



**THEMATIC GROUP**  
**Public Spaces and Urban Cultures (PSUC)**

## **Annual Report 2023**

*Prepared by Christine Mady, Stefania Ragozino, and Tihomir Viderman, with the support of TG PSUC members*

### **Introduction**

Public Spaces and Urban Cultures (PSUC) is a thematic group established in April 2010 upon the initiative of Sabine Knierbein (Associate Professor, TU Wien, Austria), Ceren Sezer (Chair of Urban Design and Institute for Urban Design and European Urbanism, RWTH Aachen University, Germany) and Chiara Tornaghi (Associate Professor, Coventry University, UK). The main aim of the group is promoting an international and interdisciplinary exchange on public spaces and urban cultures across research and practices. For more than 10 years, this thematic group has informed research, planning and design agendas within and beyond the AESOP community.

in 2023, and after a challenging period during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Thematic Group resumed its in-person activities in addition to online ones. This year, the TG's membership has reached 145 professionals, researchers and activists working on public spaces and urban cultures.

### **Internal organization of the thematic group**

The thematic group's activities are discussed and organized by a collective made up of group members who continuously attend to the tasks that are central to the thematic group's success:

- establishing and promoting the Group's agenda (working topics, calls, publications, events);
- managing communication with the thematic group's members, broader audiences and the AESOP Secretary General (AESOP TG blog, Facebook page, mailing list, newsletter);
- preparing meetings and annual reports;
- disseminating scientific results;
- using synergies of group's membership to conduct research, enable exchange and produce publications.

The internal organization of the group is structured as follows:

**Group Coordination:** Stefania Ragozino (Main Coordinator, Italy), Christine Mady (Finland) and Tihomir Viderman (Germany) and Matej Nikšič (Slovenia) who joined the coordination team in July 2023, when Stefania Ragozino switched from the coordination to the Advisory Board.

**Core Working Group:** Patricia Aelbrecht (UK), Chiara Belingardi (Italy), Nadia Charalambous (Cyprus), Gabriella Esposito De Vita (Italy), Ebba Högström (Sweden),



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Sabine Knierbein (Austria), Karina Landman (South Africa), Matej Nikšič (Slovenia), Nikolai Roskamm (Germany), Mohamed Saleh (The Netherlands), Sara Santos Cruz (Portugal), Ceren Sezer (Germany), Socrates Stratis (Cyprus), Burcu Yigit Turan (Sweden).

**Advisory Board:** Ali Madanipour (University of Newcastle upon Tyne, UK); Sophie Watson (Open University, UK); Sabine Knierbein (TU Wien, Austria); Gabriella Esposito De Vita (CNR-IRISS National Research Council of Italy); Ceren Sezer (RWTH Aachen, Germany) and Stefania Ragozino (CNR-IRISS National Research Council of Italy).

**Group's activities 2023**

**Working Theme 2022-2024 - Public Spaces, Urban Cultures, and Constructing Peace**

The theme is available at:

<https://aesop-planning.eu/tg-news/public-spaces-and-urban-cultures/call-for-expressions-of-interest-to-host-the-thematic-group-s-meetings-2022-2024>

*The construction of peace - the urge to understand how we arrive at peace*

The world's struggle to cope with health, ecological and economic crises, coupled with conflicts across multiple scales – from acquiring geo-political dominion to often invisible struggles that permeate spaces of homes – make the construction of peace the central theme in securing better urban futures. While debates on divides and conflicts in urban societies often shift focus in the range from social polarisation and political exclusion (e.g. political economy or post-foundational theories), over the negotiation of the private-public boundary in everyday life struggles (e.g. feminist critique), struggles over appropriation of public space (urban activism and literature on insurgencies), to insights into spaces of enduring conflicts and divides (Belfast, Baghdad, Istanbul, Nicosia or Beirut), they introduce the 'securing of' peace as a normative goal. However, the institutionalisation of peace across the binary of peace and conflict creates a conceptual gap, in which conflicts across the world are described as increasingly pervasive and complex, while peace is offered as rather a one-dimensional goal. Such an abstraction of a complex set of values, symbols, experiences, and practices that amalgamate into peace, carries the danger of instrumentalising peace in the construction of hegemonic social, cultural, and symbolic spaces. Achieving peace through political and other peace-making processes, too often preserves and produces disparities in power relations, be it at the level of global peacemaking or at the level of the home. The projected image of peace must conform with certain imaginaries of peace and peaceful living together, even when this means casting a veil of silence over past injustices, daily struggles, and potential paths of change. Every day, individuals, collectives, and societies go about

their lives, often unaware that the choices they make continuously negotiate between peace and conflict, and, moreover, negotiate what kind of peace is desired. This is why we ask how peace is constructed. How do we arrive at peace in everyday life, and how does urban space mould the understanding of what kind of peace we aim to arrive at?

*Understanding peace*

From a broader perspective, one might challenge the very understanding of peace, starting with the dialectics between what is perceived as peace and the invisible struggles that such an image might disguise. We ask if urbanisation processes ever aimed at peace. As post-colonial debates or debates on settler colonialism indicate, even within settings, which are perceived as peaceful, (histories) of violence might be permeated. This raises the question of not only peace as a normative goal, but rather how we arrive at peace.

*Urban studies, the focus on conflict versus focusing on everyday peace*

Urban studies rather focus on conflict, war, and divides. But we are interested in how we negotiate peace on a daily basis. At what price is everyday peace constructed in the urban context? It does not come at the same price for everyone and does not have the same impact on everyone's daily life. Think of poverty, discrimination across differences, heritage of violent pasts and how these struggles are passed onto later generations. Moreover, negotiating peace could include actions or non-actions, the decision to be in place, or avoid that place; the acceptance to abide by norms (such as COVID-19 health and safety measures) or not. These choices could lead to inclusion or exclusion from what is considered as the expected norm/ behaviour.

*Peace and public space*

The first reflection of conflict and ironically its dissolution, occur in urban public spaces. These spaces reflect the discourses and practices of tolerance towards differences and display or disguise the tensions immanent in encounters and exchange across diverse urban cultures. From the mundane acts of conviviality to demonstrations, public space accommodates different expressions of demands and claims for spatial and social justice. These struggles can materialise in various forms, from peaceful to violent in a panoply of endeavours that try to belong and partake in democracy.

*Peace, scale and levels of personal/social arrivals*

Peace has a transformative power. While considering public spaces as the catalyst for arriving at/ constructing peace and spatial justice, several aspects come to mind. The 'construction of peace', or being at peace comes at different scales of experiencing peace. Focus on peace is simultaneously a personal and social endeavour. It includes different scales, from personal space to groups with close bonds, over city, society to global normative goals. It also transgresses the boundary between (industrialised) societies and nature, as humans seek peace in connection to nature, and declaratively seek to resolve the lost peace with nature and the planet. It starts with the individual feeling at peace with oneself and extends to the environment. One could feel at peace when surrounded by crowds, or when isolated in their private dwelling. Peace

facilitates inclusion, also for vulnerable groups who feel at peace in public space (gender, age, special needs, cultural and other backgrounds...).

*Addressing the call for proposals*

The AESOP Thematic Group Public Spaces and Urban Cultures invites proposals that explore the construction of peace at different scales and through diverse disciplines, to reflect the position of urban studies within this process and build on observations, experimentation, and narration of the transformative power of peace within public spaces. The proposals would address the following topics in relation to the construction of peace:

- Care
- Climate
- Digitalisation
- Diversity and tolerance towards differences (community engagement, participation, and co-creation, enabling and establishing possibilities for dialogue)
- Inclusion (age, gender, special needs, backgrounds, ethnicities and so on)
- The Political and Urban Space
- Human-centred spaces
- Spatial justice
- Urban transformation

The **2023 AESOP Annual Congress in Łódź, Poland “Integrated Planning in a World of Turbulence”** took place during 11-15 July at the University of Łódź, Faculty of Management. The TG PSUC organized and co-chaired Track 8: Planning for Culture and Tourism: Public Spaces, Heritage, Identity, Regeneration with the local chair Monika Murzyn-Kupisz and the YA Syed Hamid Akbar. The track had 10 sessions over the three conference days, and 33 papers were presented. The session presentations are available at:

[https://aesop-planning.eu/images/PDFs/LODZ-Tracks/Track\\_08\\_program.pdf](https://aesop-planning.eu/images/PDFs/LODZ-Tracks/Track_08_program.pdf)

During 2023, the TG PSUC theme was covered in the following events:

**Public libraries as generators of peace** - An event of the AESOP Thematic Group on Public Spaces and Urban Cultures, which was held in Helsinki 15-16 May 2023. The call is available at: <https://aesop-planning.eu/tg-news/public-spaces-and-urban-cultures/call-for-abstracts-public-libraries-as-generators-of-peace-cases-in-helsinki>

The first event of the two-year period 2022-2024 on the working theme 'Public Spaces, Urban Cultures, and Constructing Peace' and held in Helsinki was attended by participants from Finland, Norway, Germany, Italy, and Palestine, in addition to master's students from the Urban Studies and Planning (USP) programme at Aalto University. The event included visits to two public libraries in Helsinki with presentations from designers and library staff, presentations by participants, and a



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workshop, which ended in a public discussion at the Oodi Library. Discussions that started with public libraries as generators of peace expanded to address topics related to the location of libraries within planning processes, funding of libraries, participatory approaches, their changing programmes, and relation to public spaces were discussed.

The local organizers were Christine Mady, Hossam Hewidy, and AESOP TG PSUC representatives were Ebba Högström, and Matej Nikšič. The report following this event is available at:

[https://aesop-planning.eu/images/TG\\_PSUC/TG\\_PSUC\\_Workshop\\_Helsinki/AESOP-TG-PSUC\\_HELSINKI-REPORT\\_20230517\\_2.pdf](https://aesop-planning.eu/images/TG_PSUC/TG_PSUC_Workshop_Helsinki/AESOP-TG-PSUC_HELSINKI-REPORT_20230517_2.pdf)

The second event **Urban Conflicts and Peace: Everyday Politics of Commons** took place in Naples on 5-6 October 2023. Information on the call is available at:

<https://aesop-planning.eu/tg-news/public-spaces-and-urban-cultures/urban-conflicts-and-peace-everyday-politics-of-commons>

It was an international conference organized by the National Research Council of Italy, Institute for Research on Innovation and Services for Development (CNR-IRISS, Italy), together with the BTU Cottbus-Senftenberg (Germany) and University of Florence (Italy), hosted by University Federico II, Department of Architecture, Naples, Italy.

A 2-day conference including keynote lectures by Prof. Stavros Stavrides (National Technical University of Athens, Greece) and Maria Anita Palumbo (University of Lyon, France), 50 paper presentations divided in 9 thematic sessions, roundtables and debates, a fieldtrip-workshop to the National Interest Site “Bagnoli-Coroglio” including meeting the main actors participating to the regeneration and remediation process, as well as a visit and workshop at Lido Pola Common and its community in Bagnoli.

The conference reflected on the politics of commons as inherently bound to the ways and means of how urban societies negotiate between urban conflicts and peace. The goal was to conceptualize the relationship between conflict and peace beyond their usual perception as a binary pair. For peace can maintain imbalances in power relations which might violently affect parts of urban population, as much as urban conflicts might open up the opportunity for more democratic participation and the recognition of differences. In the realm of politics, conflicts may shape a transformative public sphere which contests the given unjust conditions and renegotiates meanings and actions. The commons display how societies have contested, innovated, produced and governed differently – they are integral part of an everyday construction of urban peace in which power relations are continuously rebalanced. They allow for a profound insight into assemblages of institutional and social actors and their daily interactions unfolding in the range of practices and settings, from the micro level of informal improvised tactics to the structured institutionalized settings of urban politics. At the same time, they show that city is made beyond institutional plans, with positive and negative impacts on daily life. To



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grasp these transformative moments of agency and to understand contentious acts of publics as political, this conference gathered academics, professionals working on and with urban space, activists and politicians who brought to the table their various epistemologies, theories, and practices.

The conference gave rise to numerous reflections, some of which will be collected in special issues of journals in 2024-2025. In December, the first call for papers "(Re)PRODUCING EVERYDAY LIFE. Urban commoning through care" was prepared and launched in the journal *Contesti Territori Progetti* of the University of Florence.

The report following this event is available at: <https://aesop-planning.eu/tg-news/public-spaces-and-urban-cultures/aesop-tg-psuc-conference-naples-urban-conflicts-and-peace-everyday-politics-of-commons>

The third event **Going Public: Framing events as a tool for inquiry in public space research** was conducted online on 6 November 2023; information on the call is available at: <https://aesop-planning.eu/tg-news/public-spaces-and-urban-cultures/going-public-framing-events-as-a-tool-for-inquiry-in-public-space-research>

The workshop was organized by the UnCommon Public Space Group (UPSG) at the University of California, Los Angeles and the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) Thematic Group on Public Spaces and Urban Cultures, **GOING PUBLIC** was an online workshop that invited participants to engage the possibility of the "event" as a form of inquiry in public space research and as a tool to advance community-based goals related to justice and peace. The workshop was attended by 14 participants representing 8 countries, each of whom were engaging with events in their own community-based research or practice related to public space.

Workshop organizers Claire Nelischer, Andres F. Ramirez, and Gus Wendel highlighted examples from Los Angeles, sharing the recent work of UCLA's UnCommon Public Space Group that uses community-based events to explore pressing public space issues, and to advance justice and peace in urban public environments. Drawing from these examples, the organizers offered a framework for how to use events in public space research to foster bi-directional, place-based, and humanistic approaches to the study of public space and to generate new knowledge. In doing so, they emphasized both the epistemological and relational potential of events to foster peaceful and just relations in public space.

Participants then had the opportunity to apply this framework to their own public space projects. Drawing from their own diverse research experiences and ideas, participants engaged in facilitated, small group discussions on the limits and possibilities of events as tools of public space research and worked collaboratively to develop and refine principles for such an approach, and prompting new questions, ideas, and opportunities. The workshop concluded with a discussion of avenues for further development and collaboration around the concept of events in relation to public space research.



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The workshop had nine participants in addition to the three organizers and two TG PSUC representatives, Stefania Ragozino and Christine Mady.

The report is available at: <https://aesop-planning.eu/tg-news/public-spaces-and-urban-cultures/aesop-tg-psuc-online-workshop-ucla-going-public-framing-events-as-a-tool-for-inquiry-in-public-space-research>

The coordination team actively participated in all preparation for the biannual theme's events, which are ongoing, with two more taking place in January 2024 in South Africa, and May 2024 in Cyprus.

The following table provides an overview of the events related to the 2022-2024 theme:

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Date, title, and place	Local organizer	AESOP TG Representative
<b>2023</b>		
15-16/05/2023 <b>Public libraries as generators of peace</b> Aalto University	Christine Mady (Finland) with Hossam Hewidy (Finland)	Ebba Högström (Sweden), and Matej Nikšič (Slovenia)
11-15/7/2023 <b>AESOP Annual Congress 2023 Łódź, Poland – Integrated Planning in a World of Track 8: Planning for Culture and Tourism: Public Spaces, Heritage, Identity, Regeneration.</b> University of Łódź	Christine Mady (Finland)	Monika Murzyn-Kupisz (Poland) and the YA Syed Hamid Akbar (Belgium).
5-6/10/2023 <b>Urban Conflicts and Peace: Everyday Politics of Commons</b> University of Naples, Department of Architecture	Stefania Ragozino (Italy)	Tihomir Viderman (Germany) and Chiara Belingardi (Italy)
6/11/2023 <b>Going Public: Framing events as a tool for inquiry in public space.</b> Online UCLA	Claire Nelischer, Andres Ramirez, Gus Wendel (USA)	Stefania Ragozino (Italy), and Christine Mady (Finland)
28-30/1/2024 <b>Public space and peace building: from degenerative to regenerative environments</b> University of Pretoria	Karina Landman and Kundani Makakavhule (South Africa)	Ceren Sezer (Germany) and Matej Nikšič (Slovenia)
May 2024 <b>AESOP TG PSUC Meeting Cyprus - Constructing Peace through Public Space: What Publics? What Commons?</b>	Sebnem Hoskara, Nadia Charalambous, Socrates Stratis (Cyprus)	Sabine Knierbein (Austria) Tihomir Viderman (Germany)
8-12/7/2024 <b>AESOP Annual Congress 2024 Paris, France - GameChanger? Planning for just and sustainable urban regions</b> <a href="https://aesop-planning.eu/paris">https://aesop-planning.eu/paris</a> <b>Track 8: PUBLIC SPACE - Planning for cultural diversity, peace and the experience of places</b> Science Po University	Christine Mady (Finland)	Dimitra Kanellopoulou, and Margherita Gori Nocentini

**Note:** Apart from the general AESOP Annual Congress, the AESOP TG PSUC has established the policy that all meetings should be free of charge to AESOP TG members and that affordable accommodation proposals are provided by the local host. In times of open call for hosting an AESOP TG PSUC, group members and other interested parties could submit a proposal for hosting a TG event (conference/call for abstract/call for paper/workshop/meeting) about current themes of the PSUC Thematic Group. This proposal should include information about timing, place, host institution, concept note, issues to address, and other information about the event's organisation.

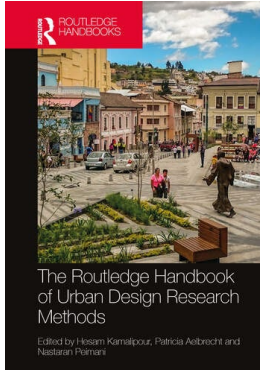
Once the event has been accepted and scheduled, the working group, including local members and TG representatives, will work on the call that will be shared with active TG members prior to dissemination to start the discussion of themes of relevance and to promote participation in the event. A final version of the call will be disseminated through the AESOP central and the TG PSUC network. In 2024, the TG PSUC will propose its new theme and use the AESOP 2024 Congress in Paris and the TG meeting during it to start working on the forthcoming 2024-2026 theme.



### Productive steps in 2023

Edited book

#### **THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF URBAN DESIGN RESEARCH METHODS.**



The book “THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF URBAN DESIGN RESEARCH METHODS” is edited by Hesam Kamalipour, Patricia Aelbrecht, and Nastaran Peimani, and published by Routledge (<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003168621>) (<https://www.routledge.com/The-Routledge-Handbook-of-Urban-Design-Research-Methods/Kamalipour-Aelbrecht-Peimani/p/book/9780367768058>)

As an evolving and contested field, urban design has been made, unmade, and remade at the intersections of multiple disciplines and professions. It is now a decisive moment for urban design to reflect on its rigour and relevance. This handbook is an attempt to seize this moment for urban design to further develop its theoretical and methodological knowledge base and engage with the question of "what urban design can be" with a primary focus on its research.

This handbook includes contributions from both established and emerging scholars across the global North and global South to provide a more field-specific entry point by introducing a range of topics and lines of inquiry and discussing how they can be explored with a focus on the related research designs and methods. The specific aim, scope, and structure of this handbook are appealing to a range of audiences interested and/or involved in shaping places and public spaces.

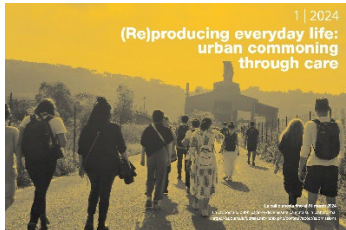
What makes this book quite distinctive from conventional handbooks on research methods is the way it has been structured in relation to some key research topics and questions in the field of urban design regarding the issues of agency, affordance, place, informality, and performance. In addition to the introduction chapter, this handbook includes 80 contributors and 52 chapters organised into five parts. The commissioned chapters showcase a wide range of topics, research designs, and

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methods with references to relevant scholarly works on the related topics and methods.

Special issue

**(RE)PRODUCING EVERYDAY LIFE. URBAN COMMONING THROUGH CARE**



This is a call for an edited volume in CONTESTI 1 by Chiara Belingardi, Gabriella Esposito De Vita, Stefania Ragozino, Tihomir Viderman

<https://oajournals.fupress.net/index.php/contesti>

Urban Commons express the entanglements among spaces, communities, and governing models. The unceasing process of reconfiguration of the geography of people, activities, and rules of self-organization, typical of the commoning process, is based on mutual recognition, shared values, openness, mutualism, and care. The three items (commoning, community, space) are equally necessary to the creation of commons, moving towards enabling policies and enabling spaces. This call of CONTESTI aims to collect theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions that deal with the concepts of urban commons and care, with the focus on (but not restricted to) the following topics: 1. Production of commons - production of values; 2. Care as a social activity and public responsibility; 3. Everyday politics of urban commons; 4. Enabling spaces, enabling policies; 5. Conflict and resistance to urban extractivism; 6. Commons and (agro)ecologies for territorial regeneration; 7. Urban Commoning by care strategies; 8. Women and queer women for urban resistance.



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Erasmus+ Project

**EDUCATION IN LIVING LABS: PARTICIPATORY SKILLS FOR  
SUSTAINABLE URBAN GOVERNANCE – PS-U-GO**

This Erasmus+, Cooperation partnerships in higher education titled “Education in Living Labs: Participatory Skills for sustainable Urban Governance”, is coordinated by Nadia Charalambous (Cyprus), with the TG PSUC as an advisory body. Project partners also include members of TG PSUC, Stefania Ragozino (CNR-IRISS, Italy) and Tihomir Viderman (BTU, Germany). This project started in December 2023.

PS-U-GO will implement Urban Living Labs (ULLs) as educational spaces involving stakeholders from the quadruple helix to experiment and test ideas and solutions to urban challenges. The ambition of the project is to enable place-based civic participation to address issues of public concern in respect to common values. The aim is to equip students with advanced participatory and soft skills for sustainable urban governance through innovative education, set in real-life environments.

The project will review and map existing ULL methodologies and participatory approaches to establish a pedagogic framework of situated learning and a strategy for co-creation. Online and in-person training will prepare the students to take part in their local ULLs, which will be implemented in four cities: Cottbus, Naples, Nicosia, Petralia Sottana (Palermo). The ULLs will be accompanied by a process of reflection - through qualitative research - and formal validation of educational outcomes.

The key results of the project will be: a) the co-creation of urban solutions and interventions in four ULLs in European cities and b) the development of advanced participatory and soft skills of students and other stakeholders. The achievement of these results will be supported by a series of outputs, including a framework for situated learning in ULLs, a co-creation handbook, context-sensitive ULL methodologies, an online manual for participatory skills and a booklet for each ULL.