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AESOP Section

The Next Generation of Planning: A Year of Milestones from AESOP Young Academics

SaeBom Song

The AESOP Young Academics (YA) Network is an integral branch of the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP), the leading academic association representing European planning schools. Established in 2003, the YA Network was created to foster the active participation of early-career scholars within the planning discipline and to strengthen their engagement with the broader AESOP community. Open to PhD students, post-doctoral researchers, and academics at the beginning of their academic careers, the YA Network provides an open, inclusive platform for scholarly exchange. At the heart of the network lies the Co-ordination Team (CT), a group of six elected members who work collectively to initiate, coordinate, and promote YA-related activities throughout their two-year term of service. These activities include the annual YA Conference, the AESOP PhD Workshop, and active involvement in the AESOP Annual Congress. It played a proactive role in contributing to the success of major AESOP events, including the 36th AESOP Annual Congress in Paris, which brought together over 1200 participants from 55 countries, and the AESOP PhD Workshop in Grenoble, which welcomed 28 doctoral students from around the world. This report offers a comprehensive overview of the YA Network's activities during the 2024–2025 term, highlighting the continued growth and contribution of young academics to the AESOP community and to the future generation of planning.

The AESOP Annual Congress in Paris and the PhD Workshop in Grenoble, 2024

As per long-standing tradition, the AESOP PhD Workshop marked the opening of the annual

AESOP Congress in early July. In 2024, the workshop was hosted by the Institut d'Urbanisme et de Géographie Alpine in Grenoble, under the title: "AHEAD OF THE GAME? Reversibility, Sufficiency and Care in the Context of Urban Transitions." In a year when Paris was preparing to host the Olympic Games, the choice of Grenoble—host of the 1968 Winter Olympics—as the workshop venue added a layer of symbolic relevance. The event prompted reflection on how planners can approach urban environments not only during global spectacles, but also beyond them, raising the timely question: "How do we plan ahead of the game while dealing with its aftermath?" The workshop drew considerable interest, with 77 applications submitted. According to internal analysis, the majority of submissions came from five countries: Italy (25%), Germany (13%), the United Kingdom (12%), Portugal (9%), and Australia (8%). Two observations are particularly notable: (i) Italian scholars continue to form a substantial and consistent presence within the AESOP community, particularly at early career levels, (ii) Despite being the host country, France accounted for only 1% of applications, a modest figure compared to the wide international reach of the event. 10% of submissions came from countries outside Europe, including China and Australia, indicating AESOP's expanding reach and interest beyond its traditional geographical scope. Following the review process, 28 doctoral students were selected to participate in the four-day event, which also featured four keynote speakers who contributed as mentors. The format facilitated both structured academic dialogue and informal peer exchange. The next AESOP PhD Workshop will be held in Istanbul from 2–5 July 2025, immediately preceding the annual congress (Figure 1).

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Fig. 1: AESOP PhD Workshop 2024, Grenoble.
(Source: Author)

Fig. 2: YA social event 2024 at the AESOP annual Congress, Paris.
(Source: Author)



The AESOP Annual Congress took place in Paris from 8–12 July. The YA Network maintained a strong presence throughout the congress, engaging in multiple sessions and initiatives. Of particular note was the YA General Assembly, which served as a key forum for connecting with early-career scholars and introducing them to the structure and goals of the YA Network. The YA Social Event, held immediately after the Assembly, offered an informal setting for interaction between junior and senior academics, contributing to broader community-building efforts during the congress (Figure 2).

YA Conference 2025

Held annually in the spring, the AESOP Young Academics (YA) Conference serves as the central academic event of the YA Network. Established in 2007, the conference is open to students, early-career researchers, practitioners, and activists, regardless of AESOP affiliation. The event typically spans three to four days, comprising plenary sessions, keynote lectures, parallel presentation tracks, and networking-oriented social events. A distinguishing feature of the YA Conference is its no-fee registration policy, which reflects the Network's aim to promote early-career research and foster a space for open, inclusive academic exchange without financial barriers. The 19th YA Conference took place from 17

to 20 March 2025 at the Faculty of Architecture and Landscape Sciences (FAL), Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz University Hanover in Germany. The conference was held under the theme: “Circular Cities and Regions – Planning for Sustainable, Social, and Inclusive Communities” and was structured into four thematic tracks: (i) Space: Built Environment and Urban Design, (ii) Links: Mobility, Economy and Energy, (iii) Communities: Societies, Culture and Participation, (iv) Recycling: Waste Management, Nutrition and Food. The call for abstracts resulted in 128 submissions, out of which 50 participants were selected for oral presentations. The majority of submissions came from five countries: Italy (18%), Germany (17%), Turkey (13%), UK (9%), and China (6%). Similar to recent YA events, Italian scholars formed the largest national group of applicants. Both Germany and Turkey also demonstrated substantial levels of engagement. It is notable that 22% of submissions originated from non-European planning schools, including a significant number from China and India, reinforcing the YA Network's increasingly international visibility. However, the majority of participation still reflects strong European representation (Figure 3).

As part of the conference tradition, a Best Paper Prize (BPP) was organized in collaboration with an international academic journal. In previous years, this has included *Planning Theory* (2022), *Euro-*

Fig. 3: The 19th AESOP Young Academics Conference 2025, Hanover.
(Source: Author)



pean Planning Studies (2023), and Territorio (2024). In 2025, 11 papers were submitted to the BPP. The award was given to Marjan Marjanović for the paper titled: “Negotiating Path and Material Dependencies of Shrinking Cities and Regions through the Circular Economy: The Emergence of Social Circularity in Parkstad Limburg.” Three additional papers were shortlisted. All four papers will be published as part of a special issue in the European Journal of Spatial Development (EJSD). In parallel, the YA Network also launched a call for abstracts for a forthcoming special issue in *plaNext – Next Generation Planning*, following the 19th YA Conference. Looking ahead, the 20th AESOP YA Conference will be held in March 2026 in Prague, Czech Republic. The event will be co-organized by the Department of Spatial Planning at the Faculty of Architecture, Czech Technical University and the Faculty of Environmental Sciences at Czech University of Life Sciences. As the 20th edition of the conference, commemorative activities are expected to reflect on the YA Conference’s two-decade history.

plaNext – Next Generation Planning Journal

plaNext – Next Generation Planning is an online, open-access journal published by the AESOP Young Academics Network. Established to support scholarly exchange in the field of spatial planning, the journal provides a platform for the dissemination of research to both academic and professional audiences. While originally conceived as a space for early-career scholars, *plaNext* now welcomes contributions from researchers at all career stages working in relevant planning disciplines. Since being indexed in SCOPUS in early 2025, the journal has continued to broaden its reach and raise its academic profile. It publishes two issues annually, one of which is typically dedicated to a special issue based on the AESOP YA Conference. The special issue related to the 18th AESOP Young Academics Conference, held under the theme “Bridging Gaps: Urban Planning for Coexistence,” is currently in the peer-review stage. For the 19th YA Conference, titled “Circular Cities and Regions – Planning for Sustainable Social and Inclusive Communities,” the call for papers for the special issue was launched in March 2025, with publication planned for the end of the year. In addition to its collaboration with the YA Conference, *plaNext* also marked a milestone in its development by launching a special issue in celebration of its 10th anniversary in September 2024. The outcome of this anniversary issue will be presented during a special session at the AESOP Congress 2025.

Booklet Series: Conversations in Planning Theory and Practice

The Booklet Series titled “Conversations in Planning Theory and Practice” is a collaborative e-publication initiative between the AESOP Young Aca-

demics Network and AESOP. Alongside the *plaNext* journal, it constitutes one of the Network’s central publishing efforts. The series aims to capture and reflect on dialogues between senior and early-career scholars, focusing on concepts, theories, and practices that have shaped the field of planning. Presented in an accessible and reflective format, the booklets are designed to engage a broad audience, including academics, practitioners, and undergraduate students in planning-related disciplines. Each booklet documents a conversation that seeks not only to convey the intellectual positions of the scholars involved but also to explain them in a way that invites further reflection and learning. The contributions are peer-reviewed and edited to ensure clarity and thematic coherence. The following booklets are currently in preparation:

- De las Rivas – scheduled for publication in July 2025
- Magnaghi – final manuscript expected by Summer 2025
- Forester – planned for release in 2027
- Swyngedouw – expected in 2027

This series contributes to ongoing efforts to build intergenerational dialogue within the planning discipline, offering insights into both historical and emerging perspectives.

AESOP Memories

To commemorate the 35th anniversary of AESOP’s founding, a new initiative, AESOP Memories was launched in 2022. The project was developed as a way to chronicle the association’s history over time. Designed to honour its roots and anticipate its future, the project sought to capture personal and institutional reflections that have shaped AESOP over nearly four decades. Led by the AESOP Young Academics Network under the guidance of AESOP, the project focused on collecting, archiving, and presenting of oral histories shared by AESOP members who have played significant roles in shaping the association. Through a series of recorded video conversations, YA Network members engaged with senior, mid-career, and early-career contributors, using a flexible interview format to trace their insights, recollections, and perspectives on planning and academic life within AESOP. By early 2025, the project reached completion with a total of seven interviews, featuring: Five senior members: Patsy Healey, Klaus Kunzmann, Willem Salet, Tadeusz Markowski, and Gerhard Schimak, One mid-career academic: Olivier Sykes, One young academic: Agnes Matoga. An additional conversation with Professor John Bryson was also conducted and is scheduled for publication in summer 2025. All interviews are accessible via the AESOP Memories website: <https://memories.aesop-planning.eu>. More than a documentation exercise, the project offers a shared space of remembrance and recognition, preserving the voices of those who have shaped AESOP’s identity over time. It stands as a resource for future gen-

erations and a gesture toward continuity, ensuring that these collective memories remain a living part of AESOP's legacy.

Regional Ambassadors

Launched in 2021, the Regional Ambassadors (RAs) initiative has become one of the core outreach efforts of the AESOP Young Academics Network. The project was introduced in response to a growing recognition of the need for broader geographic inclusion and visibility across Europe. It aims to strengthen representation in regions and countries where engagement with the YA Network has been more limited. The initiative is guided by three main objectives: (i) To support the internationalisation of European students and planning education, (ii) To raise awareness of the regional challenges and opportunities that shape early academic experiences in spatial planning, (iii) To actively promote the YA Network through both in-person and online engagement at the local level. Each year, new ambassadors are selected through an open call, and those appointed are expected to help disseminate information about key YA activities – including the YA Conference and the AESOP PhD Workshop – while also facilitating connections among students and early-career researchers in their regions. In practice, Regional Ambassadors contribute to building local and national academic networks, creating entry points for scholars who might otherwise remain disconnected from AESOP's wider community. A new open call for Regional Ambassadors is scheduled for July 2025. As the project continues to evolve, it not only extends the presence of the YA Network across borders, but also reflects a growing commitment to fostering academic inclusivity and regional dialogue within the planning discipline.