges it faces.

2. Transforming City Regions

2.1 Curriculum framework

TCR's curriculum framework comprises core courses, compulsory electives courses, and a range of electives courses. This provides a comprehensive curriculum covering theoretical, practical, methodological, and empirical aspects—facilitated by an interdisciplinary and international faculty (Fig. 1).

The core courses of the programme focus on the fundamental dynamics of contemporary cities, the processes that shape their form and structure, and the design tools necessary for urban transformation. These courses, taught by a multidisciplinary teaching staff, provide students with the essential knowledge, tools, and methodologies to address the challenges of evolving European territories. The core curriculum, which emphasises awareness of different spatial aspects such as social, economic, and environmental factors, ensures that graduates are equipped with a solid foundation to understand and address complex urban issues with sensitivity to their multifaceted nature.

The programme offers compulsory elective courses designed to foster integrative and conceptual thinking in response to the increasing territorial complexity and the different priorities within the different structural and content-related areas. These courses cover a wide range of methodological, procedural, morphological, landscape architectural, ecological, legal,

and economic aspects. By exploring these diverse areas, students are encouraged to make connections between disciplines and develop a holistic understanding of urban challenges. Taught by experienced faculty members, these courses provide students with the flexibility to tailor their education to their interests and career goals while ensuring a comprehensive understanding of urban transformation processes.

In addition to the compulsory core and elective modules, the programme offers a range of elective courses supported by a multidisciplinary teaching staff. Like the compulsory elective, the elective courses also cover a wide range of aspects. By focusing on specific topics of interest, students have the opportunity to deepen their knowledge and skills in areas relevant to their career aspirations. These electives provide students with the flexibility to explore specialised areas of study while benefiting from the expertise of faculty members with diverse backgrounds and expertise. Through these courses, students can further refine their understanding of urban transformation processes and develop the necessary skills to effectively address contemporary urban challenges.

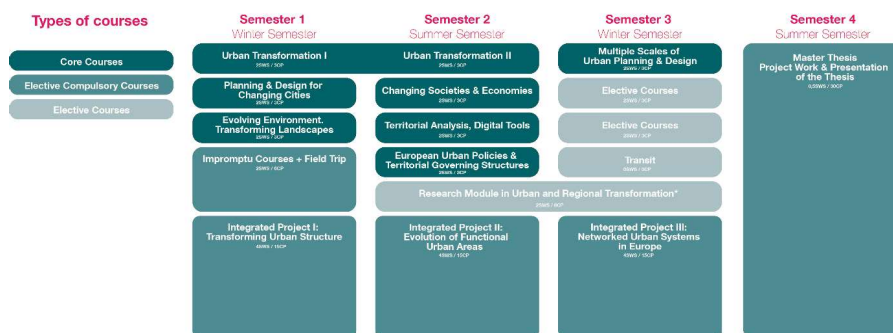


Fig. 1: RWTH's M.Sc. Transforming City Regions curriculum framework. Source: (Authors, 2024).

TCR adopts a multi-faceted approach to teaching, including lectures, tutorials, seminars and projects. Lectures provide specialist knowledge and methods on a weekly basis, while projects offer supervised opportunities to deepen understanding through practical design and planning tasks. Seminars, whether weekly or as compact events, explore complex issues and provide additional factual and methodological knowledge, encouraging critical thinking and discourse. At the heart of the curriculum are projects that integrate various subject areas with a focus on design and planning, allowing students to apply theoretical concepts to real-world scenarios. Assessment methods include written and oral examinations, term papers and presentations of urban design and planning concepts, ensuring that students not only acquire theoretical and methodological knowledge but also develop the presentation skills necessary to communicate visions for urban transformations to a broader audience.

2.2 Learning outcomes

Through TCR's curriculum framework, graduates acquire a robust set of skills, including analytical, conceptual and design skills (Fig. 2). They gain in-depth multidisciplinary knowledge that enables them to understand and manage complex urban problems and systems with a scientific and solution-oriented attitude. Equipped with advanced methodological tools and techniques, they are able to analyse changing urban and regional structures, conceptualise

scenarios for future change, and formulate strategies for sustainability and resilience. Graduates also excel at selecting, analysing, and interpreting spatial data, preparing them to tackle challenges at different scales in interdisciplinary teams. Their ability to communicate urban concepts, ideas and policies to a wider audience ensures that their solutions can be effectively communicated and implemented.

The analytical skills of graduates are sharpened through interdisciplinary training. They learn to describe, analyse, and interpret relationships and interdependencies within European territorial challenges. Equipped with analytical methods from different disciplines, they navigate complex spatial problems with a scientific and solution-oriented attitude. This training fosters practical decision-making skills that are applicable in all professional settings, including the private sector, public institutions, and civil society organisations. Graduates are also instilled with a sense of social responsibility, ensuring that their analytical skills are applied ethically, considering social, cultural, and environmental factors.

The conceptual skills are refined through the exploration of dynamic territorial processes and the conceptualisation of future scenarios. Real-world case studies provide a platform for the application of design and planning methods, considering different spatial aspects such as social, economic, and environmental factors. Graduates gain an in-depth understanding of European policies and governance structures, enabling them to interpret social and economic processes in urban and rural spaces. They can conceptualise strategies for sustainability, resilience, and risk mitigation, ensuring alignment with the evolving needs of European territories.

Moreover, the TCR curriculum emphasises the development of design skills in its graduates. They acquire skills in selecting, analysing, and interpreting spatial data, preparing them to tackle challenges at different scales in multidisciplinary teams. With responsibility for specific tasks, they solve complex spatial problems and present solutions effectively to the public. The final semester, dedicated to the final thesis, offers students the opportunity to showcase their individual skills through integrative projects, whether theoretical-conceptual or design-oriented. Throughout the programme, TCR highlights the importance of design and technical knowledge grounded in social, cultural, and environmental responsibility, ensuring that graduates are equipped to contribute meaningfully to the transformation of urban regions.

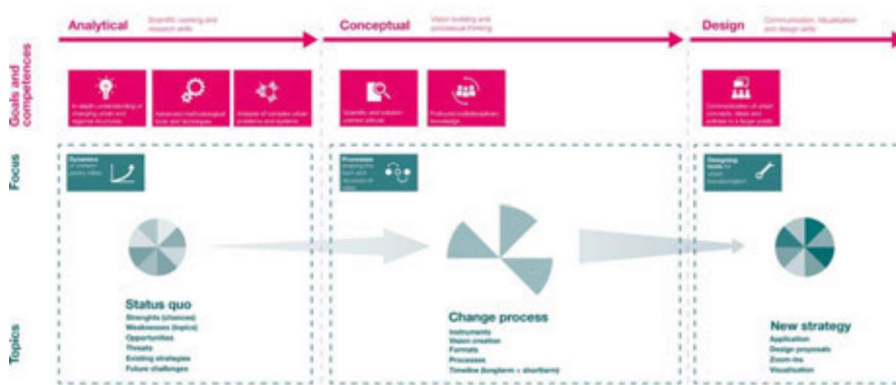


Fig. 2: RWTH's M.Sc. Transforming City Regions academic approach. Source: (Authors, 2024).

2.3 International and multidisciplinary setting

TCR welcomes students from a wide range of academic backgrounds concerned with spatial issues, including disciplines such as urban design, urban planning, architecture, spatial planning, landscape planning, geography, sociology, and cultural studies, among others. Taught entirely in English, the programme attracts students from all over the world, ensuring a rich cultural and disciplinary mix among its participants. Accordingly, the international and multidisciplinary nature of the programme is its main characteristic. On the one hand, this contributes to RWTH's internationalisation strategy and fosters an environment where interdisciplinary teamwork is highly valued and encouraged. On the other hand, it provides an environment that is personally and professionally enriching for students. In combination, TCR offers students valuable opportunities to work with peers from different cultural and academic backgrounds, broadening their perspectives and preparing them to tackle the complex challenges of urban change on a global scale (Fig. 3).

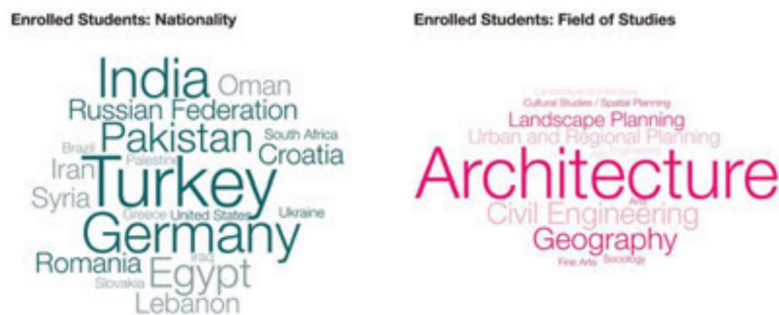


Fig. 3: RWTH's M.Sc. Transforming City Regions student composition. Source: (Authors, 2024).

3. Co-designing future planning education

The relevance of internationalisation and multidisciplinary environments in planning education has become increasingly important in addressing the complex challenges of contemporary urban development. As cities around the world grapple with issues such as housing shortages, environmental degradation, and social vulnerability, there is a growing need for innovative approaches and integrated pedagogies in urban planning and design education. One of the key challenges, however, is to match the expectations of students from diverse backgrounds with institutional teaching and learning objectives, on the one hand, while integrating interdisciplinary knowledge into a coherent curriculum framework, on the other hand. This multifaceted challenge raises a two-fold question. Firstly, of how diverse students' expectations can be aligned with institutional teaching and learning objectives. Secondly, of how interdisciplinary knowledge can be effectively integrated into a well-defined curriculum framework. To address this, the paper proposes a co-design approach involving workshops with alumni, enrolled students, and faculty to continuously refine and develop curricula for urban planning and design education.

3.1 The process

The co-design of a curriculum framework is a collaborative effort in which educators, students, administrators, and sometimes community members work together to build a comprehensive educational structure. This process begins by embracing the diverse perspectives and needs of all stakeholders and creating an environment where every voice is considered. In the context of higher education, it ensures not only a well-rounded curriculum framework but also one that is culturally sensitive and responsive to the community it serves. Through open dialogue and collective effort, the framework becomes a product of shared knowledge, bringing together the expertise and insights of multiple contributors. This approach encourages innovation and adaptability, as the latest educational trends, technological advances, and diverse pedagogical methodologies can be integrated.

Moreover, co-design fosters a sense of ownership and commitment among participants, making them active contributors to the educational landscape. This process cultivates a shared responsibility for the success of the curriculum and fosters a sense of unity and common purpose among stakeholders. Ultimately, co-designing a curriculum framework means taking a progressive and inclusive approach, which is essential for creating an educational roadmap that is versatile, relevant, and responsive to the diverse needs of learners and society.

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the TCR timeline, the co-design workshops, and the key role of each milestone in shaping the curriculum framework. It details the sequence of events and workshops, highlighting their essential contributions at two levels. Firstly, these collaborative workshops facilitated discussion between teachers, students, and administrators, encouraging diverse perspectives and innovative ideas. Secondly, each workshop and milestone provided valuable insights that guided the development of the framework, resulting in a synthesis of collective knowledge. Overall, the section highlights how the iterative process of workshops and milestones significantly influenced the overall design, resulting in a comprehensive curriculum that is finely tuned to meet diverse educational needs with cultural responsiveness and adaptability (Fig. 4).

The timeline of the TCR is marked by four key moments: the establishment of the Chair and Institute of Urban Design at RWTH in October 2018, the official launch of TCR in October 2019, the first feedback workshop in March 2022, and finally the integration of the TCR into the UNESCO Chair of Cultural Heritage and Urbanism in March 2023. Figure 5 illustrates the timeline of the TCR and maps three key workshops that were held with different focus groups to capture their perspectives. The first workshop with the first graduates took place in March 2022, followed by the second with enrolled students from all semesters in February 2023, and, lastly, the third with alumni and enrolled students in November 2024. The results helped to reflect on teaching and learning outcomes in a workshop with lecturers in April 2024.

These workshops provided valuable insights into the programme's effectiveness and highlighted areas for improvement. Feedback from enrolled students and alumni informed ongoing discussions on curriculum development, pedagogical approaches, and the integration of international perspectives. In particular, the integration of the TCR into the UNESCO Chair of Cultural Heritage and Urbanism emphasised the need to revise the curriculum framework, integrate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and strengthen internationalisation in line with UNESCO and RWTH guidelines.



Fig. 4: Co-designing the future of RWTH's M.Sc. Transforming City Regions. Source: (Authors, 2024).



Fig. 5: TCR timeline. Source: (Authors, 2024).

3.2 Alumni perspectives

The first feedback workshop, held in the winter term of 2022 with the first graduating class of TCR, aimed to assess the first impressions of alumni and identify critical issues early on. It provided an opportunity for alumni to reflect on their experiences during the programme and give feedback on various aspects, from the application process to postgraduate concerns. The timing of the workshop allowed alumni to assess the effectiveness of the programme in preparing them for life after graduation and to apply their learning experiences retrospectively.

During the feedback session, the alumni were divided into several themes, including pre-study expectations, courses and workload during the programme, and postgraduate issues. Special attention was given to the Integrated Projects, a key component of the programme, which were heavily weighted with 15 ECTS credits. Alumni were encouraged to record their feedback anonymously on a visual collaborative web platform and to discuss their opinions further during

the session. The workshop began by addressing the alumni's expectations before the start of the programme, followed by evaluations of the application process, the organisation and content of the courses during their studies, and their personal experiences. In addition, alumni were invited to discuss important issues for their life after graduation, and to give free feedback on all areas of the programme.

Initial findings from the workshop identified several areas for improvement. Alumni expressed concerns about the clarity of programme requirements, particularly for students from different disciplines. The level of stress during the programme, especially in relation to the Integrated Projects, was highlighted, as well as the desire for more support for academic work, the preparation of the Master's thesis and design skills. The lack of thematic coordination between courses, particularly in Integrated Projects, was criticised, as was the perceived overemphasis on urban design. Suggestions were also made to improve the programme's relevance to practice, such as increased collaboration with professionals and courses on potential careers. These findings led to short-term actions, including the establishment of a student support forum, the provision of resources and expanded collaborations, with plans for long-term improvements, including a review of the Integrated Projects strategy. A further workshop was planned to validate these findings from the perspective of subsequent classes.

3.3 Students' perspectives

The second workshop, held in February 2023, invited all students enrolled in TCR at that time. Building on the findings of the first workshop, the second workshop aimed to validate and further develop them, focusing on course weighting, course content and post-graduation perspectives. This workshop was informed by internal reflections on the content and structural orientation of the programme. Concrete questions, including true/false and multiple choice, were used to explore different topics, with an open discussion at the end to allow students to raise points of their choice. The interactive platform used allowed students to actively participate in discussions during the workshop and to anonymously share their opinions afterwards (Fig. 6). In total, about 30 people participated in at least one of the two activities.

The results of the second workshop echoed some of the findings of the first. Students expressed a desire for a stronger focus on scientific work and a clearer relationship between courses. They also emphasised the need for more electives to provide opportunities for specialisation and suggested collaboration with specific faculties of interest. In addition, students expressed a desire for more practical relevance in the programme through field trips and a focus on developing software skills. Career prospects were also discussed, with students identifying professions such as urban sociologist, urban designer, AI designer, smart city product manager or consultant, researcher, or architect. Many emphasised the importance of scientific work and software skills for their professional future, especially for those planning to work in Germany. General comments reiterated concerns about the application process for the programme, the workload for few ECTS, and the desire for more individual work.

The results of the second workshop largely confirmed those of the first, and led to ongoing internal reflection and action. These include a redistribution of ECTS and thematic emphases, particularly regarding the redesign of Integrated Projects and a greater emphasis on academic work. Tools are being developed to address criticisms of the pre- and post-study periods, with the aim of providing guidance and support. However, not all students' wishes can be met, such as the offer of a compulsory module in building and planning law for those interested in German design and planning practice. Nevertheless, there is a commitment to increase collaboration

within the university to provide students with greater flexibility in their elective and transit modules to ensure that the programme remains sustainable and adaptable to student needs.

Were your expectations concerning the focus of the program met?

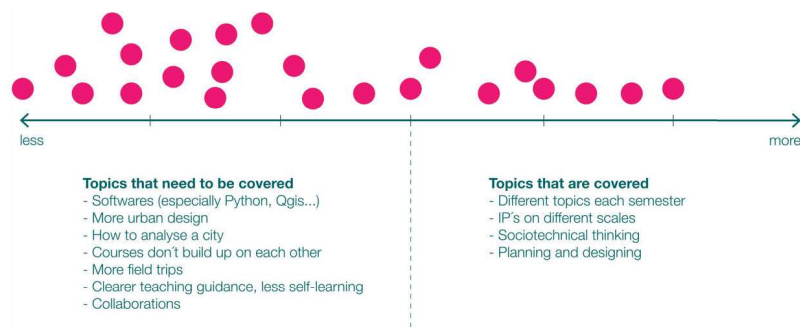


Fig. 6: TCR students' expectations mapped anonymously. Source: (Authors, 2024).

3.4 Mapping expectations and achievements

The third student workshop, offered as part of an impromptu course, gave students the opportunity to conduct semi-structured interviews with TCR alumni. The aim of the course was to illustrate the diverse backgrounds of TCR alumni and to compare their situations before and after their studies, i.e. mapping expectations and achievements. Through the semi-structured interviews, students gained valuable insights into the different experiences of alumni, allowing them to formulate questions related to their own study interests. In addition, participants learned about innovative visualisation and interviewing techniques and had the opportunity to network with TCR alumni, gaining valuable insights into their experiences and career paths.

Questions in the interviews focused mainly on expectations before starting the TCR programme and achievements after completing it. The results were ultimately used to create personas that anonymously represented the alumni (Fig. 7). These personas indicated the alumni's undergraduate background, whether their expectations were met and what they were able to achieve after completing the programme. These personas were then published on the Transforming City Regions website, giving potential applicants an insight into the diverse backgrounds of successful alumni, and helping them to understand the content of the programme through these personas. This initiative not only provided valuable information for prospective students, but also served as a platform for alumni to share their experiences and insights.

The findings from the interviews provided valuable feedback on the programme from an alumni perspective. Interestingly, ratings of expectations were generally lower than ratings of achievements, suggesting that TCR exceeded expected outcomes or needed to be better explained in advance (Fig. 8). Multidisciplinarity was consistently cited as an important achievement, indicating the programme's success in promoting a diversity of skills and perspectives among its graduates. However, practice orientation was rated the lowest overall, highlighting an area for potential improvement. In addition, TCR alumni emphasised the importance of programmes that provided hard skills, although this category was not rated

highly. Perceptions of research orientation varied among alumni, with those working in research-oriented positions rating the programme's skills more highly. This diversity of perspectives demonstrates the programme's ability to enable students to find their own areas of interest and develop their skills, regardless of their undergraduate background.

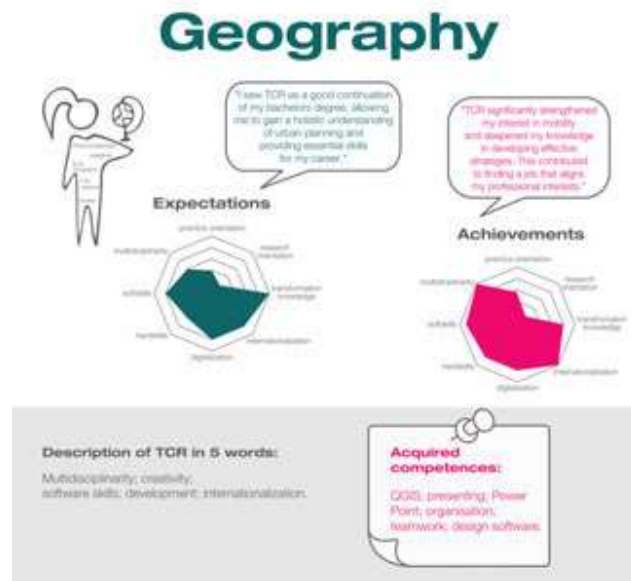


Fig. 7: TCR Persona. Source: (Westerkamp et al. 2023).

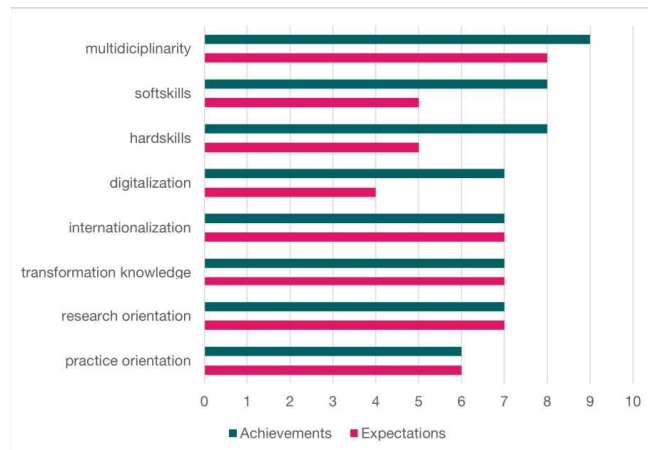


Fig. 8: Mapping expectations and achievements. Source: (Authors 2023).

3.5. Lectures' perspectives

The workshop with lectures was designed to address the alignment between the learning outcomes of individual courses and the overarching objectives of the programme. Core lecturers attended and were tasked with presenting their courses and discussing any issues they were facing. In addition, the results of student workshops were presented to provide insights into the challenges faced by students. Thematic consolidation of courses was a key focus, with examples given of courses that had already been coordinated to support student work. There was unanimous agreement that projects should be supported by core courses, highlighting the importance of coherence in the curriculum.

The workshop explored the challenges posed by the interdisciplinary nature of the programme, which brings together students from different thematic and cultural backgrounds. While students benefit from learning from each other, it becomes difficult to assess them on the same level and to set consistent requirements. Discussion centred on how to bring students to a common level that can be assessed consistently, particularly in areas such as design skills where student levels vary widely. A key outcome was the need for the programme application to be clearer about the requirements that applicants need to meet. This isn't to restrict the interdisciplinary nature of the course, but to give students a clearer understanding of the programme in advance, so that they can acquire the necessary skills before they start their studies. The workshop suggested the introduction of a self-assessment tool for applicants to reflect on their suitability, enabling them to understand what skills are needed for the programme.

The workshop emphasised the importance of regular meetings between lecturers to focus on the main objectives of the programme and to engage in thematic discussions. This ongoing dialogue would help to ensure that courses are aligned with the programme's objectives and that students receive consistent support and guidance. By addressing the challenges of interdisciplinary learning and providing clearer expectations for applicants, the programme can better equip students with the skills they need to succeed and foster a more cohesive learning environment.

4. Discussion

Contemporary urban development presents unprecedented challenges, including housing shortages, environmental degradation, and social vulnerability, and requires a responsive and adaptable planning education to address the complexities of urbanisation. To achieve this, future planning education should focus on multidisciplinary and internationalisation. The TCR programme at RWTH Aachen University exemplifies this approach, integrating different disciplines and methodologies to address the complex challenges of European urban regions. Accordingly, the core premise of the programme is the recognition of the growing territorial complexity and the interplay between structural and substantive priorities—emphasising the need for integrative and conceptual thinking. Furthermore, TCR recognises the critical need to reconcile urban growth with environmental and social sustainability and aims to equip students with the skills and knowledge needed to effectively address contemporary social and spatial issues. Through a project-based educational model, TCR provides graduates with up-to-date knowledge and essential tools to address pressing issues in Europe's developing urban regions.

However, aligning the expectations of students from diverse backgrounds with institutional teaching objectives, while integrating interdisciplinary knowledge into a well-defined curriculum, is a multifaceted challenge. TCR addresses this challenge through a co-design approach. Through feedback workshops with alumni and enrolled students, as well as interviews with graduates, the programme continuously refines its curriculum. This collaborative effort ensures that the curriculum remains relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of both students and the urban planning profession.

The co-design approach outlined in section 3 emphasises iteration and inclusivity. By involving different focus groups in the curriculum development process, TCR creates an environment where every voice is considered. This process encourages innovation, adaptability, and cultural sensitivity, resulting in a curriculum framework that reflects the collective knowledge and insights of multiple contributors. Through open dialogue and collaborative effort, TCR ensures that its educational roadmap remains diverse, relevant, and responsive to the diverse needs of learners and society.

Alumni, students, and lecturers provide valuable perspectives on the effectiveness of the TCR programme. Alumni highlighted concerns about programme clarity, workload, and thematic coordination, while students emphasised the need for a stronger focus on scientific work and practical relevance. Lecturers discussed the challenges of assessing students' interdisciplinary learning and suggested clearer programme expectations for applicants. Despite different perspectives, all agree on the importance of continuous improvement and alignment with the programme's objectives. The mapping of expectations and achievements, as discussed in section 3.4, provides insights into the effectiveness of the programme from the alumni perspective. While TCR has generally exceeded expectations, areas for improvement include practical relevance and clarity of programme requirements. These findings will inform ongoing curriculum development efforts to ensure that TCR remains responsive to student needs and industry demands. By addressing these shortcomings and continuing to engage various focus groups in the curriculum development process, TCR can further enhance its educational offering and make a meaningful contribution to the community it serves.

While the co-design approach offers valuable insights and improvements for educational planning, it also has several challenges and limitations. Resource constraints, lack of perspectives from practice, and the need for more time to assess programme quality and graduate market readiness are some of the shortcomings highlighted. Balancing expectations for a more scientific or practical education with the complexity of integrating interdisciplinary knowledge is another challenge. In addition, the high expectations of students and the time required to implement improvements can slow progress. Despite these challenges, TCR remains committed to addressing them and ensuring the continuous improvement of its educational offerings. By effectively utilising available resources, seeking input from industry experts, and transparently managing student expectations, TCR can mitigate these limitations and further strengthen its position as a leader in interdisciplinary urban planning education. Through ongoing collaboration and a commitment to innovation, TCR can continue to adapt and evolve, preparing students to navigate the complexities of contemporary urban development and make a positive contribution to the future of urban regions worldwide.

5. Conclusion

In addressing the main research question, the paper explored how the expectations of students from diverse backgrounds can be aligned with institutional teaching and learning objectives and

how interdisciplinary knowledge can be effectively integrated into a well-defined curriculum framework. Through a series of workshops and interviews, we found that a co-design approach involving focus groups such as alumni, enrolled students, and faculty is essential to achieve this alignment. By actively involving these groups in curriculum development, we ensure that educational programmes such as TCR at RWTH Aachen University meet the needs of a diverse student body while maintaining a coherent and comprehensive curriculum. The workshops showed that clarifying programme requirements, improving thematic coordination, and providing adequate support are crucial steps in aligning expectations and effectively integrating interdisciplinary knowledge. This collaborative effort not only ensures that students from diverse backgrounds are adequately prepared for the challenges of contemporary urban development, but also fosters a sense of ownership and commitment among groups, making them active contributors to the educational landscape.

The findings of Chapter 3 on the co-design process have significant implications for the challenges outlined in Chapter 1. As contemporary urban development faces unprecedented challenges, there is a growing need for innovative approaches and integrated pedagogies in urban planning and design education. The co-design approach outlined in this paper offers a promising solution to these challenges by fostering collaboration and responsiveness to stakeholder feedback. By continuously refining and developing curricula through workshops and stakeholder engagement, educational programmes can better prepare students to address the complexities of urban development and contribute meaningfully to the future of city regions. These findings highlight the importance of ongoing dialogue and collaboration between educators, students, and practitioners in shaping the future of planning education. By adopting a co-design approach, educational institutions can adapt to emerging trends and challenges in urban development and ensure that graduates are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to effectively address real-world issues.

The co-design approach discussed in this paper represents the first step in a larger effort to improve planning education at RWTH Aachen University and beyond. Collaboration with other universities and involvement in initiatives such as the ENHANCE University Alliance (ENHANCE 2023) and the UNESCO Chair in Cultural Heritage and Urbanism (UCCU 2024) are seen as potential game changers—enriching the educational experience and ensuring its relevance to contemporary urban challenges. By embracing this approach and actively engaging with focus groups, educational institutions can foster innovation, adaptability, and cultural sensitivity in urban planning education, ultimately preparing students to navigate the complexities of urban development and make a positive impact on the future of city regions worldwide. This collaborative, inclusive and iterative approach to curriculum development is critical to addressing the multifaceted challenges of contemporary urban development and ensuring that planning education remains responsive and relevant in an ever-changing world.

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