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Foreword: A bright future for *plaNext* and the AESOP publishing platform

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Introduction

In early 2025, *plaNext – Next Generation Planning* achieved a significant milestone: its indexing in the Scopus database. This event marks a pivotal moment for the journal and for the broader publication strategy of the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP). It is a recognition of the collective efforts made by successive editorial boards, contributors, reviewers, and above all, by the young scholars who believed in a journal that could serve both as a platform for emerging voices and as a vehicle for innovation in planning scholarship. More than a celebratory note, this foreword seeks to situate *plaNext* within AESOP's evolving ecosystem of publications and overall digital environment. It reflects on the journal's distinctive role and achievements, connects it with the broader ambitions of AESOP's scientific dissemination strategy, and explores how recent developments—including the launch of the AESOP Digital Archive—are contributing to a renewed and more integrated platform for publishing in planning.

AESOP has always considered quality academic publishing a cornerstone of its mission of promoting excellence in planning education and research (Geppert and Cotella, 2010). As an academic community grounded in diversity—of traditions, languages, institutions, and methodological approaches—AESOP promotes not only excellence in research, but also accessibility, pluralism, and intergenerational dialogue. The publication activities of the Association must be read in this light. Today, AESOP offers a rich and articulated platform for knowledge dissemination, including three peer-reviewed channels—*plaNext*, *Transactions of AESOP*, and the booklet series *Conversations in Planning Theory and Practice*—as well as the recently launched AESOP Digital Archive, a public repository for open-access dissemination of a wide range of materials produced within and beyond the AESOP community. Each of these instruments plays a specific role. Together, they form a coherent, open, and inclusive knowledge infrastructure that reflects AESOP's mission and evolving responsibilities in a complex and interconnected world.

Aiming at providing the readers with an account of the latter, this foreword is organised in three parts. First, it will reflect on the trajectory and present positioning of *plaNext*, focusing in particular on its foundational vision and the significance of its recent indexing in Scopus.

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Second, it will consider the broader publishing landscape of AESOP, situating *plaNext* alongside *Transactions* and the booklet series, and emphasising their complementarity. Third, it will place all these activities within the emerging architecture of the AESOP Digital Archive, arguing that together they are giving shape to a new era of academic dissemination in planning: open, plural, collaborative, and forward-looking.

plaNext: A space for next-generation planning

From its inception, *plaNext* was envisioned as a journal that would break with convention. Conceived in 2013 as a peer-reviewed open-access journal of AESOP, it was designed to fill a specific gap in the landscape of planning publications: to offer early-career scholars an opportunity to publish their work in a high-quality academic venue that was not only rigorous and international, but also accessible and supportive. In doing so, *plaNext* embraced two complementary missions. On the one hand, it sought to foster excellence and visibility for emerging voices in planning research. On the other hand, it aimed to challenge the established boundaries of the field, encouraging contributions that were methodologically sound, theoretically diverse, and reflective of the rapidly changing realities of urban and regional development.

Over the past decade, *plaNext* has succeeded in fulfilling this dual mission. Through special issues emerging from AESOP Young Academics conferences, open calls, and thematic dossiers, the journal has published a wide array of articles covering innovative topics—from post-growth planning and environmental justice to digital transformations and decolonial approaches to space. It has welcomed interdisciplinary contributions, fostered critical debates, and promoted inclusive authorship. Above all, *plaNext* has become an entry point into international publishing numerous early-career researchers who might otherwise have struggled to overcome the barriers of more traditional editorial environments. The recent indexing of *plaNext* in Scopus is a significant recognition of this achievement. It validates the editorial and scientific quality of the journal and elevates its standing in the global planning research community. At the same time, it provides a strategic opportunity for the journal to renew its vision and further its impact. Indexing in Scopus brings greater visibility, enhances discoverability, and makes it easier for authors to meet institutional publishing requirements. But it also entails new responsibilities. The editorial board of *plaNext*, together with AESOP leadership, is now in a position to consolidate the journal's identity, sharpen its editorial scope, and refine its review and publication processes to ensure that the founding mission—supporting early-career researchers and stimulating innovative thinking—continues to guide the journal's evolution.

The success of *plaNext* also points to a broader strategic insight: that academic publishing must not be seen merely as an endpoint of research, but as an integral part of the research and training ecosystem. In this sense, *plaNext* is not just a journal; it is a pedagogical and community-building instrument. It provides young researchers with a first-hand experience of peer review, helps them navigate the publishing landscape, and connects them with international networks. It also offers an avenue for mentoring and intergenerational exchange, as senior scholars contribute to the journal as reviewers, guest editors, and supporters. The continued success of *plaNext* will depend on AESOP's ability to nurture this ecosystem and to integrate the journal more closely into its teaching, research, and networking activities.

A plural publishing platform: Transactions and booklets

While *plaNext* holds a unique place in AESOP's publishing platform, it is part of a wider constellation of initiatives. The AESOP journal *Transactions* and the booklet series

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Conversations in Planning Theory and Practice complement the work of *plaNext*, each contributing in distinctive ways to the mission of knowledge production and dissemination.

Transactions of AESOP was launched in 2017 to serve as a journal of record for the AESOP community. It offers an outlet for high-quality papers that have undergone peer-review and often presentation in the context of the Association's flagship annual congress. Unlike *plaNext*, which is primarily oriented toward early-career scholars, *Transactions* provides a space for the more established segments of the planning community to share the results of their work. In so doing, the journal serves a strategic function: it helps to preserve and valorise the intellectual output of the various activities organised in the framework of AESOP—from its annual congresses to the thematic groups' meetings—translating what would otherwise remain as ephemeral presentations into citable and widely available knowledge products. Importantly, *Transactions* reflects the diversity of the AESOP community, both in terms of geographical representation and disciplinary approach. It embraces conceptual and empirical work, and reflects a wide spectrum of planning cultures, offering a venue where pluralism, openness, and critical reflection can thrive (Davidoff, 1965).

The booklet series, launched under the title *Conversations in Planning Theory and Practice*, represents yet another dimension of AESOP's publication strategy. Designed as a more flexible outlet, the booklets allow for a dialogic approach that fall outside the conventional boundaries of journal articles. More in detail, they aim to document conversations between two generations of scholars about theories, ideas, concepts and practices that matter in planning in an inviting and explanatory way that allows the readers to engage with the discussion easily. In so doing, the booklets serve as a bridge between academic publishing and community engagement, offering a space where ideas can be explored in a less formal and more conversational tone, where theory and practice can meet, and where planning scholars can reflect collectively on shared challenges. At the same time, their academic rigour is ensured by the blind peer-review process, and every time they host comments by senior scholars that highlights parts of their work in a manner that helps to elaborate on the essence of the conversation in knowledge creation.

Together, these three channels—*plaNext*, *Transactions* and the booklets—compose a robust and diversified dissemination platform. Each has its own editorial identity and operational logic, but they are united by a shared commitment to open access, internationalism, and scholarly excellence. They also reflect AESOP's longstanding attention to different formats and audiences, from students and early-career researchers to senior academics and practitioners.

Toward an integrated infrastructure: the AESOP Digital Archive

In 2025, AESOP launched its new Digital Archive, a publicly accessible online repository designed to collect, preserve, and disseminate the intellectual output of the AESOP community. The Archive represents a fundamental step toward an integrated and sustainable knowledge infrastructure, one that brings together publications, presentations, teaching materials and multimedia content under a coherent and open-access framework. It is both a technological and a political project: technological in the sense that it provides the tools and standards for long-term digital preservation and discoverability; political in that it embodies AESOP's commitment to open science, transparency, and equitable access to knowledge.

The Digital Archive was conceived not as a competitor to formal publishing venues, but as their complement. It hosts working papers, conference proceedings, grey literature, and other outputs that do not necessarily find space in peer-reviewed journals but are of significant value to the planning community. It also supports the dissemination of other types of knowledge and materials, fostering the transfer of information and capacity building. In time, the Archive is

expected to evolve into a comprehensive portal that supports metadata integration, DOI attribution, and cross-linking with other databases and platforms. Its alignment with European and international standards ensures its interoperability and long-term sustainability. Within this infrastructure, *plaNext*, *Transactions*, and the booklet series find new resonance. The Archive allows for enhanced visibility of the published content, better indexing, and easier access by researchers, students, and practitioners. It also enables new forms of engagement: thematic curation, cross-referencing, digital exhibitions etc. By anchoring its publishing activities within the Archive, AESOP is not only improving the circulation of knowledge but also rethinking the very function of academic publishing. The Archive foregrounds the idea that knowledge production is a continuous, collective, and open-ended process—one that benefits from transparency, accessibility, and dialogue.

More broadly, the Archive reflects the shift from a publication-centred to a platform-centred approach. Instead of seeing journals, booklets, or proceedings as discrete entities, AESOP is now embracing a more systemic vision. This vision recognises the multiplicity of formats, audiences, and temporalities involved in knowledge production (Scott et al., 2016). It acknowledges the need for interoperability, reuse, and accessibility. And it commits to building a resilient infrastructure that can support the planning community in the face of accelerating social, environmental, and technological change.

Conclusion: Looking ahead

As we celebrate the Scopus indexing of *plaNext*, we should also take the opportunity to reflect on how far the AESOP publishing platform has come and, more importantly, where it is heading. The success of *plaNext* is a testament to the vitality of AESOP's community, its commitment to emerging scholarship, and its capacity to evolve. But it is also a reminder of the responsibilities that come with visibility and recognition. Strengthening *plaNext* means investing in editorial quality, mentoring, international reach, and innovation. It means ensuring that the journal consolidates as a beacon for next-generation planning, grounded in excellence and open to experimentation.

As mentioned above, to achieve these results AESOP has been investing in integration. The coexistence of *plaNext*, *Transactions*, the booklet series and the Digital Archive all became part of a shared and converging agenda. By connecting these initiatives technically and intellectually, the Association is building a knowledge infrastructure that reflects its plural identity, its pedagogical mission, and its social responsibility. This is not only a matter of scholarly dissemination; it is a contribution to a more just, open, and collaborative culture of planning.

In this spirit, the future of *plaNext* is indeed bright. But even more promising is the future of the AESOP publishing platform as a whole. Rooted in values, responsive to change, and committed to the next generation of planners and researchers, it stands as a model for what academic publishing can and should be in the years to come.

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