



**24th AESOP Annual Conference 2010- General Report**  
(Art 6 Congress Agreement)

Peter Ache  
Mervi Ilmonen  
YTK, Espoo, 30<sup>th</sup> November 2010

## 1. Main theme

The chosen theme was Space is luxury. The theme was chosen for several reasons. In 2010, the world is clearly one that can be called 'urban'. In relative terms, more than half of the world's population dwells in urban settings – about one billion under 'slum conditions'.

*Having quality space available equals commanding a 'luxury'!*

Planning and urban design are key factors in shaping and managing space and generate the wished for quality spaces. The concept of space and concomitantly that of spatial quality includes different meanings and dimensions. Space is physical, including architecture and urban form. Space is also socially constructed through various forms of human interventions. Space is contested and a reason for serious conflicts. Space is presented and space represents. For planning, the management of the competing uses for space requires complex interventions. The making of better places that are valued and have identity is an enduring ambition of planning. And, returning to the start of this brief reflection, the major challenge of spatial planning is to find solutions for a more sustainable urban millennium. Space is expensive and exhaustive, a luxury we cannot afford any longer, if it means excessive use of space in terms of energy inefficiency and traffic pollution.

The Centre for Urban and Regional Studies at Aalto University welcomed 700 planning scholars and professionals from all over the world to Finland to discuss the manifold issues of space is luxury and to explore the multitude of related planning issues.

## 2. Contact details

Chair: Professor Peter Ache, YTK

Deputy Chair: Mervi Ilmonen, YTK

Aalto University Congress Consultant: Jan Fagerström, Dipoli

Secretariat: Timo Heikkinen & Eeva Mynttinen, YTK

Webmaster: Mikko Johansson, YTK

Centre for Urban and Regional Studies (YTK)

PB 12200, FIN 00076 AALTO

Telephone (+358 9) 470 24080

Fax (+358 9) 470 24071

E-mail [aesop2010@tkk.fi](mailto:aesop2010@tkk.fi)

Internet <http://ytk.tkk.fi/en/>

webpage; <http://aesop2010.tkk.fi/>

## 3. Statistics

Number of abstracts submitted: 647

Number of abstracts accepted: 581

Acceptance rate: 90 %

Number of papers submitted before deadline, before conference: 320

Number of cancellations, number of 'no-shows': 101 cancellations; 29 'no shows'

Track session attendances: no figures counted

Number of registrants (with standard fees): see table below

Registrations by country: 43 countries were represented across all participants

Registrations by schools: 77 member schools were present during the conference

Number of main authors, number of all authors: 392 single authored papers; 156 co-authored; 97 with three or more authors; counted against all submitted abstracts

The congress office reports a total of 535 participants who registered to the conference using below fee categories.

Table 1 - Fee Paying Participants

Fee Paying Participants			535
	<April	>April	
Conference fee, member	228	29	257
Conference fee, non-member	118	23	141
Conference fee, student	115	22	137

Figure 1

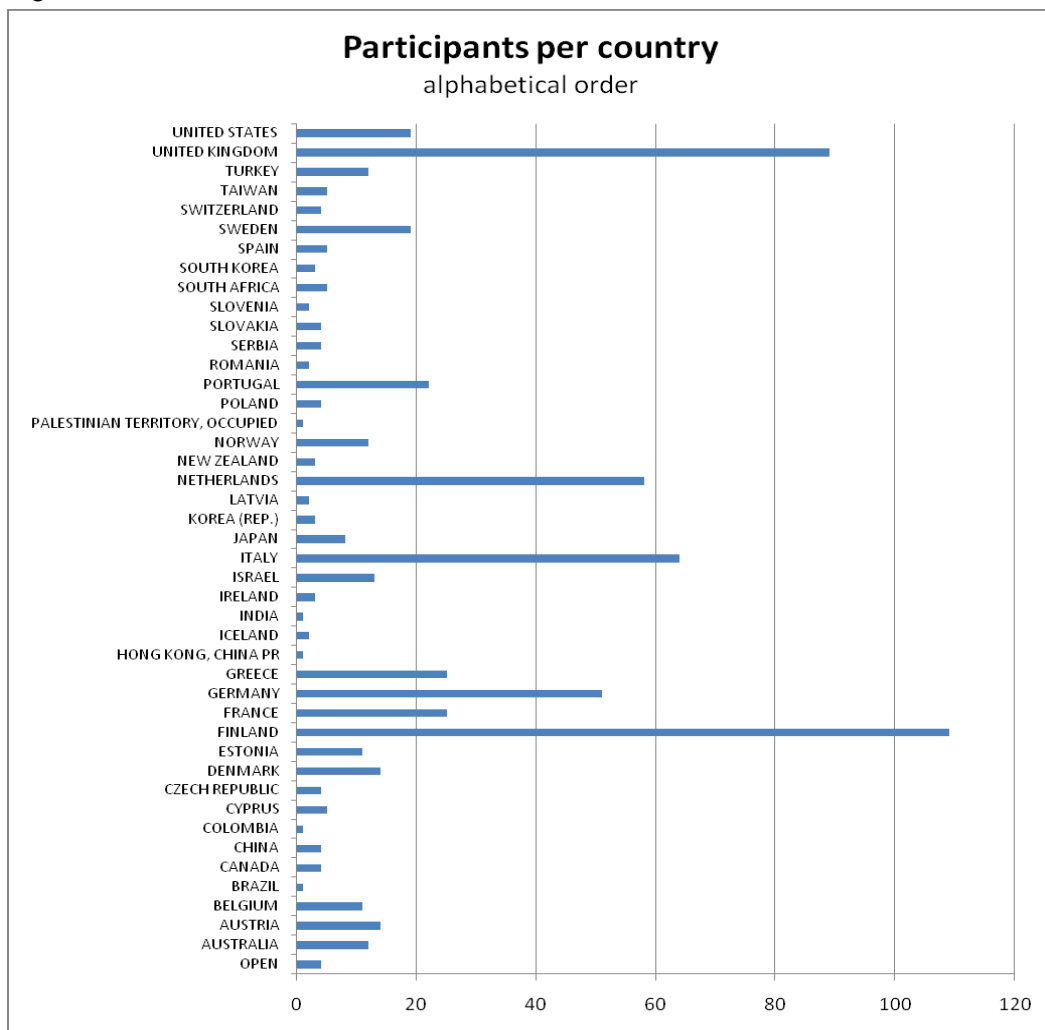


Table 2 – Overview according to abstract submissions

TRACK TITLE	After end of the abstract submission		REALLOCATED FROM	REALLOCATED TO	FINAL ALLOCATION	ACCEPTED	REJECTED	ACCEPTANCE RATE	CANCELLATIONS	NOT REGISTERED NOT INFORMED	CANCELLATION RATE
	FIRST PRIORITY	SECONDARY PRIORITY									
Planning Theory and Methods	65	86	19	10	56	40	16	71,43%	3	5	20,00%
Planning History	18	16	0	9	27	27	0	100,00%	3	5	29,63%
Planning Education	18	4	1	3	20	19	1	95,00%	3	0	15,79%
Planning and Complexity	21	61	2	14	33	29	4	87,88%	9	1	34,48%
European Territorial Cooperation and I	21	17	0	4	25	25	0	100,00%	5	1	24,00%
Global Challenges and Local Responses	56	71	10	9	55	45	10	81,82%	5	2	15,56%
Planning for Rural Areas	34	21	2	6	38	37	1	97,37%	5	1	16,22%
Urban Planning and Physical Form	95	86	36	6	65	55	10	84,62%	12	1	23,64%
Culture, Heritage and Planning	37	44	0	10	47	40	7	85,11%	8	3	27,50%
Sustainability: Climate Change, Risks ar	42	31	10	6	38	33	5	86,84%	10	1	33,33%
Housing and Regeneration Policies	41	37	2	10	49	45	4	91,84%	6	1	15,56%
Mobility: Transport Planning and Policy	33	17	0	7	40	34	6	85,00%	4	1	14,71%
Resource Management, Energy and Pl	26	23	0	13	39	39	0	100,00%	7	4	28,21%
Participation and Governance	76	74	41	0	35	35	0	100,00%	4	1	14,29%
Planning, law and property rights	33	16	1	5	37	37	0	100,00%	6	2	21,62%
Planning 'in' or 'for' multicultural socie	14	23	0	8	22	22	0	100,00%	5	0	22,73%
SEPARATE SPECIAL SESSION: Developm	15	17	0	4	19	19	0	100,00%	6	0	31,58%
TOTALS:	645	644	124	124	645	581	64	90,08%	101	29	22,38%

#### 4. General Comments on successes and failures

The conference proved to be very successful according to current AESOP standards. The turn-out was quite high and also had a large number of overseas attendances, so far a feature mainly of the joint conferences with ACSP or under the WPSC labels.

However, despite this success in terms of participants, the economics of the conference were quite difficult. Finland is a high cost country which LOC had to cope with. The financial break down (see separate report) reveals that the conference managed to break even.

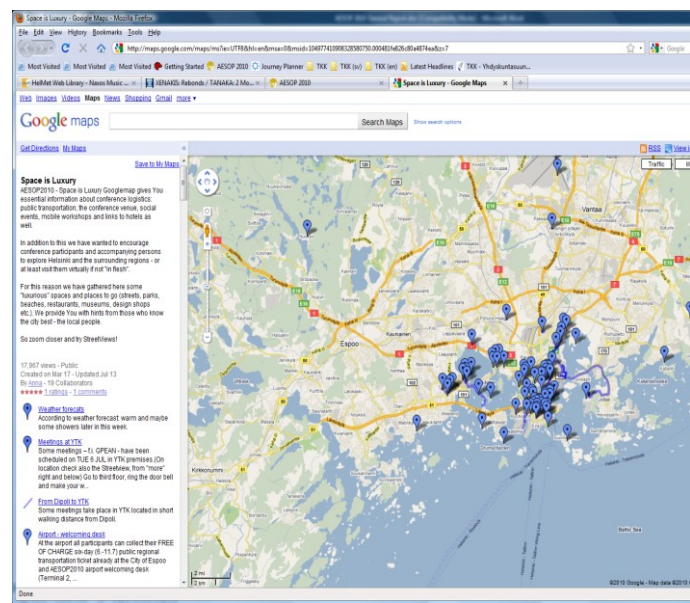
In terms of another general conclusion, it is highly recommendable to commission a professional conference organizer for the handling of items related to hotels, registration and payments, and other more practical items. The experience of such an office is very helpful for managing a large conference and keeping schedules.

##### *Pre-Conference*

The overall theme and broad structure of the conference had been defined for the Chicago Conference 2008 and submitted to AESOP as a proposal. Also the dates of the conference were set at that time. After the CoRep decision had been achieved to run the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference in Helsinki, LOC started in autumn 2008 to develop the overall schedule.

The setting up of a web page was on time for the Liverpool conference in July 2009 (see Figure 2). The conference web page is a very important marketing instrument. At a later stage, LOC also established a *Facebook* group with additional information (like a google map) (see Figure 2), which again demonstrated to be a well accepted information source.

Figure 2 – AESOP 2010 - Web Page (left) – Google Map (right)



LOC also printed a 'chair drop', a safe the day information with the size of a business card. This card was very handy for distribution and for people to take home and distribute further.

## *Venue*

The conference was held in one location only, the Dipoli Congress Centre. This was very beneficial in terms networking, of communications to and from conference venue, and in terms of the logistics inside the building, i.e. flow of people btw. sessions and tracks.

However, Dipoli as such had not the optimal room size distribution. A number of rooms were actually operating beyond their seating capacity. The LOC tried to match the rooms according to accepted papers and to guess the likely attendance from that. This worked in most cases, but especially on the opening day some rooms were crowded. During the later conference days this problem levelled out, though.

The conference benefitted from a sponsored public transport ticket. Registrants used those tickets widely, already asking for those on the day of arrival to negotiate their way f.i. from the airport to the city centre or hotels.

The book exhibition area showed also positive results. Publishers were happy to be in the same place with the refreshment area. This resulted in a high contact rate and participants used coffee breaks to read through books etc. The additional attempt to 'play' the book exhibition area with roundtables is in principle a good idea; it however suffered in the specific context from bad acoustics.

All rooms for the tracks were attended by a volunteer. Volunteers helped with the presentations and also kept copies of papers delivered to the sessions. A data stick was kept with the track for archiving purposes.

## *Track Chairs*

Communicating with track co-chairs (TC) in the preparation of the conference and during the conference is an important issue. LOC tried to keep TC informed not only at all times but also timely. However, the usual delays were seen – in some cases though up to the point of no reply. So, having two TC is certainly a good recommendation. However, the communication between TC did not always work properly.

## *Abstract management system*

LOC implemented a web based system for the management of abstracts and later on for papers. This open source system has all functionalities to manage a conference (even payments, if one wishes). The actual operation of the system depends though on the willingness of users, on their factual skills, and also on a mutual learning process during the period of operation. TC had some negative comments regarding the system, mainly related to bulk emailing of abstracts/papers, downloading/printing of papers, communication with registrants to identify moderators/discussants. LOC tried to remedy all factual errors in the system and also developed some ad-hoc solutions, if needed. As this abstract management system is open source, coming users can look especially into those points listed before. However, some general observations: In advance of the conference, only TC have access to papers and in consequence moderators or discussants. Should papers be made available as a general repository to every participant?

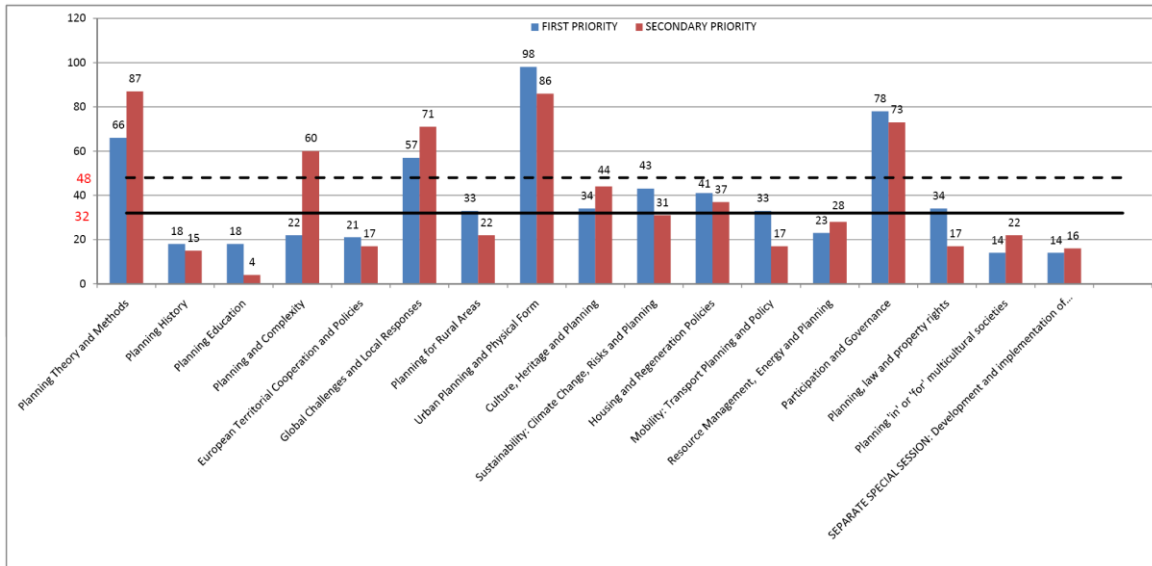
Authors were asked to indicate while up-loading a paper whether the paper can be entered to the Best Conference Paper Price. TC were notified well in advance, that they shall select from all those papers and recommend to the BCP committee; this did not work properly.

## *Deadlines*

Timing and deadlines is a crucial issue for the conference. The general recommendations given by AESOP seem to work fine. Some comments though: A four week submission period for abstracts seems to be sufficient; extended deadlines are no real help. Depending on the future quality agenda, the assessment of abstracts and the balancing between tracks – or the definition of tracks – certainly needs time (see Figure 3). A large part of the schedule depends on the response times

needed by TC. For the conference organiser, a deadline well in advance of the conference helps adjusting to costs and to develop the program proper. LOC still face an uncertainty about final participation numbers; but the requirement for presenting authors to register by a certain date helps getting a more realistic picture (see Figure 4).

Figure 3 – Tracks and paper submissions



TC, if taking their duties seriously, have a great deal of work ahead. This should be reflected in an AESOP policy like waving registration fees for TC and more.

Figure 4

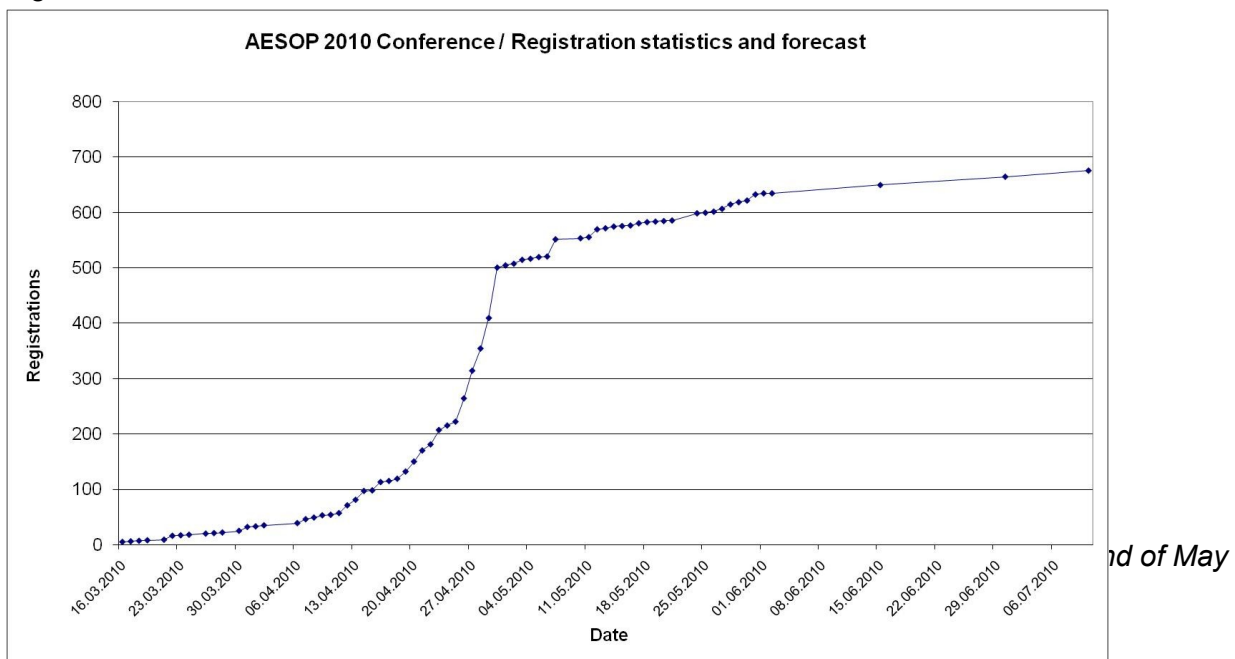


Table 3 – Overview Dates & Deadlines

Mid Oct 2009 - Track Chairs send outline texts

Beginning Nov 2009 – Call for Papers opened  
31 Jan 2010 – Deadline for Abstract submission  
31 Mar – Notification of acceptance/rejection  
30 Apr – deadline early bird  
31 May – deadline for authors/presenters to register to be present in program handbook and book of abstracts  
May – Start detailed scheduling, regarding individual sessions and presentations  
6 June – deadline to up-load full paper  
7 July – conference

## **5. Short comings**

The conference also faced some short comings, which had to do with sponsoring, conference products and media coverage.

The sponsoring of the conference turned out to be very difficult. Mainly the public sector sponsors were interested, the private sector companies and entrepreneurs were not so interested although the LOC worked quite hard with this. Publishers were contacted quite early, but came late and were asking for discounts.

The conference products were partly dysfunctional, especially the conference bag. The original model which was presented while negotiating with the producer was different from the final product delivered the day before the conference. As a matter of fact, how important this technical detail had been, only turned out during the actual use of the bag. At that point, it was too late to complain and return the bags. A recommendation is to keep a sample of the product which has been agreed between the parties and to compare this carefully with the final product.

The t-shirts had a good quality, but did not work as an income source. A recommendation here is to consider this only as an extra.

The media coverage was low. In part this was due to the fact, that July is a vacation period in Finland. In another respect, the print and other media seem to have been less interested in the conference content and key-note speakers as such.

## **6. Quality Agenda**

LOC for the 24<sup>th</sup> AESOP Annual Conference tried to establish a new quality policy regarding abstracts and papers:

Abstracts should have been more structured and use a minimum number of words.

Papers were of different length (anchor, standard, distributed) and it was proposed to up-load papers before the conference.

For the abstract period, the very tight submission period of four weeks proved to be good. Potential registrants tend to submit anyway only during the last week and actually the very last days before the deadline (see Fig. 4). However, paper submissions are different; as it was not an absolute requirement to submit a paper to get the floor in the session, authors in part used the very last moment to up-load or bring the paper.

Regarding the latter point: If AESOP wishes to establish such a policy, an indispensable condition is a proper timing of deadlines. The 24<sup>th</sup> AESOP conference insisted on registration until end of May 2010 for all authors, who want to be listed in the program handbook. By that time most abstracts had been assessed and accepted and also allocated to tracks. This gives the LOC a fair idea about a minimum number of participants.



The different categories of papers (anchor, standard, distributed) were not fully applied. TC had difficulties to use these categories on the basis of abstracts, only. TC rightly pointed out, that the finally submitted papers show also discrepancies with the initial statement in the abstract. Presentations in addition can also be different from papers. This is a line which cannot fully be controlled.

Full papers were required by beginning of June, four weeks in advance of the conference. If AESOP wants to apply a strict policy like 'no paper - no floor', registration and paper deadline need to be at the same time.

From the point of view of a conference organiser this constitutes a problem: The number of participants needs to be known early. Numbers need to be at an economic viable level. Cancellations cannot be late and need to be reflected with a proper cancellation policy.

Regarding the distribution of papers per abstract the 24<sup>th</sup> AESOP Annual Conference faced similar problems as in previous years, i.e. a no balanced outcome of submissions. Figures ranged from 14 to 98 abstracts for first priority, 4 to 87 second priority (see Fig. 3).

LOC tried to even out abstracts, which is ultimately papers per track, using the first and second priority to distribute papers. TC were in part reluctant to receive papers via distribution. They were concerned about the quality of their tracks. This is certainly an argument, but there is also the element of 'interest' in certain themes. On the basis of f.i. 14 paper one can organise a nice seminar but not an Annual Conference. TC need to accept the point, that to run an economic viable Annual Conference you need to get the economics right. From LOC point of view, AESOP should look into variation for conferences in terms of tracks and themes. LOC suggests also breaking up 'entailed estates'; tracks are not personal property and should be adaptable to organisational requirements.

TC need to reflect on the umbrella theme of the conference properly! If AESOP wants to achieve quality in conferences, a close interplay between the conference theme and the invitation texts (call for papers) needs to be established. TC also need to scan abstracts for a link to the umbrella theme. In the end, maybe a more open structure is better: The future host defines the conference theme; the future host launches a call for track chairs with interpretations of/proposals for tracks; track chairs invite paper submissions and review papers. To further improve quality, possibly additional (external) peer reviews are needed for final papers. This way the conferences become probably more consistent and achieve an overall higher quality, also regarding paper presentations.