

Global Planning Education Associations Network (GPEAN) Governing Council held a number of meetings during the World Planning Schools Congress (WPSC) in July 2016 in Rio de Janeiro. These meetings provided a platform for discussing current and future activities of GPEAN. Below are the highlights of the meeting and discussions, which are also updated with more recent events (such as the Habitat III meeting) that took place after the Rio de Janeiro meeting, and decisions made via recent e-mail correspondence.

### **Assessment of the WPSC 2016**

The number of participants were more than 530 as of the final day of the congress. This number was 430 in Perth in the 2011 WPSC. Therefore, it looks like 500 attendants is a possible projection for future.

However, more participation could have been expected for this congress. There were some exogenous reasons, such as the *zika* virus. Plus, some presenters did not know the presentation day until too close to the congress – that meant that when they knew, it was too expensive to buy tickets. Some funding bodies require the programme to be announced/printed in detail before giving travel funds to participants. Therefore, the future congress guidelines should include certain “milestones” such as the above announcements, and these should be met by the Local Organising Committee (LOC).

The congress programme was also unreliable. The unavailability of credit card payment (this was to do with the country and not with the LOC) created chaos, in terms of lack of information on who was attending the congress, and hence the unreliability of the sessions programme. As a way of ensuring authors to be more committed to attend the event, some conferences require a fee to be paid during abstract submission – but that could not have been possible due to credit card payment problem. (This may not be a desirable approach for WPSCs anyway, considering the intention to attract as many attendants from as many different associations as possible.)

In addition, there were problems with the way the congress was organised. There were too many tracks. Number of tracks is an issue to note when working on future congress guidelines. This was a problem with the Perth WPSC too. This creates too many divisions, and people do not meet each other, missing one of the core purposes of a congress.

Many colleagues stated that reaching a contact person and getting replies to questions/e-mails have been difficult. That service was poorly managed. This issue, i.e. the LOC identifying a committed contact person, should also go into the congress guidelines.

It has also been a problem to have sessions in various different buildings. Attendees complained that they could not find rooms easily. Signs and assistance to orient people were not sufficient. In addition, there was not a hard copy of the programme, making it difficult to follow the programme and sessions. The app sometimes worked and sometimes did not. The approach in programme dissemination should be something inbetween digital technology and printed copies. As a result, organisational issues *during* the event are also extremely important.

GPEAN should play a more prominent role in the organization of these congresses. It is suggested by ACSP representatives that one option could be to have a congress-responsible person who is paid. This is the ACSP model, and it can make the congress a more professional event, attracting more delegates, generating more profit. This can also increase the organisational quality, since a professional person would be in charge.

In spite of these problems, the quality of debates, even in tracks that few presenters turned up, was quiet high. The scientific content of the sessions was generally very good.

Based on the discussions made in the AESOP General Assembly held on the last day of the Congress in Rio de Janeiro, the following points were also conveyed to the GPEAN Governing Council:

- Organisational issues: There have been complaints about the chaos on the first day of the congress, in terms of both the large numbers of withdrawn papers and the lack of technical infrastructure in session rooms. The congress programme was unreliable, as many presentations did not take place or changes occurred in schedules. However, it was also discussed in the General Assembly that having to work in a very flexible way due to the changes in the programme resulted in a very improvised and innovative way of organising the sessions, which helped fruitful discussions, and more number of sessions in a roundtable format. These were positive points, but still AESOP colleagues asked whether there was a contract or a document of guidelines to prevent such organisational problems in the future. (David Amborski, who has been leading the congress committee, stated that there are guidelines but they need further developing. There is not a contract.)
- Visibility of the GPEAN member associations was very poor, and this is an important problem in an event, which is the major activity of GPEAN taking place every five years.
- AESOP has a higher stake in these World Planning Schools Congresses, because every five years when the WPSC is held, AESOP joins this congress instead of holding its annual congress in Europe. In other words, this is AESOP's annual congress.

Following the above points, the GPEAN Governing Council decided to rethink the formulation of the Local Organising Committee (LOC) too, with a view to use the 11 associations more heavily in organising the congress. There could be a presence of all the associations in the LOC. That way GPEAN could also better announce and disseminate this congress in its associations' events and congresses that take place prior to the WPSC. It has also been discussed that it was a missed opportunity not to have a presidents' meeting during this congress, although it was planned and suggested to the LOC by the GPEAN.

As another point that could go into the new congress guidelines, it was suggested that the chair of the LOC attends the GPEAN meetings prior to the congress. This is a requirement in AESOP Congress contracts – that the congress chair and/or representative attend at least one Executive Committee meeting, and also they have to attend the annual congress prior to theirs and make a presentation.

It has been decided that these comments are made into a list and that they are addressed in the new congress guidelines.

### **Planned future activities**

A new conference committee will be set up, to be functional by the time GPEAN announces the call for bids for the next world congress (WPSC 2021). Members of the committee should be people with a congress organisation experience. They should also have access to funding to be able to travel and attend meetings.

Call for bids for the next congress (WPSC 2021) should be made within 2017. The new congress committee will carry out this task.

Following the discussions regarding problems with the WPSC in Rio de Janeiro, congress guidelines will be revised, or new guidelines will be developed. The new congress committee will work on this issue.

The issue of making GPEAN a legal institution is to be a major agenda item for the future meetings. The aim is to allow the network to raise funds, sign contracts, etc. with a legal status.

Regarding its webpage, GPEAN will either revive its links with the Tongji University for using the original webpage, or alternatively set up a new webpage. For both cases, a working group is to be set up for the content of the webpage. AESOP has also suggested to create a page/section under the AESOP webpage as a transition period since the current webpages are not being maintained and are extremely out of date.

Habitat III meeting took place in October in 2016 in Quito. GPEAN was represented by Bruce Stiftel, the UN Habitat liaison of the GPEAN Governing Council. GPEAN organised a side event called “Capacity Building for the New Urban Agenda: Roles for Universities”, which was attended by a high number of conference participants. (For AESOP’s Position Paper to Habitat III, please see the last section of the report below.)

During the meetings held in Rio de Janeiro, it was decided that after the Habitat III meeting, the implementation of the New Urban Agenda would become a critical issue, for which planning schools can play a critical role. Therefore, GPEAN will develop ideas for possible projects in relation to post-Habitat III process and the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

GPEAN will also explore the possibility of a joint activity/conference/workshop (or a joint session in an already planned congress) with ISOCARP on planning education and practice. A regular joint activity, such as a congress or workshop to be planned over the coming years (rather than waiting for five years until the next WPSC), can give GPEAN more visibility. Holding one main activity, i.e. WPSC, every five years is considered as too infrequent, and hence organising a smaller-scale event inbetween the WPSCs can make GPEAN more active and visible. It would be formulated with a different format, as a more focused event, such as one with a focus on planning education and practice. (AESOP ExCo has also made a suggestion that each year a joint activity between ISOCARP and one of the Associations of the GPEAN could be planned.)

The next meeting of GPEAN (for 2017) will be held in Denver, USA, in conjunction with the ACSP (American Collegiate Schools of Planning) annual conference, which will take place in October. ACSP has agreed to waive the conference registration fees for GPEAN delegates, so that the GPEAN representatives can follow the scientific sessions too.

### **Update on UN Habitat III and the New Urban Agenda**

Habitat III meeting took place in October 2016, and GPEAN has been involved in its activities via the UN Habitat Liaison of GPEAN, as stated above. In addition, AESOP has been contributing to the Habitat III process and particularly the debates on the New Urban Agenda. AESOP has also applied to become an accredited partner of UN Habitat and it already became one of the members of the General Assembly of Partners (GAP), a special initiative proposed by the World Urban Campaign (WUC) to serve as a platform for non-governmental partners in Habitat III.

The Habitat III Conference adopted a New Urban Agenda (NUA)—an action-oriented document which sets global standards of achievement in sustainable urban development, rethinking the way we build, manage, and live in cities through cooperation with committed partners, relevant stakeholders, and urban actors at all levels of government as well as the private sector.

Prior to the Habitat III meeting, AESOP prepared a Position Paper focusing on the role that research and academia, and in particular, our planning schools should play in the implementation phase of the New Urban Agenda through capacity building, knowledge production, and research that informs policymaking, as well as data collection and analysis for the subsequent monitoring phases. This Position Paper, which was shared with the Habitat III Secretariat and GAP, was published online on our webpage too ([http://www.aesop-planning.eu/news/en\\_GB/2016/10/10/readabout/aesop-s-position-paper-on-the-new-urban-agenda](http://www.aesop-planning.eu/news/en_GB/2016/10/10/readabout/aesop-s-position-paper-on-the-new-urban-agenda)). It is given below.

## **AESOP's Position Paper on the NEW URBAN AGENDA**

With over 150 members, Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) is the only representation of planning schools of Europe. Given this unique position, AESOP mobilizes its resources, taking a leading role and entering its expertise into ongoing debates and initiatives regarding planning issues, planning education and planning qualifications of future professionals.

AESOP has been involved in and following the discussions and development of the New Urban Agenda via GPEAN, which we are a member of, and via the General Assembly of Partners, a stakeholder platform towards Habitat-III, comprising a number of partner constituent groups, one of which is the Research and Academia.

While AESOP recognizes the positive progress that has taken place in the content of the New Urban Agenda since its initial drafts, and in the process of stakeholder involvement, particularly through the General Assembly of Partners, certain issues in the New Urban Agenda require careful consideration.

One such issue is the rather universal approach offered in the document in tackling the problems of human settlements in the face of varying local realities, which refer not only to a diversity of complex urban problems and priorities in different settings, but also to different governmental structures, policy contexts, and capacities in implementing and enforcing policies as well as in monitoring their effects via reliable data. Research and academia can play a significant role in the successful implementation of the rather universal policy recommendations of the New Urban Agenda by facilitating research- and evidence-informed policymaking, evidence-based governance, and collection, analysis and dissemination of data with a view to reinforce local knowledge.

Following this, the increased emphasis of the New Urban Agenda on capacity development, knowledge platforms, and issues of implementation are seen as strong points of this document.

However, the role that research and academia can (and should) play in capacity development, knowledge production, and follow-up and review of the New Urban Agenda are not adequately acknowledged in the final draft that is being taken to the Quito meeting.

Among many disciplines dealing with the multidisciplinary issues of human settlements, our planning schools, within the AESOP community as well as worldwide, should be actively involved in the post-Habitat III process to ensure the successful implementation of the New Urban Agenda by offering their expertise in knowledge production and research, as well as helping build capacity both for effective formulation and implementation of policies and for data collection.

Acknowledgement of, and a more explicit support for, the role that research and academia can play in the post-Habitat III process would not only contribute to the successful implementation of the New Urban Agenda, but also strengthen the link between research and practice, and between academia and local/national governments, which would have positive and wide-ranging repercussions in tackling problems of human settlements.

Consequently, as AESOP, we consider this point to have a significant importance and hence we provide this input for the Habitat III process (via General Assembly of Partners) on behalf of the AESOP community so that the role of research and academia is emphasised more strongly in the New Urban Agenda document as well as in the post-Habitat III process. Thus, we also encourage all our member schools to be as actively engaged as possible with the Quito Implementation Plan.

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AESOP ExCo