

AESOP Thematic Group Public Spaces and Urban Cultures - Call for Expressions of Interest to host the Thematic Group's Meetings 2022-2024

"Public Spaces, Urban Cultures and Constructing Peace"

Working theme written by Christine Mady (Beirut, Lebanon), Stefania Ragozino (Naples, Italy), Tihomir Viderman (Berlin, Germany), in collaboration with the TG PSUC's Core Working Group

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

Proposals should present how in a series of meetings/workshops/conferences or other formats, participants from academia (universities and research institutes), policy, practice and civic society among other, could engage with contributions to the call's theme, and arrive at tangible, synergetic outputs on the potentialities and different roles that public spaces and urban cultures could have in the global to local construction of peace.

Schedule

- Call launched in AESOP Tartu July 2022
- Submission of expression of interest: **31 October 2022**
- Announcement of selected applications: **2 November 2022**
- Joint Meeting for development of full proposal: **7 November 2022**
- Submission of full proposals: **27 November 2022**

Mission, aims and engagement within the Thematic Group on Public Spaces and Urban Cultures

The AESOP Thematic Group Public Spaces and Urban Cultures critically and constructively inquires into the nature of urban cultures and public spaces (=lived space), offering potentials by confronting and weaving networks with the AESOP Planning Community, other scientific communities engaged with these topics, European research networks, policy makers, local communities, and urban activists among other.

This thematic group aims to introduce the research and design focus on Public Spaces and Urban Cultures in planning-related disciplines. Indeed, the group brings together people from diverse disciplines: Art, Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Urban Planning, Urban Design, Policy, Urban Sociology, Urban Geography, Urban Ethnography, among others.

The group consists of members focusing on:

1. theory, concepts, speculation
2. methodology, methods combination, method reflection
3. empirical field research and related ethics
4. education and learning
5. policy, regulation and planning
6. civic design, co-production and collective meaning-making

The members of the AESOP Thematic Group on Public Spaces and Urban Cultures discuss and develop approaches proposed under the biennial group's working theme and engage in peer-to-peer exchange on research and design projects. In addition to the annual AESOP Conference, the group has regular meetings spanning academia, praxis and activism, which take place in the form of workshops, seminars and conferences, accompanied by field trips.

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 contain information about timing, place, host institution, concept and issues to deepen. Once the event proposal has been accepted, the host institution prepares the event in close cooperation with the two TG representatives, who assist the hosting institutional partners in developing the meeting's theme and agenda. The hosting institution invites the two TG representatives as members of the meeting's scientific committee. If local funding is not available, the hosting institution assists them in obtaining funding elsewhere. Once the call is prepared, it will be shared with the TG Core Working Group prior to dissemination in order to start the discussion of themes of relevance and to promote participation in the event. A final version of the call will be shared with the local and TG networks through social media.

The format of the event is open. The events are mostly held in the format of two-days workshops/seminars/conferences that often include a field trip. During these events, participants are encouraged to give presentations about their research and design projects on the relevant topic. Apart from the general AESOP Annual Conference Meetings, the AESOP TG PSUC has established the policy that all meetings should be free of cost to AESOP TG members, at least keynote lectures should be accessible for the public without any costs (in place, and/or virtually through livestream), and that, when possible, affordable accommodation proposals are provided by the local host. Participants usually cover their own travel and accommodation expenses.

For questions regarding the organisation of the meetings please send an email to: psucnetwork@gmail.com

We acknowledge as well the institutions and colleagues that have hosted our events so far: Interdisciplinary Centre for Urban Culture and Public Space, TU Wien (Vienna, Austria); Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia (Ljubljana, Slovenia); Institute for Research on Innovation and Services for Development of Naples, National Research Council of Italy (Naples, Italy); Human Cities Symposium Organizers, Faculté d'Architecture La Cambre Horta and ProMateria (Brussels, Belgium); Middle East Technical University (Ankara, Turkey); Technical University of Lisbon (Lisbon, Portugal); Ozyegin University (Istanbul, Turkey); UN Habitat World Urban Forum (Medellin, Colombia); Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urban Planning (Bucharest, Romania); La Villette School of Architecture (Paris, France); Public Space Biennale at Faculty of Architecture Roma Tre (Rome, Italy); University of Glasgow (Glasgow, UK); Czech Technical University Faculty of Architecture (Prague, Czech Republic); CITTA Research Centre for Territory, Transports and Environment, University of Porto (Porto, Portugal); Faculty of Architecture, Art, and

Design, Notre Dame University Louaize (Louaize, Lebanon); Tracce Urbane and Laboratory of Urban Studies at Sapienza (Rome, Italy); Department of Architecture, University of Cyprus (Cyprus); Wageningen University (Wageningen, the Netherlands); Gothenburg University (Gothenburg, Sweden); Cardiff University (Cardiff, UK); University of Venice (Venice, Italy); Delft University of Technology (Delft, The Netherlands); University of Technology (Gdańsk Poland); Aristotle University (Thessaloniki, Greece).