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AESOP Thematic Groups

Report of meeting with Thematic Group Coordinators during the AESOP Congress in Utrecht 2014

Notes Ela Bablik-Sutcliffe

On 10th of July, a brief meeting was held with the Thematic Group Coordinators that were available to attend. The coordinators of Planning & Complexity Thematic Group, Transportation Planning & Policy Thematic Group, Ethics Values & Planning Thematic Group, Resilience and Risks Mitigation Thematic Group, Public Spaces and Urban Cultures Thematic Group were present at the meeting.

The following points were highlighted and discussed:

1. Guidelines for Thematic Groups and Annual Reports

Guidelines for Thematic Groups (TGs) have been updated late 2013 and have been available at the AESOP Thematic Groups webpage since last November. This document can be accessed through here: <http://backend.aesop-planning.eu/uploads/thematic-groups/aesop-thematic-group-guidelines.pdf>

The guideline document lists rights and duties as well as responsibilities of TGs. Financial support that can be made available for TGs is described, and application form for funding is available on the webpage too.

Among the duties of TGs is to deliver an annual report to the AESOP Secretary General by the end of January every year. Regrettably very few TGs delivered their annual report this year while majority failed to do so. This is an important requirement and it must be noted that only the financial support application of those TGs that submitted their annual reports are accepted for consideration. TG coordinators are kindly reminded to submit their annual reports annually and on time.

2. Thematic Group Meetings Time Slots for Future Congresses

During the e-mail communications and meeting in 2013 last year, some of the TG Coordinators had raised the issue of inconvenient scheduling of TG meetings during AESOP congresses. Meetings of TGs are often scheduled in a way that they coincide with scientific sessions or other activities during the Congress. It is clear that the ideal way to plan these meetings is by allocating them a specific time slot, during which no other session or activity is planned. This would mean that each TG holds their meeting during that time slot parallel to each other.

Although this has been conveyed to Congress organisers, overwhelming attendance at annual AESOP Congresses prevented organisers from being able to clear a time slot completely reserved for TGs. Consequently, a different strategy is to be followed as discussed in the TG Coordinators meeting:

It is suggested to schedule TG meetings in the morning right before the opening session of our annual congresses.

Generally AESOP Council of Representatives (CoRep) meet right before the opening session of our congresses; however, it is intended to schedule CoRep meetings the day before the Congress with a view to reserve an hour and a half (duration of a regular session) for the TGs to hold their meetings, parallel to each other.

TG coordinators meeting is also considered important and desired to be held every year during the annual congress. Depending on the schedule of the congresses, these meetings can continue to be organised as lunch meetings or planned right before the parallel TG meetings session.

3. Thematic Groups and Congress Tracks

Some of the TGs relate very easily and directly with some of the well-established tracks that feature each year in our annual congresses (for example, the Transport Planning & Policy TG, or the Planning, Law and Property Rights TG). For some other TGs the link is not as straightforward. It is not possible to name each track every year in a way to clearly indicate an existing TG as this would leave no room for congress local organisers to plan the thematic content of the congress.

Nevertheless, it should be ensured that the members of each AESOP TG can associate themselves with one or more of the tracks in congresses. One way of providing this is to consider TG Coordinators or other members of the TGs to contribute as track-chairs. Once again, this may not always be possible in each case for each TG, but it can be considered when possible.

It is therefore important to ensure that when call for papers is prepared, Local Organising Committees ask relevant track chairs to make sure that track descriptions include parts/sentences that address related TGs and/or their keywords. That way, members of TGs can orient themselves and having a clear track for each TG also enables their community to meet during the sessions (in addition to the meeting of the TG).

The track chairs can also be asked by the Local Organising Committee to appoint session chairs from amongst the TG coordinators or members.

Ela Babalik-Sutcliffe, as the member of ExCo responsible for coordination with TGs, was asked to provide this link between the TGs and Congress Local Organising Committees (LOCs). Following this request, on the last day of the Congress in Utrecht, on 12th July, a short meeting was held to convey these points to the LOC of 2015 AESOP Congress to take place in Prague.

4. Visibility of Thematic Groups

Both AESOP and the Thematic Groups themselves are keen to increase the visibility and impact of TGs. The issue of each TG corresponding to a track in annual congresses, as described above, is one ways of sustaining visibility and strength of TGs. In addition, the following suggestions were made during the meeting:

A desk can be allocated during the congresses if TGs make a request.

TGs can make use of InPlanning (www.inplanning.eu), the publishing platform of AESOP. They can consider having their publications accessible via InPlanning. In addition, TGs can use InPlanning to launch their own journals, congress/meeting/workshop paper proceedings, etc.