



## Eventful years – a look back at the activities of the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) over the last two years

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## AESOP Section

### *Eventful years – a look back at the activities of the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) over the last two years*

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#### *Introduction*

Since 2022, despite global crises such as the COVID pandemic and the wars in Ukraine and Israel/Palestine, the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) has continued its mission to promote cooperation and exchange in the academic planning community. In recent years, the focus has been on AESOP's international congresses, PhD workshops, numerous projects and quality assurance programmes. This review provides an insight into the activities of the past two years. Fortunately, AESOP is very active with its member schools and I apologise for not being able to mention all the activities.

#### *A success story – AESOP congresses*

The effects of the COVID pandemic have also had a major impact on the AESOP planning community. Between 2020 and 2022, many events had to be held online or postponed, but in 2022 the situation gradually began to normalise. As a reminder, the last regular congress was held in Venice in 2019 with around 900 participants, the 2020 congress had to be cancelled and an online conference was held in 2021 thanks to the commitment of the Faculty of Architecture, Gdańsk University of Technology in Poland.

#### *AESOP Congress 2022 in Tartu, Estonia*

The AESOP 2022 Annual Congress took place in Tartu, for the first time ever in Estonia and for the first time ever in a Baltic country!

The congress was organised by the Estonian University of Life Sciences, the University of Tartu, Tallinn University, the Tallinn University of Technology, the Estonian Academy of Arts, the Estonian Association of Spatial Planners, and Publicon PCO.

The theme of the congress was "Space for Species: Redefining Spatial Justice" and the 15 tracks were partly held online. The aftermath of COVID was still being felt. The congress was

overshadowed by the Russian attack on Ukraine in February 2022, and at one point there was even talk of cancelling the congress so close to the Russian border. However, together with the Local Organizing Committee (LOC), the Executive Committee (EXCO) decided to hold the congress. AESOP also reacted immediately to this act of aggression with a statement, which the EXCO published on the AESOP website. Many colleagues from the AESOP community took the opportunity to endorse the statement to express their joint rejection of the war and solidarity with Ukraine, especially with our Ukrainian planner colleagues. It was also decided to allow Ukrainian schools to become members of AESOP free of charge.

#### *AESOP Congress 2023 in Łódź, Poland*

The theme of the 2023 congress in Łódź, Poland, was 'Integrated planning in a world of turbulence'. Influenced by the ongoing war in Ukraine, the focus was on urban resilience and the role of planning in times of crisis. Seventeen sessions discussed how to address the complex challenges of our time, emphasising the need to move away from conventional norms and shift the paradigm towards adaptive and innovative strategies that respond to today's uncertainties. The 2023 Congress again attracted around 600 participants and provided a platform to discuss the importance of planning in uncertain geopolitical contexts. Łódź, a city with a history of reconstruction and transformation, served as an ideal host for these debates.

#### *AESOP Congress 2024 in Paris, France*

In 2024, the AESOP Congress took place in Paris just before the Olympic Games. The congress theme was 'GAME CHANGER? Planning for equitable and sustainable urban regions' and it questioned, among other things, the global narrative of major events and internationalisation strategies, especially when it comes to ecological change. The answer to the question of what constitutes a real 'game-

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changer' was at the heart of the congress, which was attended by around 1200 colleagues! This congress set a record not only in terms of participants, but also in terms of the various events that took place during the congress. There were 18 thematic tracks, 17 special sessions (partly within the tracks), 8 special evening events and 12 brown bag lunch seminars focusing on French issues.

### *Investing in the academic future – AESOP PhD workshops*

The annual AESOP PhD workshops provide a platform for young researchers to present their work, receive feedback from experienced academics and network within the international planning community. These workshops have become even more important as they promote dialogue between generations of planners in a world marked by crises and are held in close collaboration with the AESOP Young Academics (YA)<sup>1</sup>. The AESOP YA network is an independent organisation within AESOP that promotes the active participation and exchange of academic work by PhD students, post-docs and early career professionals.

### *PhD Workshop 2022 in Narva, Estonia*

This workshop entitled Space for (all) Species: creative use of data to understand the role of planning took place under difficult conditions in the city of Narva, right on the border with Russia.

### *PhD Workshop 2023 in Poznań, Poland*

The PhD Workshop 2023 took place at the Morasko University Campus under the motto 'From challenges to response – Integrated planning approaches in turbulent times.

### *PhD Workshop Grenoble, France 2024*

The PhD workshop in Grenoble with the theme 'Ahead of the game – reversibility, frugality and car in the context of urban transitions. Grenoble, a former host city of the Olympic Games with a long history of close links between citizens' movements and local government, is the ideal place to discuss the planning of reversibility, frugality and care.

### *Exchanging knowledge and innovation – AESOP Heads of Schools Meetings (HOS)*

The Heads of Schools Meetings (HOS), which have been held annually since 2006, are a platform for exchange between the heads of European planning faculties and schools. These meetings provide an opportunity to discuss current challenges in planning education and to promote cooperation between universities. Due to the pandemic, these meetings could only take place on a limited scale and in a virtual space.

### *Heads of Schools Meeting 2022 Tirana, Albania*

This 17th HOS Meeting was dominated by the pandemic and only a few colleagues were able to attend in person. Universities were faced with major challenges in 2020-2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. With hopes for the resumption of face-to-face teaching, perspectives and challenges of post-pandemic education planning were discussed.

### *Heads of Schools Meeting 2023 Bratislava, Slovak Republic*

Hoping for a quick end to the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine and in solidarity with planner colleagues from Ukrainian universities, the Council of Representatives (COREP) in Tartu decided in July 2020 to hold HOS 2023 at the National University "Yury Kondratyuk Poltava Polytechnic" in Ukraine. However, this hope did not materialise and, at the time of writing in September 2024, there is still no end in sight to Russia's attack on Ukraine. In this situation, the Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava, which also organised the first HOS in 2006, thankfully agreed to host the meeting. The title of the HOS was 'Future Planning and Development within Emergencies' and was centred around the war in Ukraine.

### *Heads of Schools Meeting 2024 Venice, Italy*

The HOS 2024 was held in Venice, a city that is unique in terms of architecture and urban planning. The title of this HOS was 'Planning education for recovery and resilience'. It discussed how diverse and dramatic emergencies

(economic and financial, social, environmental and climatic, health and geopolitical) require critical thinking about the nature and goals of urban planning and how European planning schools can provide future planning practitioners with comprehensive knowledge and skills for planning and programming for more resilient cities.

### *Improving the quality in planning education – the Core Curriculum and the AESOP Quality Recognition (QR) Programme*

The Core Curriculum is a key AESOP project aimed at establishing recommendations for planning education in Europe. The first Core Curriculum was developed in 1995. Since 2020, AESOP has been working intensively to further develop this curriculum and to ensure that it meets current challenges and developments in planning. Thanks to the intensive work of the AESOP Working Group on the Curriculum of Planning Education, the new Core Curriculum was adopted at COREP in Venice in the spring of 2024. This was reported in DISP 236. Please read the full version of the new Core Curriculum on the AESOP website.

AESOP's QR programme is another key element in the efforts to ensure the quality of planning education in Europe. Since its inception, the QR programme has helped universities and planning departments to maintain and continuously improve their educational programmes to a high standard. Many universities have already been recognised for their excellence in planning education. As of 2022, the following programmes:

- MSc Programme in Urban and Regional Planning, Faculty of Landscape and Society, Norwegian University of Life Sciences
- MSc Programme in City and Regional Planning, School of Architecture, Polytechnic University of Madrid
- MSc Programme in Architecture and Urbanism – Spatial Planning Module, Faculty of Architecture, Czech Technical University in Prague,
- Bachelor programme in Urban and Regional Planning, Faculty of Architecture, Department of City and Regional Planning, Yıldız Technical University
- MSc Programme in Architecture – Specialisation in Urbanism, Lisbon School of Architecture, University of Lisbon
- MSc Programme in Regional Planning, Faculty of Architecture, Istanbul Technical University

This service is exclusively available to AESOP member schools. More information is available on the AESOP website.

### *AESOP Lecture Series*

Since 2012, the AESOP Lecture Series has provided a platform for outstanding lectures by leading experts in planning and related disciplines. These lectures, which take place both online and in person, cover a wide range of topics. An AESOP Lecture can be organised by a member school. The idea is to reach out not only to the local academic community, but also to a wider audience of politicians, community leaders and organisations, businesses and the media to promote planning as a discipline. The nineteenth lecture is entitled 'Innovative property for innovative land policy and urban design' and took place at RWTH Aachen University.

### *Europe in the global planning context – Global Planning Education Association Network (GPEAN)*

AESOP is also an active member of the Global Planning Education Association Network (GPEAN), which was founded following the first World Congress of Planning Schools in Shanghai in 2001. A central aim of the network is to improve the quality of planning education and the visibility of the planning profession by placing spatial planning and planning education at the forefront of the global agenda. The sixth World Congress of Planning Schools will take place in Helsinki, Finland, in July 2026, and for the first time in Europe! The congress, with the theme 'Peripheral Visions: Rethinking Planning', will be jointly organised by AESOP member schools Aalto University, the University of Helsinki and the University of Tampere. I invite you to make a note in your diary for this extraordinary event!

### *Appointment of Professor Simin Davoudi as an Honorary Member*

During the 2024 Annual Congress in Paris at Sciences Po University, Professor Simin Davoudi was officially appointed an Honorary Member of AESOP. Honorary membership is awarded to individuals who have made a significant contribution to the discipline of planning

in Europe in general and to AESOP in particular. Her significant work and commitment to promoting sustainable and inclusive planning practices has inspired many generations of planners and academics in Europe and beyond.

She joins Prof Klaus R. Kunzmann, Prof Andreas Faludi, Prof Louis Albrechts, Prof Rachelle Alterman, Prof Willem Salet, Prof Gerhard Schimak and Prof Patsy Healey as the eighth recipient of the award.

Patsy Healey sadly passed away on 7 March 2024, leaving a huge gap in the world of planning education and research. It is with great regret that we have had to say goodbye to Patsy Healey, an outstanding personality in the field of planning, a founding member of AESOP and President in the period 1994–1996.

### *Conclusion*

Since 2022, AESOP has successfully continued its mission of promoting and supporting spatial planning education despite the global crisis. With a variety of initiatives, congresses, workshops and programmes, AESOP remains a central platform for the exchange of knowledge and ideas in the planning community. Despite the war in Ukraine and the ongoing conflicts in Israel/Palestine, AESOP has expressed its solidarity with affected members and institutions and has sought to maintain dialogue and cooperation in difficult times.

AESOP's main tasks of in the coming years will continue to be the

- Creating frameworks internally and externally – links between AESOP member schools, their staff and students, between AESOP and European as well as global academic associations and institutions, and leading professional organisations in the field of planning – to protect the discipline and the autonomy and development of the profession, while being open to interdisciplinarity, flexible learning and career pathways, exchange and collaboration in research and teaching across different participating and related disciplines,

- To support AESOP member schools in developing their own unique profiles, strategies and networks in the context of their own universities and specific planning cultures and systems, and in building bridges, while respecting the diversity of institutional profiles.

- Supporting and working closely with the AESOP YA and involving the YA in AESOP networks and activities.

The most important thing for AESOP in the near future will continue to be the willingness of the entire community to participate and engage in a friendly and collegial atmosphere. Underpinned by mutual understanding, acceptance of different views and mutual respect. This is the basis for the attractiveness of AESOP and co-operation between planning schools in a global context.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of the EXCO from previous years for their great co-operation. These dedicated persons, together with many other colleagues from our member schools, have been responsible in helping AESOP to fulfil its position as the leading association of European planning schools.

I would be delighted to welcome you to one of the next AESOP events! Perhaps at the

- AESOP 2025 Heads of Schools Meeting in Liverpool, March 11–14, 2025 or at the
- AESOP 2025 Congress in Istanbul, July 7–11, 2025.

More information on all AESOP activities can be found at <https://aesop-planning.eu/>.

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### *Notes*

- 1 <https://aesop-youngacademics.net/>