



The AESOP Digital Archive: building institutional memory

Frank van der Hoeven & Ljiljana Radisavljević

To cite this article: Frank van der Hoeven & Ljiljana Radisavljević (2026) The AESOP Digital Archive: building institutional memory, *disP - The Planning Review*, 62:2, 81-85, DOI: [10.1080/02513625.2026.2708511](https://doi.org/10.1080/02513625.2026.2708511)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02513625.2026.2708511>



© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
ETH – Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich



Published online: 05 Aug 2026.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

AESOP Section

The AESOP Digital Archive: building institutional memory

Frank van der Hoeven and Ljiljana Radisavljević

1 Introduction

Over the past few years, AESOP has made significant progress in the digitalization of its outputs. Its journals are being published within automated journal systems, while conference preparation and contributions are managed through dedicated conference management systems. Ultimately, all materials produced and published within AESOP are brought together on a single platform known as *Digital Archive*¹. The idea for such integrated approach emerged through AEKOM² (AESOP Knowledge Management Platform, 2019–2022) project.

From 2022 until today, we have had the privilege of taking part in the creation of this digital archive. The idea was to gather, in one place and in digital form, everything that AESOP has produced since its foundation in 1987, as well as materials created by others, that are related to AESOP.

AESOP represents a large, primarily European but also international community, with a wide scope of activities in the field of planning education. Each year, an annual conference is organised, and since 2001, every fifth one is held as a global event, generating a significant number of contributions. In addition, AESOP publishes journals, awards prizes, organises summer schools and supports thematic groups and young academics.

All of this results in a large and diverse body of material, both digital and printed, often scattered across temporary websites, personal archives, and institutional storage. For this reason, the active involvement of AESOP members in collecting the material for building the Digital Archive proved to be particularly important.

This paper focuses on the development of the AESOP Digital Archive from scratch – from the initial idea to building a structured and functional system. It reflects on the process itself, including challenges, collective work, cooperation, and enthusiasm that have shaped the Archive into a structure that is still evolving but already shows visible results.

2 Infrastructure

At the beginning, the platform on which the Digital Archive will be built was planned to be relatively simple. The main goal was to bring together, in a single place, documents that had been spread out all over (various websites or private collections).

The initial platform was based on the Open Preprint Server – OPS (PKP). Using this system, the first version of the AESOP Digital Archive

was launched (at the time, it was on web address: eprints.aesop-planning.eu).

After almost six months of use, the platform turned out not to be well suited for the diversity and increasingly complex structure of the material that was intended to be deposited in the AESOP archive. The material was very diverse and required organization in many communities, collections, and subcollections, which proved difficult to implement in OPS.

In 2022, AESOP formally adopted Repository Policy³ promoting open access as a guiding principle, while respecting the original licensing terms of other deposited materials not published by AESOP. This balance between openness and copyright compliance was a very important feature for the platform. So, we needed more flexible control over access of deposited files (open, embargoed, restricted) and that also could not be achieved in OPS.

The situation was further complicated by a system failure, which resulted in the loss of all materials deposited on the platform up to that moment. While this represented a significant setback, it also became a turning point in the development of the Archive. It was clear that we needed a more robust hosting, flexible control over document access and a platform capable of supporting Archive's rapid expansion and continuous growth.

We therefore decided to explore alternative platforms and eventually opted for DSpace, an open-source repository system, widely used by academic institutions for managing and preserving digital content.

3 Organisation and depositing of "borne-digital" materials

A particularly important step in establishing the foundations of the Archive was the organization of its collections. The initial structure was not branched enough, so the reorganization was inevitable. This reorganization was carried out in collaboration with the AESOP Secretary General, whose institutional insight helped shape the collections, reflecting the institutional structure and diversity of AESOP activities.

Materials were therefore grouped into seven main communities:

- I – AESOP general community
- II – Events
- III – Excellence in Planning Education
- IV – Awards
- V – Journals

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

Frank van der Hoeven (TU Delft, Netherlands) is Director of Research at the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment and Programme Manager Open Science at TU Delft. His work focuses on the development of research infrastructures, open science practices, and digital platforms supporting scholarly communication. He is also the founder of SOAP | Stichting OpenAccess Platforms, which facilitates open academic publishing initiatives, including collaborations with European Association of Architectural Education and Association of European Schools of Planning.
ORCID: 0000-0001-9308-0828

Ljiljana Radisavljević (DATASET, Serbia) is AESOP Repository Manager and Editorial Assistant. She specialises in institutional repositories, metadata management, open access, research data management, and researcher support in scholarly communication. Her work focuses on the development, organisation, and long-term preservation of scholarly and institutional content, with particular attention to visibility, accessibility, and sustainable digital archiving.
ORCID: 0000-0002-7486-4982

VI – YA Network | AESOP Young Academics Network, and

VII – Thematic Groups.

This restructuring made navigation more intuitive and presented the Archive as a more coherent institutional resource. Each of these communities brings together a specific segment of AESOP's activities.

The “General Community” includes foundational documents, records of key bodies (ExCo, CoRep, General Assembly) as well as yearbooks, calls, projects, and all other formal documents of the Association

The “Events” community includes materials related to congresses, workshops, meetings, lectures and summer schools. This collection is central and the largest. Each conference collection brings together a range of related materials: Book of Abstracts, Book of Proceedings, Programme, sometimes even journal articles, and other outputs related to the event (videos, photos). Large volumes of conference proceedings are broken into separate

papers and deposited individually, enabling better visibility, citation, and searchability (see Figure 1).

The community dedicated to “Excellence in Planning Education” collects all “Quality Certificates”, while “Awards” community collects all awarded papers for teaching, best published and best conference papers.

The “Journals” community brings together publications issued directly by AESOP, such as *Transactions of the Association of European Schools of Planning*⁴ and *plaNNext – Next Generation Planning*⁵, as well as those developed in collaboration with other publishers or featuring dedicated AESOP sections or articles related to AESOP.

The “YA Network”⁶ community highlights the work of young academics: PhD students and early-stage researchers, while the “Thematic Groups”⁷ community gathers outputs related to AESOP's thematic groups, supporting exchange, discussion, and collaboration within the AESOP community.

As material often overlaps across different collections (e.g., journal article reflecting on AESOP

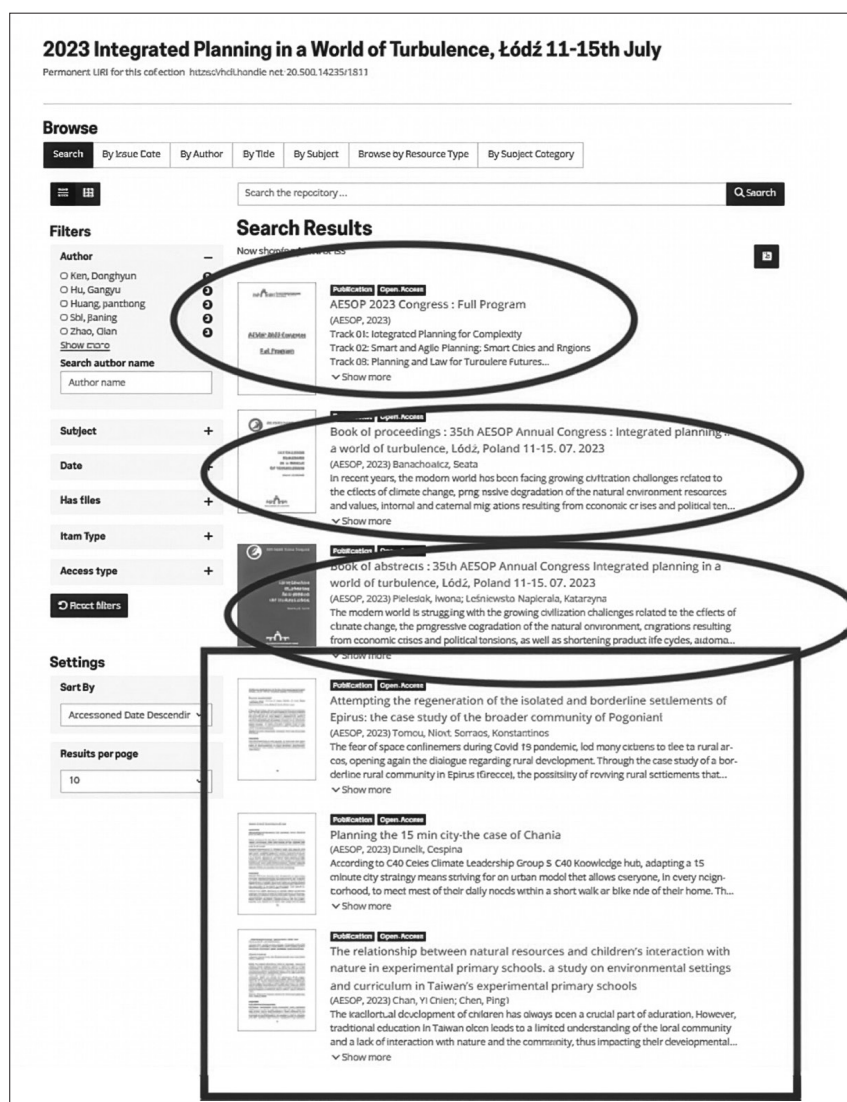


Fig. 1: Screenshot of the 2023 AESOP Annual Congress collection in the Digital Archive (Integrated Planning in a World of Turbulence, Łódź, 11–15 July 2023). It shows the programme, Book of Abstracts, Book of Proceedings, and individually deposited conference papers. The figure illustrates how large conference outputs are organised both as complete volumes and as separate papers to improve visibility, citation, and searchability. (Source: <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14235/1811>)

conference) an important feature of the Archive is the possibility of assigning a single item to multiple communities and it proved to be quite useful.

DSpace offers an intuitive and simple search. Content can be browsed either through hierarchical structure (communities and collections), or by

using simple keyword search or advanced search by author, title, subject, or date (see Figure 2).

Once the collection structure had been established, the focus shifted to depositing. We decided to start with the content that was already available in digital form (so-called digital-born material). It

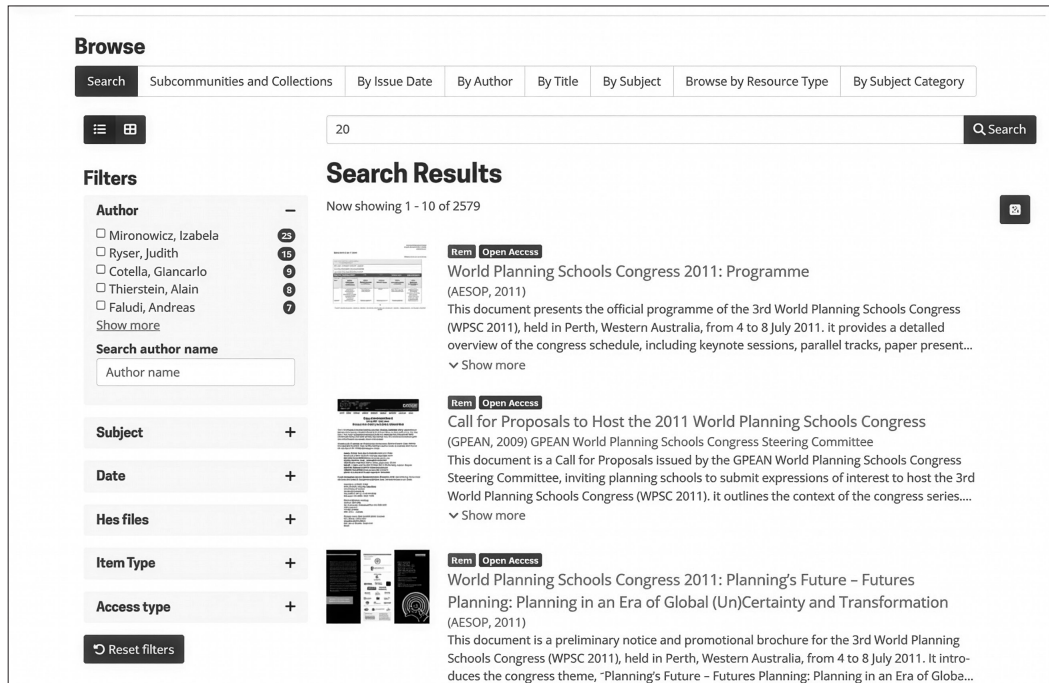


Fig. 2: Screenshot of the search interface of the AESOP Digital Archive. It shows browsing options by communities and collections, issue date, author, title, subject, and resource type, as well as filters and keyword search. The figure demonstrates the repository's navigation structure and search functionality.

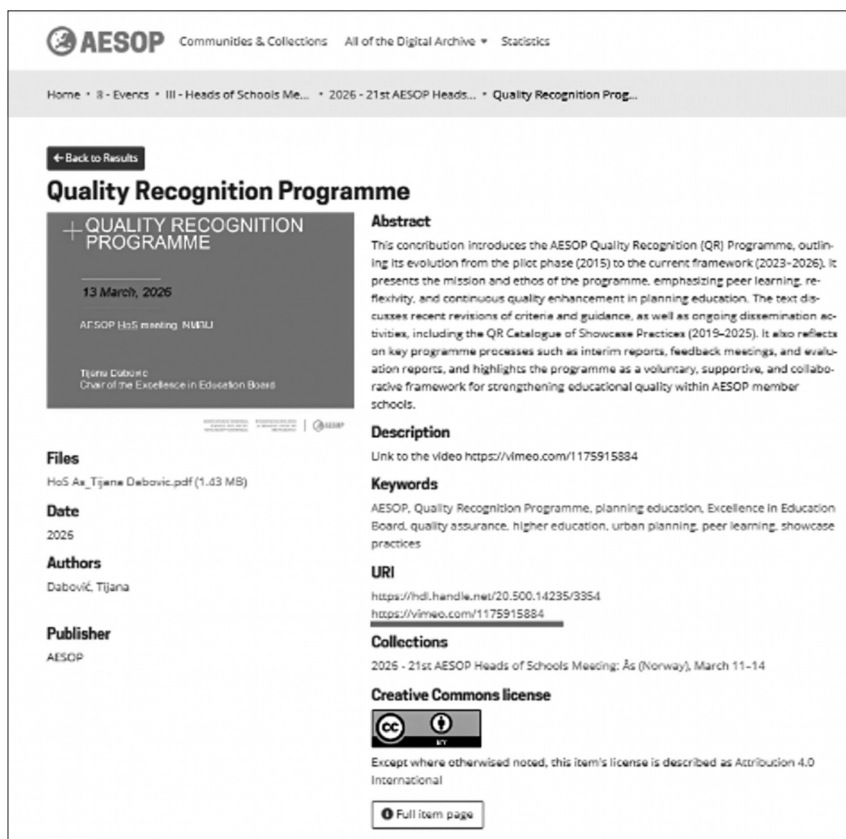


Fig. 3: Screenshot of a video record in the AESOP Digital Archive. It shows metadata for a video item, including title, abstract, keywords, URI, and a link to the full video hosted externally on Vimeo. The figure illustrates how video materials are described in the repository without storing the video files directly.

(Source: <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14235/3354>)

was gathered from a wide range of sources, including earlier AESOP conferences, and other websites, personal archives, institutional drives, and external repositories.

Many AESOP members were happy to contribute the materials from their private archives. This phase had a strong sense of shared engagement in building Digital Archive as a form of institutional memory. Correspondence with figures such as Andreas Faludi and Klaus R. Kunzmann brought not only valuable documents into the Archive, but also added personal dimensions to the process.

On the other hand, video materials were handled differently due to their size. Instead of being stored directly in the repository, they were uploaded to the AESOP Vimeo Channel, while their description (metadata) was created in the Digital Archive, with links leading to the video itself (see Figure 3).

This collective work resulted in over 2000 items in the Digital Archive by the end of 2024, which is a truly significant result for just two years of development.

4 Digitisation

In the summer of 2025, we updated DSpace from version 7.6 to 9.0, and moved the repository to a new server and deployed the new URL: archive.aesop-planning.eu.

Archive moved into a new phase that combined the continued deposit of born-digital materials with the active digitisation of printed documents.

Although we archived a great amount of material in previous periods, still the significant portion of AESOP's material existed only in printed format. This primarily included conference proceedings, abstract books, and various supporting documents produced for events.

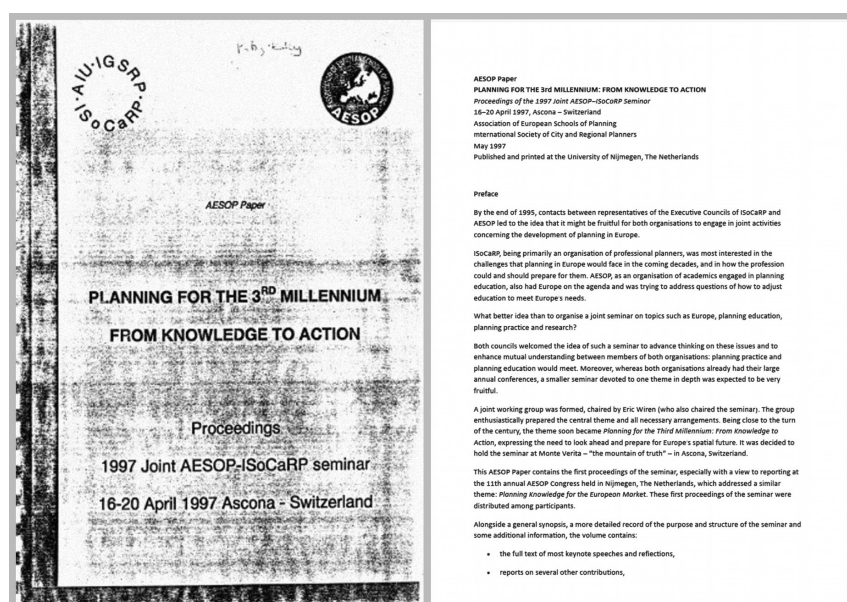
In order to make these materials accessible, a decision was made to digitise them by scanning them and deposit the scanned versions into the Archive. However, this process introduced a new set of challenges. Scanned documents were often significantly larger in size than born-digital files, which required additional processing, such as compression and optimisation, in order to ensure efficient storage and access.

A more worrying issue was the readability of the scanned material. The standard scanning process results in image-based documents that are readable to the human eye, but not to machines. Machine-readable text is essential in digital archiving since it provides searchability, indexing, and overall visibility on the internet. Without it, documents remain largely invisible in digital environments.

To address this, scanned materials were processed using Optical Character Recognition (OCR) tools. OCR is a technology that converts images of text into machine-readable and searchable text. While ideally, OCR would be applied during the scanning process itself, such a solution was not always available due to technical and financial issues. Instead, scanned documents were subsequently processed using available OCR tools, freely accessible online. The digitisation process therefore involved several steps: scanning the original material, optimising file size, applying OCR, and preparing the files for repository ingestion.

As a result, many records in the Archive now include two associated files: a scanned version of the original document, preserving its visual authenticity, and a separate, text-only document. This approach ensures both faithful representation of the original material and improved readability for users and machines.

Fig. 4: Comparison of a poor-quality scanned photocopy and its extracted OCR text version. The left side shows the original scanned document with low visual quality, while the right side shows the machine-readable text generated through OCR processing. The figure demonstrates how digitisation improves accessibility, searchability, and long-term preservation of printed archival materials. (Source: <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14235/3238>)



Sometimes, the only available material for a certain collection was a low-quality photocopy. Nevertheless, we did not give up even on those files, either (see Figure 4).

Although this process is a time-consuming one, it is still rewarding to see how paper editions of old Congress Proceedings become digital.

By late 2025, the Archive contained more than 2900 items. More importantly, many materials that had once been scattered and at risk were brought together in one place – the Digital Archive.

5 Final remarks

The development of the AESOP Digital Archive is a process that relies on shared effort and long-term commitment. What started as an attempt to gather all AESOP related materials has slowly evolved into a structured, growing platform that already reflects the wide range of AESOP activities. As the Archive continues to expand, its integration into a broader open science ecosystem, such as OpenAIRE, and other discovery platforms becomes increasingly important. This will position the Archive as a visible and relevant source of knowledge for the wider scientific community beyond AESOP.

Archive remains an ongoing project. Its future development will depend not only on technical support and expert guidance, but also on awareness and active engagement of the AESOP community in contributing to its further development and enrichment.

The Digital Archive is a form of institutional heritage that is continually evolving, reflecting the ongoing development of AESOP and its activities.

Notes

- 1 <https://archive.aesop-planning.eu/home>.
- 2 PERRONE, C.; DEFFNER, A.; SILVA, P.; SCHREURS, J., ŠEVKUŠIĆ, M.; DARWICH, R.; DABOVIĆ, T.; CAMPAGNA, M. (2022): AEKOM – Final Report. AESOP; <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14235/3339>.
- 3 Repository Policy – AESOP Eprints. November 2022; <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14235/3340>.
- 4 <https://traesop.aesop-planning.eu/index.php/TrAESOP/index>.
- 5 <https://journals.aesop-planning.eu/index.php/planext/index>.
- 6 <https://aesop-youngacademics.net/>.
- 7 <https://aesop-planning.eu/thematic-groups>.

Dr. ir. Frank van der Hoeven
AESOP IT Manager
SOAP – Stichting OpenAccess
platforms, Netherlands

–
TU Delft
Faculty of Architecture and the
Built Environment
PO Box 5043
2600 GA Delft, Netherlands
f.d.vanderhoeven@tudelft.nl

Ljiljana Radisavljević
AESOP Repository Manager
and Editorial Assistant
DATASET, Serbia
ljiljar@gmail.com