



Complexity Unpacked

CALL FOR PAPERS

Complexity Unpacked: Analytical Tools & Practical Insights for Uncertain Futures

24th Conference of the AESOP Thematic Group on Planning and Complexity

Location: **University of Nicosia, Department of Architecture, Cyprus**
Date: **8–9 January 2027**

Extended Abstract Submission Deadline: 15 July 2026

Planning operates within, and as part of, complex socio-spatial systems. Cities and regions are not merely objects of intervention but evolving, relational, and adaptive assemblages shaped by multiple interacting actors, institutions, infrastructures, and environments. They are characterised by non-linearity, emergence, uncertainty, path dependence, and cross-scalar interdependencies.

Complexity thinking has offered planning theory powerful shifts: from prediction to adaptation, from control to learning, from linear causality to feedback and co-evolution, and from optimisation to resilience and robustness. Yet an ongoing challenge remains: *how can the conceptual advances of complexity thinking be meaningfully translated into planning practices, analytical tools, and institutional routines?*

We invite contributions that explore this translation. Rather than treating complexity as metaphor alone, we seek work that operationalises (applies) complexity — that mobilises methods and tools capable of engaging with uncertainty, interdependence, and dynamic change in planning contexts. We welcome contributions that critically reflect on how complexity-informed tools reshape professional roles, decision-making cultures, and planning epistemologies. The theme positions tools not as neutral technical devices, but as socio-technical instruments embedded in institutional, political, and normative contexts. We encourage submissions that interrogate both the *promise* and the *constraints* of complexity-based approaches in real-world planning settings.

By unpacking both theoretical foundations and practical applications, the conference seeks to advance dialogue across scholars and practitioners committed to engaging complexity not only as a conceptual lens, but as a mode of planning action.

Scope & Topics

The conference invites contributions that *explore the reciprocal relationship between complexity theory, analytical tools, and planning practice*. We welcome work that moves across conceptual, methodological, and empirical domains, recognising (the co-evolution of theory and practice) that theory and practice co-evolve. We are particularly interested in how analytical approaches such as agent-based modelling, network analysis, system dynamics, exploratory scenario planning, resilience assessment, serious games, participatory methods, and hybrid qualitative–quantitative methods:

- Make visible feedback loops, emergent dynamics, and relational structures
- Support reflexive and adaptive governance
- Enable experimentation and learning in planning processes
- Facilitate participation and co-production under conditions of uncertainty
- Reveal limits, blind spots, and ethical implications of modelling complex systems

Submissions may engage with, but are not limited to, the following interconnected strands:

1. Conceptualising Complexity in Planning

Contributions that advance, reinterpret, or critically reflect on core complexity concepts and their relevance for planning, including:

- Emergence, self-organisation, and non-linearity
- Co-evolution, path dependence, and feedback dynamics
- Adaptation, resilience, robustness, and transformability
- Uncertainty, indeterminacy, and limits of prediction
- Relational, assemblage, and socio-technical perspectives on urban systems

We particularly encourage submissions that make explicit how these conceptual developments inform methodological choices or planning interventions.

2. Operationalising Complexity: Methods and Analytical Tools

Contributions demonstrating how complexity thinking is translated into concrete methods, including:

- Agent-Based Modelling (ABM)
- Network analysis of spatial, social, or infrastructural systems
- System dynamics and causal loop modelling
- Scenario planning and exploratory futures approaches
- Resilience metrics and adaptive capacity assessment
- Gamification, serious games, and simulation platforms
- Participatory modelling and co-production tools
- Hybrid qualitative–quantitative and mixed-method approaches

Submissions may focus on methodological innovation, technical development, or comparative application across contexts and scales.

3. Complexity in Practice: Governance, Institutions, and Learning

Contributions examining how complexity-informed approaches reshape planning practice, governance, and institutional cultures, including:

- Adaptive and reflexive governance arrangements
- Experimentation, learning, and iterative planning processes
- The role of modelling and simulation in decision-making
- Institutional uptake and resistance to complexity-based tools
- Ethical, political, and normative implications of operationalising complexity
- The evolving role of planners within complex adaptive systems
- A complexity take on the role, use and limitations of AI in planning

We welcome both empirical case studies and theoretically grounded reflections that illuminate the promises and constraints of complexity-informed planning.

Submission & Key Dates

Abstract Submission (max. 500 words):	EXTENDED 15 July 2026
Notification of Acceptance:	July/August 2026
Extended Abstract Submission (max. 2500 words):	15 October 2026
Conference Dates:	8–9 January 2027

Please submit abstracts to complexity2027@unic.ac.cy

Include title, abstract, author names, affiliation, contact information and keywords.

Conference Format & Venue

The conference will include paper presentation sessions, method-focused panels, case study discussions and interactive and participatory formats aligned with complexity-based approaches.

It will be hosted by the Department of Architecture, University of Nicosia, Cyprus.

Contact

For inquiries regarding the theme, submissions, or participation, please contact:

Conference Organising Committee Member

Solon Solomou – solomou.s@unic.ac.cy

The conference is organised within the AESOP Thematic Group on Planning and Complexity by Solon Solomou and the local organising team in Cyprus together with Christian Lamker and Jenni Partanen (thematic group coordinators). More information on the thematic group at <https://aesop-planning.eu/thematic-groups/planning-and-complexity>

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