

AESOP HOS meeting in Madrid.

Report from the Workshop on AESOP quality recognition for planning programs.

1. Context

The workshop was well attended with 45 participants. Anna Geppert and Maros Finka introduced the discussion, presenting the pilot phase of the AESOP quality recognition process:

- A working group on AESOP quality recognition (WG) has been established in 2014 in order to test the interest and feasibility of an AESOP procedure (and related certificate) of quality recognition of planning programs. This WG consists of: Maros Finka, Anna Geppert, Francesco Lo Piccolo and Kristina Nilsson.
- After defining a methodological framework, a pilot phase offered AESOP schools the opportunity to apply for such certificate, on voluntary base and without cost. As many as 22 AESOP member schools participated in the pilot phase.
- The WG has met in Bratislava in January 2015 in order to evaluate the submissions and to test the procedure of evaluation itself.
- Globally, the experience appears quite positive. Also, the WG asked the community to discuss the results of the experience and possible next steps in the AESOP HoS meeting – and CoRep meeting – in Madrid, March 2015.

2. Discussion

The following questions have been addressed by the community.

Shall AESOP continue the process and deliver a certificate of quality recognition for planning programs?

The answer was by majority very positive. Such certificate will support the schools in their national contexts as well as set a milestone in the European recognition of the planning profession, a common endeavour of AESOP and ECTP.

- *Consequently, the proposal of establishing an AESOP quality recognition standard phase will be addressed to the CoRep at its next meeting in Prague, in order to pass from the pilot phase to the standard phase of the already approved Quality Recognition Project.*

Are the criteria satisfactory and sufficient to ensure a convincing and fair assessment?

Globally, they are. However, from this first round, it appears that some elements were unclear to the participants, in particular many schools submitted several programs in one application. In addition the discussion underlined the necessity to avoid criteria discriminating the schools acting more nationally/regionally than European/internationally.

- *Consequently, the WG will clarify and re-edit the application form before entering the standard phase.*

How should the certification be expressed?

The discussion showed the necessity to find the balance between two elements:

1/ a single standard of certificate rather than categories, because creating categories could lead to misinterpretations and AESOP has only one definition of quality expressed by core curriculum

2/ the effort to express the diversity of our planning programs and recognize the quality of specialisations offered by different programs.

- *Consequently, the certificate will consist of two parts:*
 - *A standard section certifying the quality of the planning program according to the European standards expressed by AESOP Core curriculum.*
 - *A specific section highlighting the quality of the programs specialisation. In the application, schools will be invited to indicate this specialisation and demonstrate its quality.*
- *Additional remarks:*
 - *One specialisation only can be highlighted for each program already in self-evaluation application.*
 - *The list of specialisations will be developed progressively but shall remain short and clear in order to ensure the visibility of the certificates.*

What should be the next steps ?

When a certification process is established, a large number of applications may be expected. The WG suggests that in the next phase, a larger number of colleagues contribute to the assessment.

- *Consequently, the WG will propose to ExCo and CoRep to transform AESOP Pool of Experts to AESOP Quality Board as AESOP responsible unit for certification*
- *Consequently, the CoRep will be asked to propose up to 3 experts per country for the AESOP Quality Board:*
 - *They should be people who are/have been in charge of a planning program, preferably with an experience in evaluation*
 - *They will sign an ethical commitment*
 - *The WG will propose a simple set of guidelines to the CoRep*

The composition of the expert panel created from the AESOP Quality Board members for each evaluation must combine the knowledge of the national context, an international footprint, and the relation with planning practice.

- *Consequently, each application will be reviewed by a panel of:*
 - *One academic from the same country*
 - *One academic from another European country*
 - *One practitioner, nominated in coordination with associations such as ECTP.*

The AESOP Quality Board as a group of experts will also be the guardians of the process.

- *Consequently, they will be collectively responsible for :*
 - *Harmonizing the evaluations, updating the list of specialisations.*
 - *Improving the evaluation process, keeping in mind that it needs to avoid time-consuming bureaucracies and remain simple.*
 - *The CoRep remains the decisional body with regard to any important evolutions in the quality recognition.*

While members of the working group wish to retire from the next phase, they are aware that a transition needs to be done and therefore suggest that :

- one joint meeting is performed with the WG and all panel members (autumn 2015)
- one member from the WG acts as chair for the first mandate of the experts.

What about the first applicants of the pilot phase?

The discussion suggested that they should benefit of the quality recognition certificate as soon as it is established.

- *Consequently, the WG will :*
 - *Before July, return to the applicants asking for complementary information and/or clarifications, if relevant.*
 - *If the CoRep agrees on the certification, prepare the mock-up of certificate so that it can be delivered to the members.*