AESOP Section

AESOP activities are back on track after the pandemic

Giancarlo Cotella and Donato Casavola

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The years of the Covid-19 pandemic have been tough for the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) and its community. The main catalyst of AESOP connectivity – its annual congress – was cancelled in 2020 and held remotely in 2021, depriving our members of the much-needed face-to-face interactions that have always contributed to the Association's advancement and growth.

Now, after a slow restart in 2022 and 2023, when people hesitantly attempted to go back to normal, we can now officially say that AESOP and its activities are back on track. The largest event in the history of the Association took place in Paris in July, hosting over 1200 delegates from 55 different countries. In the wake of this great success, it may be worth summarising the multiple activities of AESOP for interested *disP* readers, in the hope that more people will attend and benefit from AESOP events in the future.

The main events organised by AESOP

The AESOP Annual Congress and PhD workshop

Every year, usually in July, AESOP holds its annual congress, hosted by one of its member universities. Congresses are a wide platform of exchange in the fields of research, education and practice in planning, open to all. The 2024 AESOP Annual Congress was held in Paris from 8 to 12 July 2024[1]. Organised at SciencePO and titled 'GAME CHANGER? Planning for just and sustainable urban regions', the event hosted more than 200 sessions, panel discussions and other events and was enlivened by academics from all over the world discussing common research topics and opening up new perspectives (Figure 1).

As always, the days leading up to the annual congress were dedicated to the AESOP PhD workshop organised in Grenoble by the AESOP Young Academic Network and the Institut d'Urbanisme et de Géographie Alpine. After a selection process that saw over 80 applications, 35 doctoral students from all over the world worked together under the mentorship of outstanding scholars, sharing experiences and research topics (Figure 2).[2]

The next AESOP congress will take place in Istanbul at the Yildiz Technical University (7–11 July 2025) and will focus on 'Planning as a Transformative Action in an Age of Planetary Crisis'. It will be preceded by the AESOP PhD workshop (also held in Istanbul from 1–4 July) titled 'Planning for Equitable and Just Futures: Exploring Transformative Approaches'.

AESOP Heads of Schools Meeting

The Heads of Schools Meeting is an annual forum for planning education, usually held in spring and gathering delegates from AESOP member schools to discuss the main challenges for and advancements in planning education across Europe. The 2024 Heads of Schools Meeting took place in Venice in March 2024, enriched by the keynote lectures of professors Simin Davoudi, Nicola Tollin and Maria Attard Figure 3).[3] The event hosted four panel discussions in which participants were called upon to discuss the following topics:

1. The role of interdisciplinarity;
2. Planning practices between politics and technology;
3. Proactive or reactive planning?
4. Improving the quality of planning programmes in Europe.

The 2025 Heads of Schools will be held at the University of Liverpool on 11–14 March and will focus on 'Planning Education for Changing and Challenging Times'.

AESOP Lecture Series

The Lecture Series was initiated in 2012 as part of the AESOP Silver Jubilee celebrations. Since then, a series of lectures has been regularly organised with prominent scholars and practitioners.[4] The lectures aim at attracting not only the local academic community but also a wider audience of politicians, community leaders and organisations, businesses and the media, to promote planning as a discipline that can contribute to urban justice and environmental quality, help find new tools of urban governance and function as an effective mediator between

Fig. 1: AESOP 2024 Annual Congress, Paris.
(Source: AESOP website)

Fig. 2: AESOP 2024 PhD workshop, Grenoble.
(Source: AESOP website)

Fig. 3: 2024 AESOP Heads of Schools Meeting, Venice.
(Source: AESOP website)

all the stakeholders involved. The sessions are recorded and, after editing, uploaded to the AESOP website and made available to the entire AESOP Community.[5]

Two new AESOP lectures have been recently approved, both to be held in the autumn of 2024:

• The political geography of colonisation – space and territory in Israel/Palestine. Speaker: Oren Yiftachel – Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. Conveners: Marco Allegra & Simone Tulumello, Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa

• Can we re-unite urban planning practice with epidemiological research to foster active longevity by design? Speaker: Prof. Chris Webster, HKU and UCL (hon.). Convener: Andrea Frank, University of Birmingham

AESOP Awards

Each year, AESOP issues each year three awards: (i) the Excellence in Teaching Award, (ii) the Best Published Paper Award and (iii) the Best Congress Paper Award.

The *Excellence in Teaching Award* encourages planning schools to apply new pedagogical approaches, technologies and learning techniques in ways that enhance the theories, knowledge and skills necessary for good planning practice. It provides an important opportunity to disseminate new and high-quality teaching practices among European planning schools.[6] Through this award, AESOP celebrates and disseminates innovative practices in teaching in its Member Schools. The broad aim of the prize is to stimulate the development of planning courses or programmes to better prepare students for their forthcoming practice, to further educate practitioners, and to promote the development of a critical perspective. Ultimately, the prize seeks to promote and encourage planning schools to innovate in ways that enhance the knowledge and skills necessary to respond to current and emerging global challenges in planning.

This year AESOP received 14 entries from AESOP member schools across a wide geographical range evidencing the ever-growing strength and quality of planning education in Europe. Winners of the 2024 AESOP Prize for Excellence in Teaching are Emilia Román López and Rafael Córdoba Hernández (Department of Urban and Territorial Planning at Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Spain) for the module 'The City and the Environment'. Two additional submissions were close runners-up and were awarded commendations: i) Fabiano Lemes de Oliveira (School of Architecture, Urban Planning, Construction Engineering (AUIC), Politecnico di Milano, Italy) for the module 'Urban and Environmental Design Studio' and ii) Elin Bórrud and Anja Standal (Centre for integrated and transdisciplinary teaching in planning (SITRAP) at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Norway) for the module 'Building competence of participation in planning'.

Initiated in 1995, the *Best Published Paper Award* celebrates the work of scholars and professionals in the planning field publishing in high-standard planning journals. It also serves to bring to the attention of planning academics and other interested parties across Europe the range of academic work being undertaken in the spatial planning field and to exchange literature between different national academic cultures. Annually, the Editorial Boards of more than 20 European planning journals[7] are invited to nominate the best papers published in their journal for the prize. From the articles nominated in 2024, the AESOP's Best Published Paper Committee awarded the honour to the paper 'The role of colonial pasts in shaping climate futures: Adaptive capacity in Georgetown, Guyana', published in Habitat International and authored by Stacy-Ann Robinson, Allison Douma, Tiffany Poore, and Kabir Singh, from the Department of Environmental Studies, Colby College, United States.[8]

The *Best Congress Paper Award* has been running as part of the AESOP congresses since 2005. It aims to honour the most relevant contribution presented to the annual congress, following a set of criteria: relevance to current debates on the chosen topic, clarity of argumentation, originality of the approach and of the presented ideas, methodological quality, quality of presentation and clarity of expression. Among the 135 contributions self-nominated by the authors, ten works were selected by the congress track chairs and then reviewed by the Best Congress Paper Award Committee. Following this process, the 2024 Best Congress Paper Award was attributed to Pieterjan Schraepen and Joris Voets, Ghent University, authors of the paper 'How to deal with conflictual central policy incentives? Regional governance dynamics in Flanders unpacked' (presented in Track 6: Governance – Planning and democracy). Furthermore, the Committee gave an honorary mention to the paper 'Planning cultures in exchange – ev-

idence derived from a cross-border simulation game' authored by Karina Pallagst, RPTU Kaiserslautern-Landau (presented in Track 4: Borders – Transboundary planning for sustainability and cohesion).

AESOP Quality Recognition and the Core Curriculum

The AESOP Quality Recognition (QR)[9] is a programme aimed at continual quality support based on voluntary grounds, peer support and sharing of best practices for improving teaching and pedagogy to safeguard the quality of planning education reflecting the changing requirements of AESOP member schools. AESOP QR has evolved since the institution in 2009 and complements the ongoing activities of AESOP in promoting excellence in planning education, in line with the elements included in the AESOP Core Curriculum[10] (Frank and Koll-Schretzenmayr, 2024).

The process of AESOP QR goes beyond the mere evaluation of planning programmes. It builds on an ethic of peer learning and engagement, reflexivity, creativity, deliberation and openness to trigger change in response to societal challenges. It is an opportunity for member schools to jointly strive for excellence in planning education. In applying for quality recognition, the main benefits for applicants comprise, inter alia, (i) opportunities to engage in critical dialogue with members of the AESOP Excellence in Education Board concerning the programme's curriculum identity, contents, pedagogies, etc., (ii) champion best practices within the AESOP community, and (iii) foster an ethic of quality enhancement among the programme's staff.

Transactions of the Association of European Schools of Planning

Transactions of the Association of European Schools of Planning is an international peer-reviewed open-access journal, produced and owned by AESOP, the Association of European Schools of Planning.[11] The journal aims to promote excellence in planning education and research, a key goal for AESOP. It supports and disseminates scholarly work of the highest quality, covering the whole spectrum of the planning discipline, including, but not limited to, that produced by AESOP members or participants in AESOP events and activities. By expanding the already rich opportunities for networking and scholarly dialogue that AESOP offers via annual congresses, thematic group activities and specialist meetings, Transactions serves as a platform for the international planning community to share research, innovative practices and provocative thoughts among peers.

Indexed in SCOPUS since 2022, Transactions welcomes submissions from all scholars who would like to share their research in the planning discipline. It welcomes unsolicited contributions that present the findings of original research in planning and related fields of academic enquiry as well as special issues and collections. It also welcomes 'think pieces' and policy-focused articles that address diverse contemporary themes in planning and sustainable urban and regional development.

AESOP Thematic Groups

AESOP Thematic Groups are working groups on specific themes established to create more effective platforms for debate and discussion among AESOP members. There are presently over 20 thematic groups, some very active, others less so, which organise seminars, meetings, special sessions and roundtables independently throughout the year.[12] AESOP is always ready to fine-tune the initiatives of the various thematic groups and is open to making room for the formation of new groups. In 2024, two new thematic groups were formed following approval by the AESOP Committee of Representatives, focusing on 'Small Towns' and 'Cities and Urbanism Beyond Growth'.

AESOP Young Academics Network

The AESOP Young Academics (YA) Network is a structured branch of AESOP that encourages the active participation and exchange of academic work from doctoral students to post-docs and those starting in academic positions.[13] The YA Network provides a platform through which the academic leaders of tomorrow can share ideas in an open and inclusive environment, challenging and supporting one another in the attainment of superior academic output. The young academics network has two core aims i) make AESOP a challenging environment for young academics; ii) open up the structure of AESOP to better encourage young academics.

YA Network activities are many and, in line with AESOP activities, increasing. The YA Network organises its annual YA Conference in spring and co-organises together with AESOP the PhD workshop traditionally held before the annual AESOP conference. Among the projects carried out by the YA Network, of particular relevance are the YA Blog, the Booklet Series, and the YA Regional Ambassadors programme. Importantly, the YA Network also founded *PlaNext – Next Generation Planning*, an international peer-reviewed open-access e-journal, to provide prospective authors with an opportunity to contribute their ideas to international planning debates as well as to make their research available to the wider planning audience. [14]

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Notes

1 More information is available at: https://aesop-planning.eu/paris
2 More information is available at: https://aesop-planning.eu/phd-workshop-grenoble
3 More information is available at: https://aesop-planning.eu/hos-venice
4 More information is available at: https://aesop-planning.eu/activities/events/lecture-series?types[0]=1
5 Most videos are available here: https://aesop-planning.eu/resources/videos
6 More information is available here: https://aesop-planning.eu/activities/awards/excellence-in-teaching-award
7 See the full list of the journals here: https://aesop-planning.eu/activities/awards/best-published-paper-award?types[0]=1
8 The paper is available here: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0197397523001625
9 More information is available here: https://aesop-planning.eu/activities/quality-recognition
10 The New AESOP Core Curriculum represents an updated version of the Core Requirements for a high-quality European Planning Education, issued in 1995 as part of AESOP's statement on European Planning Education. More information is available here: https://aesop-planning.eu/activities/core-curriculum
11 The official website of the journal is accessible here: https://transactions-journal.aesop-planning.eu/index.php/TrAESOP/
12 For a clear picture of all Thematic Groups and their activities see: https://aesop-planning.eu/thematic-groups
13 More information is available here: https://aesop-youngacademics.net
14 The PlaNext – Next Generation Planning website is accessible here: https://journals.aesop-planning.eu/index.php/planext

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