



# AESOP

## Quality Recognition Catalogue 2019-2025

Sharing Excellence in  
Planning Education

# AESOP Quality Recognition Catalogue 2019 – 2025: Sharing Excellence in Planning Education

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# Foreword

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## **Karina Pallagst, Vice president of AESOP and Maria Hakansson, President of AESOP**

It is with great pleasure, and indeed a deep sense of pride, that, on behalf of AESOP, we introduce this publication. The “2019-2025 AESOP Catalogue of Recognised Quality in Educational Settings, Approaches and Practices” represents far more than a collection of exemplary cases; it offers a thoughtful and timely reflection on the very core of planning education: its programmes, pedagogies, and evolving ambitions.

At the heart of every planning school lies its curriculum - where knowledge, values, and future visions of our cities and regions are shaped. This catalogue brings together a carefully curated selection of programmes that have undergone AESOP's rigorous Quality Recognition process. In doing so, it not only highlights excellence but also captures the diversity and richness of planning education across Europe today. Each recognised programme reflects a commitment to innovation, critical thinking, and societal relevance, demonstrating how planning education continues to respond to complex global challenges while remaining rooted in local contexts.

This publication serves multiple purposes. For institutions considering entering the Quality Recognition process, it provides both inspiration and guidance. It illustrates what it means to strive for and achieve recognised quality, and how reflective self-assessment can strengthen academic programmes, in exchange with peers. At the same time, for the wider academic and professional community, it offers valuable insight into the current state of planning education by revealing shared concerns, emerging themes, and contemporary pedagogical approaches across different national and institutional settings. Furthermore, the ambition is that this publication can bring inspiration for both teachers and institutions to contribute to developing and strengthening planning education together.

What becomes evident through these showcases is that planning education is not static. It is continuously adapting to new societal demands and transformations. Issues such as resilience, digitalisation, equity, and participatory governance are increasingly embedded within curricula, shaping a new generation of planners equipped to navigate uncertainty and complexity.

Our sincere thanks go to all those who have contributed to making this publication possible. First of all, all colleagues of the AESOP community which generously agreed to share their experiences and examples from their programmes and the Quality Recognition process. In particular, we of course would like to acknowledge the dedicated efforts of the Quality Recognition Team, whose commitment and professionalism ensured the integrity and depth of the evaluation process. They have carefully assembled, reviewed, and curated the showcased programmes, investing considerable time, expertise, and care into every stage - from selection to final presentation.

We would also like to extend special appreciation to editor-in-chief Tijana Dabović who also serves as Chair of the AESOP Excellence in Education Board (2023-2026) and to the editors Mina Di Marino, Zeynep Enlil, Alenka Fikfak, Anna Kazcorowska, Christopher Maidment, Juliana Martins, Ana Peric, Declan Redmond, Federica Scaffidi, Paulo Silva, Patrick Witte, who also serve as AESOP Excellence in Education Board Members (2023-2026). Moreover, we express our thanks to the design team Alenka Fikfak, Juliana Martins, Federica Scaffidi, Anna Kazcorowska, Graphic Designers Aleš Švigelj and Gašper Mrak. Their editorial and curatorial work has shaped this catalogue into a coherent and engaging volume, truly expressing their ability to translate complex academic material into an accessible and compelling format. Supported by co-funding from the Center for Academic Teaching and Learning at Utrecht University, the publication is not only highly informative but also a pleasure to read.

The timing of this catalogue could not be more fitting. As the planning community prepares to gather at the World Planning Schools Congress in Helsinki in the summer of 2026, this publication provides a valuable point of reference and reflection. It invites us to consider where we stand as a community of educators, and where we aspire to go. It encourages dialogue, exchange, and mutual learning - values that lie at the very heart of AESOP.



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# Spatial Distribution of the Presented Programmes



\* Cities with two awarded programmes.

In memoriam Gentle Ben (TU Dortmund, AESOP President 2018–2020) — who insisted the map should show more.

# Introduction

## **Tijana Dabović**

2019-2023 Member and 2023 – 2026 Chair of the AESOP EEB

## **Patrick Witte**

2023 – 2026 Member of the AESOP EEB

## **Christopher Maidment**

2021 – 2026 Member and the 2026 – 2030 Chair of the AESOP EEB

In recent decades, planning educators across Europe have faced the challenge of delivering planning programmes in a rapidly changing societal context. Sustainable spatial development, digital and green transformations, and the emergence of AI continue to have far-reaching implications for how we train our future planners. Simultaneously, the changing context of higher education, including budget cuts, poses challenges to critical thinking, reflexivity and collaboration. Against this backdrop, the purpose of this 2019-2025 AESOP Quality Recognition Catalogue is to showcase the diverse ways in which planning educators in different contexts across Europe continuously strive to prepare future spatial planners as ethical, knowledgeable and innovative actors who will do their best to pursue the public interest within these increasingly complex and competitive conditions.

## **Quality Recognition Programme**

This Catalogue is a collection of planning programmes awarded during the Standard Phase of the Quality Recognition Programme, but it can be understood as the result of an at least decade-long effort within the AESOP community. Emerging from the AESOP mission and extensive deliberation within the AESOP community on what it would mean to offer meaningful, peer-grounded quality recognition in European planning education, the QR Programme began in 2015 with an initial Pilot Phase. From the first working group discussions (see Galland and Chettiparamb, 2020; Lo Piccolo, 2017), a clear conviction emerged that the quality recognition process is best achieved through the principles of mutual sharing, reflexivity, creativity and deliberation.

The formal establishment of the Excellence in Education Board (EEB) in 2017 marked a significant institutional step forward, providing the QR Programme with a dedicated body (the Excellence in Education Board) responsible for its ongoing development and quality. In 2019, the Programme moved to its Standard Phase, seeking the answers to three questions: How can AESOP offer

member schools institutional support by certifying recognised qualities in their programmes? How can it do so through a process that is voluntary, collaborative and oriented towards mutual learning, rather than through a competitive, bureaucratic audit process? How can we design the QR Programme to be responsive to evolving understandings of what high-quality education requires?

Consequently, over the 2017–2020 and 2020–2023 terms, both chaired by Daniel Galland, QR's Mission, Ethos, Criteria, Guidance and Timeline were progressively defined and refined. The evolving list of QR Criteria is evidenced on the last page of each programme's Showcase Practices Section, where the most relevant QR Criteria are highlighted. Mission, Ethos and Timeline have not changed since 2020, while Guidance was evolving along with the Criteria. These elements became foundational in structuring the interactive, dialogical process of quality recognition between assessors from the EEB and programme applicants (AESOP - About AESOP, 2026; AESOP - QR Process, 2026). From 2022, this process included adding a 14th criterion to specifically recognise 'Showcase practices' - the practices that planning schools want to communicate to the wider AESOP community.

In August 2023, Tijana Dabović became the EEB Chair and, backed by the current EEB members (AESOP – EEB, 2026), took up three complementary, intertwined processes:

- Revisions needed to address emerging challenges in planning education, resulting in a consolidation of the criteria, guidance and application form into a single, integrated document, with clearer signposting and explicit links to the 2024 revision of the AESOP Core Curriculum. Revised QR document also included additional guidance to emerging priority themes (including socio-spatial justice, the use of artificial intelligence and spatio-temporal dimensions of planning practice) identified through surveys, expert interviews, webinars and systematic literature review;
- Joint reflections among assessors, applicants, and the wider planning education community on the QR Programme and its transformative potential took place at the annual EEB meetings, and at QR roundtables held during the 2024 AESOP Heads of Schools Meeting in Venice and the 2025 AESOP Congress in Istanbul. It was after the 2024 Round Table in Venice that it became clear that the AESOP Digital Archive, containing the QR Evaluation Reports and Certificates, was not widely used — leading to the idea of creating the open-access QR Catalogue.

- Enhanced dissemination of QR's mission and outputs led to regular presentations of the QR Programme not only at the CoRep, but also at the 2024, 2025 and 2026 AESOP Heads of Schools meetings in Venice, Liverpool and Ås, respectively. This catalogue is one contribution toward that larger vision.

These processes reflect the aspiration, embedded in the EEB, for the QR Programme to evolve continuously — remaining relevant and responsive to the shifting challenges of planning education — rather than ossifying into fixed criteria applied mechanically across heterogeneous contexts.

Furthermore, the QR process unfolds as a genuine, structured dialogue. Two members of the EEB assess each application and prepare Interim Reports that highlight how the application should be further developed and clarified, followed by a Feedback Meeting between applicants and assessors. This cycle of sustained, peer-to-peer exchange continues until the assessors consider that the application fully meets the QR criteria. This is reflected in the award of the Certificate of Quality and the publication of a final Evaluation Report on the AESOP website (AESOP - QR Certified Programmes, 2026; AESOP Digital Archive, 2026). This exchange is as valuable as the certificate itself. It prompts applicants to examine their programmes with fresh eyes, to articulate what is distinctive and why it matters, and to identify what might yet be strengthened. The Showcase Practices in this Catalogue were identified, named and described through this precise process. The Catalogue is published to celebrate the process and to serve as an inspiration for quality enhancement and the facilitation of connections among planning educators beyond QR processes.

## Programmes Catalogue

The Catalogue brings together contributions from planning programmes awarded during the Standard Phase of the AESOP Quality Recognition Programme from 2019 to 2025. The only programme missing from the Catalogue is the Bachelor of Engineering Programme in Spatial Management offered by Krakow University of Economics awarded in 2024. The 21 programmes whose contributions follow span 12 countries and encompass both bachelor's and master's level qualifications. These programmes are taught in English and in national languages, and take place in faculties of architecture, engineering, geography, economics and thematic interdisciplinary studies. Their student cohorts range from intimate seminars of fewer than 10 to cohorts of 120 or more. Several of them have been graduating their students for two decades, whereas others are newer creations, shaped from the outset by European and international debates about what 21st-century planning education should look like.

## How Each Contribution Is Structured

Each contribution has been prepared by the programme's academic staff and reviewed by an EEB member, ensuring that it is both an authentic act of self-representation and an externally validated account of quality. Contributions are structured to enable both comparability and a full expression of each programme's distinctiveness.

While the 'Highlights' offer a concise summary, 'Programme Key Characteristics' provide more detail, structured around each programme's alignment with national, regional and European planning frameworks, its core perspectives, knowledge, skills and attitudes, and the learner-centred pedagogical methods used to organise and support learning. Finally, the institutional settings of the programme are presented, covering quality assurance and key relationships with external stakeholders.

Showcase Practices are the heart of the catalogue, including how they reflect specific QR criteria. Each programme presents illustrative examples of its pedagogical approach, where and how it is applied, what students learn through it, and what its typical outputs are. These descriptions are concrete and specific - grounded in the actual conditions of each programme's delivery.

## What the Showcase Practices Reveal: Cross-Cutting Themes

What unites the contributions to the Catalogue is a recognition of how important it is to prepare future planners for the messy, negotiated and politically embedded realities of professional work. Reading the contributions, several points are mentioned with a frequency and variety that merits recording them here:

### Sustainability as a disposition

- Several examples show that the need to overcome the gap between theoretical instruction in sustainability and climate change, and its practical application in planning processes and outcomes, is being taken seriously.
- Careful choices of topics for cross-scalar, cross-disciplinary and cross-temporal research and inquiry present an organising principle woven through curricula, project briefs and fieldwork sites, allowing students to bring together biological and ecological knowledge with social processes and impacts.

### Real-world engagement being structurally embedded

- A feature of several showcase practices is the extent to which programmes engage their students with real places, real challenges and real people, not as an occasional add-on, but as a fundamental part of the programme's structure.

- Examples range from field placements that engage students in data collection to address local needs, to facilitating dialogue with key stakeholders, to holding public exhibitions of their work.

### **Commitment to international and intercultural learning**

- The pursuit of internationalisation in ways that are equitable, reflexive and genuinely transformative is addressed through different settings, ranging from mandatory mobility requirements or cross-cultural studio assignments, to the structural inclusion of Global South perspectives in curricula and working with partners to arrange international workshops and competitions.
- These represent different ways to make internationalisation a substantive part of programme delivery, without always relying on mobilising students across borders.

### **Reflexive praxis and the formation of professional identity**

- Multiple programmes focus strongly on ways of cultivating not just knowledge and skill, but the ethical orientation, critical self-awareness and civic commitment that responsible planning practice demands.
- The attention that several programmes in this catalogue pay to professional ethics (not as a standalone module, but as a thread running through studio critique, field reflection, internship documentation and public presentation) reflects a shared understanding of this imperative.

### **The studio as an integrative environment**

- Amongst a range of carefully chosen pedagogies, the planning studio (or its equivalent) functions as the space where different intellectual and practical strands are drawn together.
- Several examples of studios in the Catalogue are based on responses to real-world problems. In some programmes this is taken a step further, sequencing studios across the programme and linking them to more theoretical courses, to generate a holistic approach to planning education.

### **The critical embedding of technology and digitisation**

- The challenges emerging from digitisation and geo-spatial and AI technologies in planning have moved beyond questions of technical competence, toward fundamental questions about their critical and ethical use.
- Several contributions document pedagogically innovative uses of digital technologies (GIS, BIM, virtual reality, IoT sensor networks, AI-assisted spatial analy-

sis), while also recognising that the use of technology can't be separated from critical reflection.

## **How to Use this Catalogue**

This Catalogue is intended for multiple audiences. For planning educators considering or currently engaged in the AESOP QR process, it provides concrete examples of how programmes have articulated their distinctiveness and showcase practices in the language of the QR criteria - a practical resource for anyone preparing an application or reflecting on how to strengthen their programme's self-presentation. For those not yet engaged with the QR Programme, it offers an accessible, grounded and inspiring account of what the process involves and what it can make visible.

More broadly, the Catalogue is intended as a resource for anyone with a serious interest in the current state and future directions of planning education in Europe. The apparent institutional and contextual diversity is not a difficulty to be overcome - it is precisely the point. Accordingly, the Catalogue does not seek to identify a single best model of planning education, nor to reduce the rich diversity of approaches represented here to a single standard. What constitutes an excellent planning programme is shaped by different legal systems, different professional cultures, different spatial challenges and different pedagogical traditions. The value of bringing these programmes together in a single catalogue is not to flatten those differences, but to make them visible. They offer an insight into what quality in planning education looks like, and an invitation to share and learn from one another across boundaries of geography (as illustrated by the map of the programme on page 6), language, disciplinary tradition and institutional context.

Similarly, the practices described here are not universal prescriptions, but they are genuine and tested examples. Each one is the outcome of a process of sustained reflection, peer challenge and iterative refinement. Readers are encouraged to engage with them not as models to be copied exactly, but as invitations to reflect: What might this approach mean in a different institutional or national context? What assumptions about learning, planning and the social role of the university does it carry? Are those assumptions shared? Where they are not, what is the alternative?

Planning education faces challenges that are unlikely to diminish in the years ahead. Crises of ecology, urban inequality and democratic legitimacy are not problems that will be resolved by any curriculum reform alone. But the quality of the planners we educate will strongly influence whether these crises can be resolved. This Catalogue is offered as a contribution to the ongoing, collective effort to make the learning process as good as it can be.

## Acknowledgements

This Catalogue is the result of a collective effort sustained over several years, across multiple iterations of the EEB. Members of the 2023-2026 EEB who served as editors and reviewers of individual contributions and relevant documents (Tijana Dabović, Mina Di Marino, Zeynep Enlil, Alenka Fikfak, Anna Kaczorowska, Christopher Maidment, Juliana Martins, Ana Perić, Declan Redmond, Federica Scaffidi, Paulo Silva and Patrick Witte), as well as the design team (Gašper Mrak and Aleš Švigelj) generously provided their expertise and their time to prepare the Catalogue.

Thanks must also go to previous members of the EEB and QR working groups who put many hours into conceptualising the QR Programme, preparing the QR criteria, reviewing applications and engaging in dialogue with programmes, as well as to colleagues running the programmes themselves - the outputs of their sustained engagement form the foundations of the Catalogue.

The authors of each contribution (the programme coordinators and academic staff who wrote, revised and refined their accounts through multiple rounds of reflection and feedback) are the true heart of this Catalogue. Without their intellectual honesty, their openness to external challenge and their commitment to sharing their experience with peers, there would be nothing here to share.

*We hope that readers find in these pages both practical knowledge and genuine inspiration. We look forward to continuing collective efforts in enhancing planning education.*

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# BSc Programme in Urbanism



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### **Name and level of the programme**

BSc in Urbanism

### **Name of the school**

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### **Duration, ECTS, start year**

3-year, 180 ECTS, start year: 2012/13

### **Average number of students per year**

35

### **Language(s) of the programme**

Slovenian

### **AESOP Certificate of Quality Duration**

2019-2025

### **[Link to the AESOP Certificate of Quality and Evaluation Report](#)**



## Programme Highlights



### Purpose:

The programme provides foundational education in urbanism, preparing graduates to address spatial development challenges through integrative, design-oriented and public-interest approaches.



### Focus Areas:

It focuses on urban planning and design, sustainability, urban theory, socio-spatial processes and planning instruments, combining studio-based learning with analytical and research-oriented coursework.



### Regional and National Context:

It addresses real spatial planning conditions in Slovenia, linking local planning practice with broader European planning frameworks and professional trajectories.

**Educational orientation:** The Bachelor programme in Urbanism at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Architecture, is positioned within the Slovenian system of spatial and construction planning, and is aligned with broader European frameworks for planning education and regulated professions. Its educational orientation reflects contemporary planning principles centred on the public interest, sustainable spatial development, environmental responsibility and professional ethics.

**Key planning perspectives, knowledge, skills and attitudes:** The programme is distinctive in its strong urbanistic and architectural orientation, rooted in the tradition of the Ljubljana School of Architecture. Urbanism is approached as an integrative discipline connecting spatial planning, urban design and architectural culture. The curriculum is structured around a coherent set of core subjects, with Urban Design Studios forming its backbone and ensuring continuous integration of theory and practice. Thematic areas include urban planning and design, theory and history of urbanism and architecture, sustainability and urban ecology, social and ethical dimensions of space, spatial legislation and governance, and contemporary planning and representation tools. The programme develops an understanding of planning across multiple spatial scales, from local to regional contexts. It fosters knowledge of socio-spatial processes, planning instruments and regulatory frameworks, alongside key competences such as analytical thinking, spatial reasoning, research and inquiry, visual communication,

and project-based problem solving. Students develop practical judgement and the ability to critically reflect on planning decisions and their societal implications.

### Key learner-centred pedagogical approaches:

Pedagogically, the programme is centred on studio-based, problem-oriented and experiential learning. Students engage with real spatial contexts through fieldwork, site analysis and project assignments, combining individual and group work. Interdisciplinary collaboration and iterative feedback processes support the development of autonomy, reflective practice and professional judgement.

### Key institutional settings for quality assurance and relevance:

The programme's relevance is ensured through structured quality assurance processes and strong connections with professional and institutional environments. Collaborations with municipalities, public institutions, research bodies and practitioners enable engagement with real planning situations, while international exchanges support openness and adaptability.

The design studios emphasise teamwork, the exploration of spatial aspects, and design through both digital and traditional approaches, including material exploration and model making.



Photo: N. Povše

### Integrated studio-based and experiential learning in urbanism

A recognised strength of the Bachelor programme in Urbanism lies in its studio-centred, learner-oriented pedagogical model, in which Urban Design Studios (1–3) function as the integrative core of the curriculum. The studios are conceived as environments of inquiry and experimentation, where students engage with real urban contexts and contemporary socio-spatial challenges, gradually developing their understanding of urbanism as a complex, multi-scalar and interdisciplinary field.

Studio work is structured around problem-based and project-oriented learning and typically unfolds through a sequence of phases, including contextual analysis, thematic interpretation, concept development and spatial proposal. Students analyse specific sites and territories, interpret spatial data, and engage with planning instruments, regulatory frameworks and development conditions. Through iterative processes, they alternate between analysis and proposal writing, developing spatial concepts and strategies that integrate design thinking with environmental, social and governance considerations. Particular emphasis is placed on articulating spatial arguments, testing alternative scenarios and justifying decisions in conditions of uncertainty and competing interests.

Pedagogical approaches include iterative design processes, fieldwork, site visits, and the combination of individual and group work. Continuous feedback through interim reviews, presentations and discussions supports a learning environment based on dialogue, peer exchange and critical reflection. Studio themes are organ-



Construction of 'My reading room' for ER in Izola, Slovenia.

Photo: A. Fikfak

ised with parallel theoretical and methodological courses, enabling strong vertical and horizontal integration of knowledge across the curriculum.

This core model is complemented by two types of workshop-based learning: urbanistic workshops and implementation workshops, which expand the studio into real societal and spatial contexts.

Urbanistic workshops focus on direct engagement with local communities, municipalities and other stakeholders. Students work on real spatial challenges, applying methods such as participatory mapping, stakeholder interviews, scenario building and co-creation processes. These formats enable students to confront different perspectives, value systems and interests, while developing communication and negotiation skills. They reinforce the understanding of planning as a collaborative, process-oriented and socially embedded practice.



The Slovenian Presidency of the EU has set up a free digital platform titled 'Europe Readr' (ER), launched on 1 July 2021 under the topic: 'The Future of Living'.

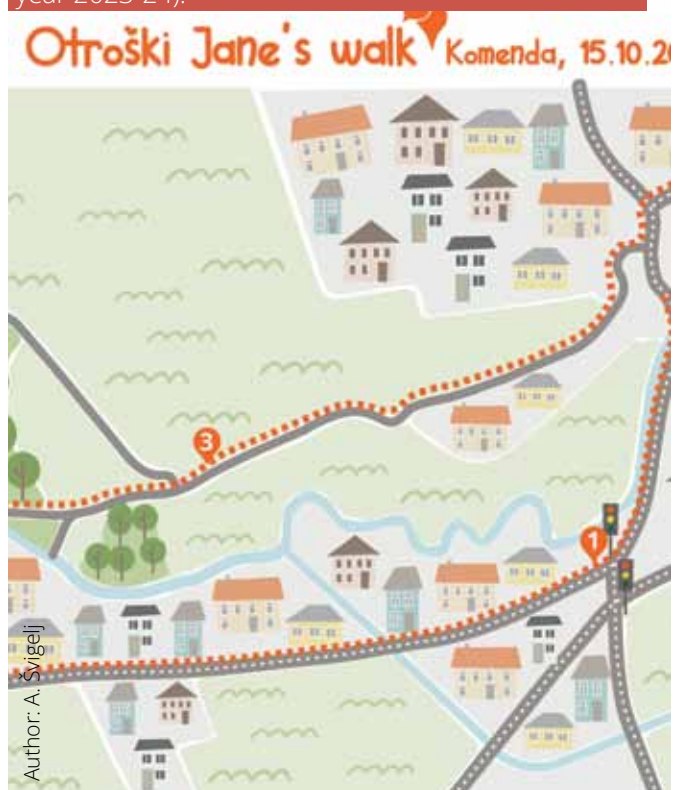
Photo: A. Fikfak

Implementation workshops further expand this approach into the realm of design-build practice, where students participate in the performance of spatial interventions at a small scale. A representative example is the 'My Reading Room' project in the city of Izola, developed as part of a broader international initiative. In this case, students collaborated with lecturers, craftsmen, local stakeholders and institutions to design and build a temporary facility in a public space.

The project was conceived as an open and adaptable spatial structure that supports social interaction, cultural activities and informal learning. Through a 'learning by doing' approach, students were actively involved in all stages of the process, from concept development and site analysis to constructing, assembling and activating the space. The building process itself became a key learning moment, enabling the transfer of knowledge between students, professionals and local participants. The installation was subsequently used as a platform for public events, workshops and everyday use, and was widely adopted by the local community.

Such implementation-based projects enable students to directly experience the relationship between design intention, material creation and public use. They highlight the performative and social dimensions of urban space and strengthen the understanding of urbanism as a practice that operates through both conceptual and physical interventions.

Jane's walk, as part of the SAFE project, with the town of Komenda, Komenda nursery school and students of the BSc in Urbanism of UL FA (academic year 2023-24).



The 'LEGO # Plečnik' exhibition is a companion event to the exhibition titled 'Universum Plečnik: From Workshop to Myth'. Students from the BSc in Urbanism, MSc in Urbanism and MSc in Architecture explored their creativity with the help of LEGO bricks.

In parallel, international collaborations such as SAFE (Erasmus project: Sustainable Accessible Future Environments) and MEMUD (Erasmus project: Middle European Master of Urban Design) further expand the pedagogical framework. Students engage with participatory and user-oriented approaches, addressing issues of accessibility, safety and inclusivity in public spaces, while also participating in transnational exchanges of knowledge and methodologies. These formats introduce comparative perspectives and expose students to different planning cultures, institutional settings and design approaches.

Typical student outputs across studios and workshops include analytical mappings, spatial analyses, urban concepts, strategic frameworks, built prototypes and public presentations. Outcomes are regularly disseminated through final exhibitions, public reviews, publications and workshop reports, which contribute to knowledge exchange and strengthen students' ability to communicate their work to professional and non-professional audiences.

This pedagogical model supports the development of key competences, including research and inquiry, spatial analysis, project-based problem solving and communication skills. It fosters practical judgement and the capacity to operate within complex environments characterised by multiple actors, constraints and value systems. Through iterative reflection on their own work and processes, students develop a reflexive and responsible approach to planning practice.

The Quality Recognition process confirmed this integrated model combining studios, workshops and implementation as a central strength of the programme, particularly its ability to bridge theory and practice and to support the early development of professional competences. At the same time, it highlighted the ongoing challenge of addressing increasingly complex themes such as climate change, inclusivity and spatial justice within the scope of a first-cycle programme.

In response, the programme continues to refine the balance between analytical, conceptual and implementation-oriented components, and to strengthen the integration of participatory methods, international collaboration and research-based learning. Despite these challenges, the studio-based and workshop-expanded model remains a robust and adaptable pedagogical framework, capable of responding to evolving societal demands while maintaining a strong focus on critical thinking, collaboration and responsible spatial practice.

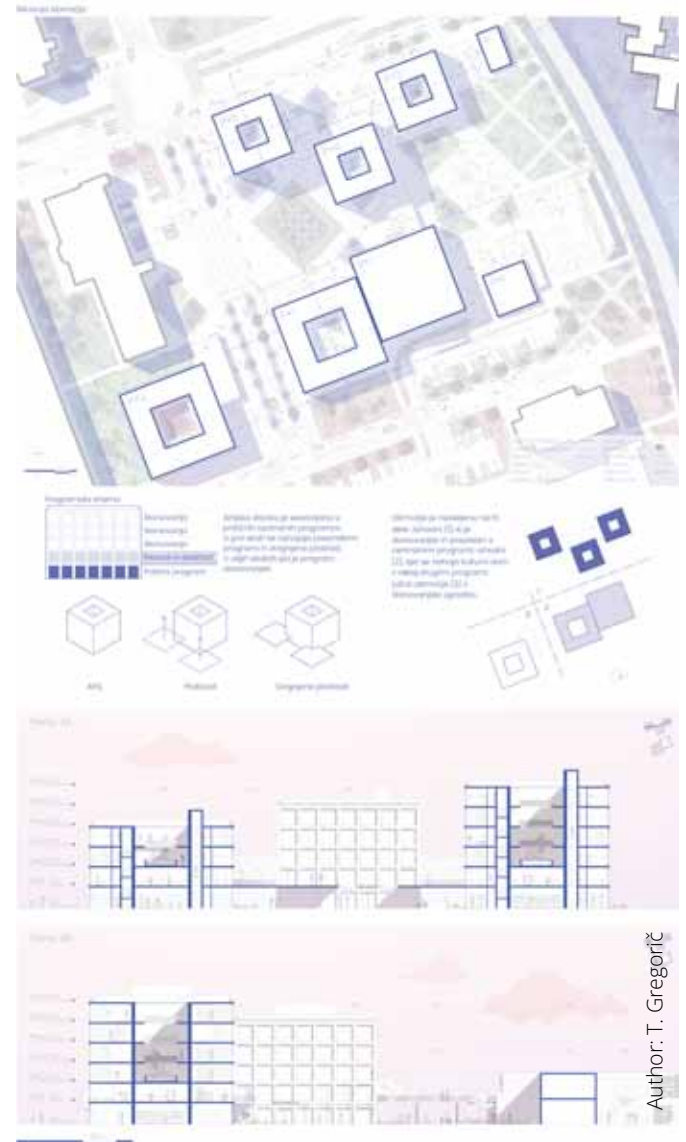
### Students' notes

My studies in urbanism provided me with a solid professional foundation and an in-depth understanding of the design and development of cities, neighbourhoods, and the broader spatial environment. The knowledge I acquired proved highly valuable in my further studies and professional practice, while also enabling me to understand the importance of thoughtfully guiding spatial development to create high-quality living conditions and sustainable cities.

Oskar Cafuta, student of BSc Urbanism Ljubljana

Urban design studio project, year 3, (academic year: 2021-22).

### "Around the block"



## Most Relevant Quality Recognition Criteria for the Programme's Showcase Practices

Programme distinctiveness / Spatial foci / Cross-disciplinarity / Global context / **Contemporary socio-spatial challenges and opportunities** / Professional ethics / **Research and inquiry** / **Independent learning and group learning** / **Practical reasoning and judgement** / **Reflexive praxis** / Student diversity / Recognition and promotion of excellence / Student/alumni/employer engagement in the development of the programme curriculum

# MA in Planning and Sustainability



Polytechnic Engineering School,  
University of Tours

**Authors:**

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**Reviewer:**

Professor Tijana Dabović, University of Belgrade

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**Name and level of the programme**

Planning and Sustainability, Master's Programme

**Name of the school**

Polytechnic Engineering School,  
University of Tours

**City, Country**

Tours, France

**Website**

<https://polytech.univ-tours.fr/english-version/international-research-master/master-planning-and-sustainability>

**Official representative**

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**Duration, ECTS, start year**

2-year, 120 ECTS, start year: 2018

**Average number of students per year**

15

**Language(s) of the programme**

English

**AESOP Certificate of Quality Duration**

2019-2025

**Link to the AESOP Certificate of Quality and Evaluation Report**

 POLYTECH TOURS

The brand new building of Polytech Tours.

## Programme Highlights



### Purpose

To equip students with research-oriented expertise in urban development and spatial planning, in the context of sustainable development and climate change adaptation.



### Focus Areas

Concepts and theories of urban development, governance frameworks, spatial analysis, spatial justice and strategic and participatory planning approaches. Particular attention to water management, biodiversity and ecological infrastructure in planning.



### Regional & National Context

The programme's 'one world' approach ensures that the training remains globally relevant, regardless of where graduates will ultimately work. It cultivates critical reflexivity towards planning models and global awareness in planning.

**Educational orientation:** The programme frames urban planning as a priority field for addressing environmental and social challenges, while equipping students to practice in a wide range of national and international contexts. Its 'one world' approach, developed in partnership with the University Network Initiative on sustainable urban development, ensures that the training remains globally relevant regardless of where graduates will ultimately work.

**Key planning perspectives, knowledge, skills and attitudes:** The curriculum is built around an unusually broad and interdisciplinary body of knowledge. Beyond the core foundations of planning (concepts and theories of urban development, governance frameworks, spatial analysis and GIS, and strategic and participatory planning approaches), the programme gives particular attention to water management, biodiversity and ecological infrastructure as planning themes. Students are expected to develop strong analytical and practical skills: the ability to integrate theory and practice across diverse contexts, to apply both quantitative and qualitative research methods, to conduct territorial diagnoses in European and Global South settings, and to work effectively in multicultural and interdisciplinary teams. The programme also cultivates a set of professional attitudes including critical reflexivity towards planning models, a commitment to social justice and sustainability, and a deliberate rejection of Eurocentric assumptions in favour of comparative and global awareness.

### Key learner-centred pedagogical approaches:

The programme draws on several active and learner-centred approaches: group research projects, workshop-based learning, problem-based and research-based inquiry, fieldwork and interactive learning modules. Research internships are strongly encouraged as a bridge between academic training and professional practice.

### Key institutional settings for quality assurance and relevance:

The programme's deep institutional link with the CITERES laboratory (Cities, Territories, Environment and Societies — University of Tours/CNRS) ensures that teaching remains directly connected to live transnational research. French Ministry accreditation (awarded for the 2018-2023 period and renewed for 2024-2029) provides formal national quality assurance. Finally, international visiting professors and guest lecturers drawn from a network of 25 partner universities attend student progress presentations each year, providing consistent external scrutiny of students' work.

Field work in Descartes, M1 - 2025-26.



Final project presentations, M1 - 2025-26.



### Showcase Practises: Learner-Centred Pedagogical Methods

Across four semesters, a set of mutually reinforcing learner-centred methods (spatial projects, workshops, research-based learning, fieldwork and a dissertation based on sustained research) forms a coherent whole rather than a collection of independent activities. Each method is designed to develop specific competences while contributing to the same overarching goal: producing graduates who can think critically, work across disciplines and cultures, and engage with real planning challenges in real places.

#### Spatial Projects: the structural spine of the curriculum

Three group spatial project modules sit at the heart of the programme, one in each of the first three semesters, carrying 10 ECTS each and together accounting for a significant share of the total workload. These are not supplementary exercises: they are the pedagogical backbone around which the taught modules are organised. Each subject module, whether it covers governance, environmental management, GIS or strategic planning, is understood as supplying specific competences that students will use within their projects.

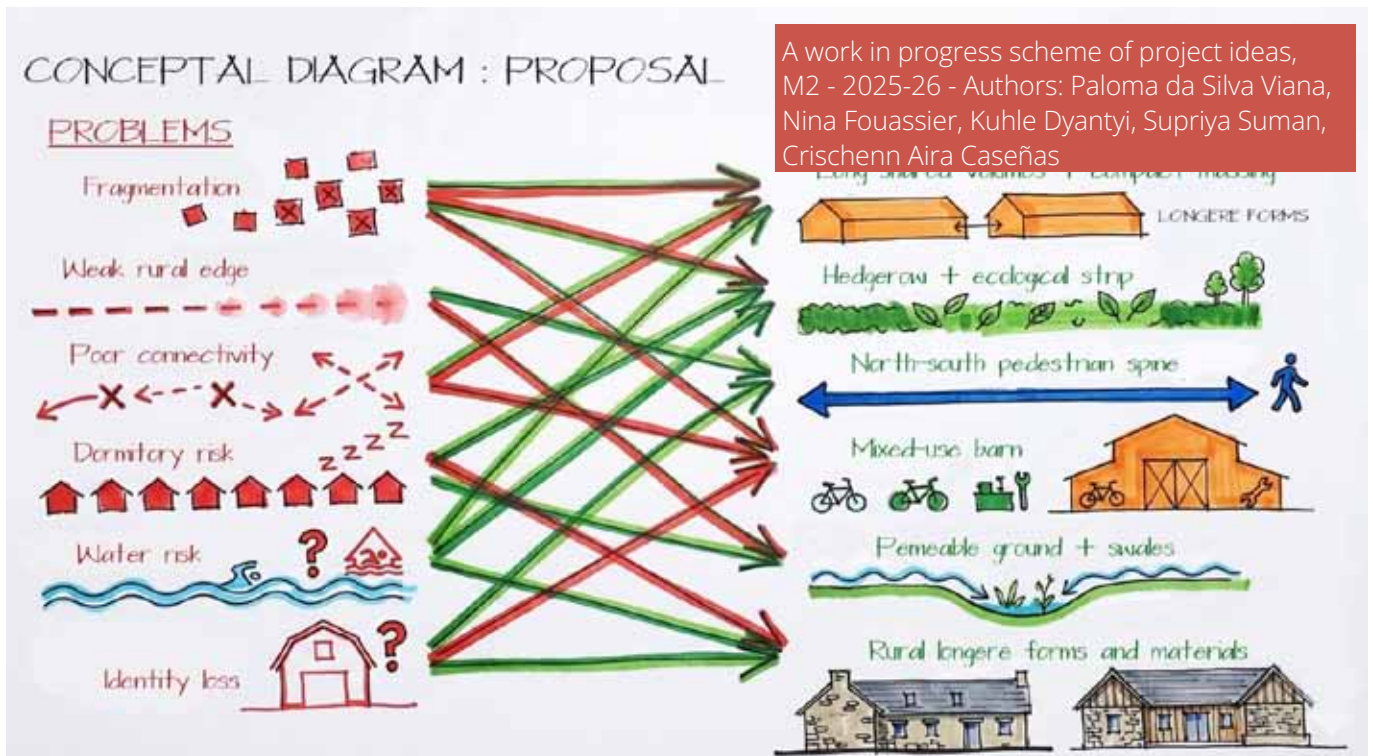
Each project is built around a real-world brief, most often issued by a public authority or territorial stakeholder. Students engage in multiple site visits, client meetings,

interim presentations and a final public defence. This studio-learning model combines high contact hours, interdisciplinary diagnosis, collective solution development and direct exposure to the expectations of professional clients. The three projects are not repetitions of the same exercise, but a deliberately structurally designed and pedagogically intentional progression. In Project 1, students learn to read a spatial situation through the lens of sustainability, to organise their analysis into a rigorous diagnostic, and to develop grounded proposals. By Project 3, the emphasis shifts decisively toward expert-level analysis and autonomous solution development.

#### Workshop-Based Learning: sustained engagement with real sites

Running in parallel with taught modules throughout the autumn semester, a dedicated workshop module offers students a complementary mode of engagement with spatial challenges. Organised over two days per week across the semester, the workshop is a substantial and recurring commitment, not an occasional intensive event. Attendance is mandatory, reflecting its status as a core pedagogical experience.

The task structure mirrors that of the spatial projects (spatial situation analysis followed by solution development), creating deliberate coherence between the two methods. Workshops are conducted on real sites, in response to genuine demands formulated by civil society



partners, and their outputs are expected to propose actionable responses to contemporary spatial challenges. This grounding in actual places, working with actual partners means that students are accountable not only to their tutors, but to the communities and organisations whose problems they are addressing.

### Research-Based and Problem-Based Learning: living research as curriculum

A distinctive feature of the programme is its deep institutional connection to the CITERES laboratory (Cities, Territories, Environment and Societies — University of Tours and CNRS), whose team on Action and Dynamics in Spatial Planning and Environment directly involves all teaching staff. This connection is not ceremonial: the content of taught modules is drawn not from textbooks alone, but from live and recent transnational research conducted by faculty members at the European scale and across several world regions, including the Mediterranean basin, Brazil, Canada, India and Southeast Asia.

Students are therefore not working on abstract or invented problems. They are contributing to, or drawing directly from, funded research programmes addressing genuine planning questions in specific places. Thesis topics may be explicitly connected to faculty research projects, and students can be hired on short-term contracts to actively contribute to research outcomes. The boundary between student learning and faculty research production is deliberately permeable, and this permeability is a source of intellectual rigour rather than confusion.

### Fieldwork: integral, not incidental

Fieldwork is treated throughout the programme as an in-

tegral component of both project work and dissertation research, not as a scheduled supplement to classroom learning. Students engage with territories, communities, data and planning actors in the field as part of the normal fabric of their studies. This commitment reflects the programme's conviction that planning knowledge cannot be fully developed at a desk: it must be tested and enriched by direct encounters with the complexity of real places.

### Research Thesis and Seminars: from scaffolded learning to independent inquiry

The research dissertation is the capstone of the programme. Under the supervision of a faculty member, students produce an original research question in relation to existing scholarship, conduct a thorough literature review, formulate a research problem and a hypothesis, carry out the required fieldwork and produce both an intermediate M1 dissertation and a final M2 dissertation.

The Research Seminars provide the methodological scaffold that makes this independent inquiry possible. Students learn to construct analysis grids, produce research protocols and develop the habits of mind that rigorous inquiry requires. These seminars are a carefully sequenced bridge between taught learning and independent research practice, timed to prepare students for each successive stage of the dissertation process.

Thesis topics consistently reflect real-world planning challenges: traffic congestion management in Kabul, comparative coastal hazard governance or sustainable transportation integration in rapidly urbanising regions, for example. Students are expected to produce work that is both academically rigorous and practically meaningful.

### International Mobility and Professional Internships: connecting research and practice

The programme strongly encourages students to combine their academic training with international mobility and professional internship experience, in both M1 and M2. The Erasmus+ partner network spans 15 universities across Europe. This network gives students access to a wide range of planning traditions, urban contexts and disciplinary cultures, reinforcing the programme's commitment to comparative and global awareness.

Professional internships in Semesters 2 and 4 are treated as a structural link between the research attitudes and methods developed in the programme and the realities of planning practice. Students are encouraged to bring the same critical and analytical dispositions they apply in their dissertation and projects to their professional environments, and to bring back from practice the questions and complexities that will enrich their academic work. Students are encouraged to structurally link the research attitude and methods to practice, realising the importance of this mindset in professional activities and in problem solving.

### Most Relevant Quality Recognition Criteria for the Programme's Showcase Practices

Programme distinctiveness / **Spatial foci** / **Cross-disciplinarity** / **Global context** / **Contemporary socio-spatial challenges and opportunities** / Professional ethics / **Research and inquiry** / Independent learning and group learning / Practical reasoning and judgement / Reflexive praxis / Student diversity / Recognition and promotion of excellence / Student/alumni/employer engagement in the development of the programme curriculum

# MSc Programme in Spatial Planning



Faculty of Civil and Geodetic Engineering,  
University of Ljubljana

**Authors:**

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Teaching Assistant Gašper Mrak  
Senior Lecturer Mojca Foški

**Reviewer:**

Professor Tijana Dabović, University of Belgrade

**Email of the corresponding author**

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### Name and level of the programme

MSc in Spatial Planning

### Name of the school

Faculty of Civil and Geodetic Engineering,  
University of Ljubljana

### City, Country

Ljubljana, Slovenia

### Website

<https://www.en.fgg.uni-lj.si/study/2nd-cycle-study-programmes/spatial-planning-ma/>

### Official representative

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### Duration, ECTS, start year

2-year, 120 ECTS, start year: 2011/12

### Average number of students per year

12

### Language(s) of the programme

Slovenian

### AESOP Certificate of Quality Duration

2019-2025

### [Link to the AESOP Certificate of Quality and Evaluation Report](#)



## Programme Highlights



### Purpose

Training generalist spatial planners qualified for professional, teaching and research roles in various private companies and public institutions. Graduates are proficient in different spatial scales and methodological approaches, including the coordination of interests in space, public participation in the spatial planning process and public advocacy.



### Focus Areas

Focus is on land use planning and management as well as urban design, rural planning, landscape architecture, traffic infrastructure and real estate management, explored with selected GIS tools and geoinformatics.



### Regional & National Context

The programme is rooted in the Slovene tradition of interdisciplinary spatial planning practice, which carefully applies different land management aspects, methods and tools, across different planning scales and goals.

**Educational orientation:** The Master's Programme in Spatial Planning is offered by the Department of Geodesy at the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Geodesy, University of Ljubljana (UL FGG). It builds on the long-standing tradition of the pre-Bologna Master's and Doctoral Interdisciplinary Study Programme in Urbanism and Spatial Planning. The programme focuses on exploring, influencing and improving ongoing and future land use changes.

**Key planning perspectives, knowledge, skills and attitudes:** The interdisciplinary approach is maintained, with courses in law, economics, spatial sociology, landscape architecture and environmental protection. Significant emphasis is placed on courses in municipal and housing management, real estate management, and the acquisition, processing, spatial analysis and interpretation of spatial data. It provides skills and abilities for the interdisciplinary exploration of various aspects of regional and local spatial development to address real-life situations and demands, within the broader international pursuit of sustainable development. The programme regularly incorporates the latest findings in the field and uses modern digital tools. Its interdisciplinary nature makes it attractive to students from other faculties who have completed their first-cycle studies and wish to specialise in spatial planning.

### Key learner-centred pedagogical approaches:

Learning approaches include flipped classrooms, seminar and project work, and international workshops, all of which allow students to learn the fundamentals of spatial and urban planning, and combine them with knowledge from other fields. Guest experts, practitioners and members from other faculties and universities also contribute to the educational process.

### Key institutional settings for quality assurance and relevance:

The programme is managed by the Chair of Spatial Planning. Special attention is given to the regular monitoring and development of the programme. It is reviewed and improved by the programme coordinator, the Study Committee of the Department of Geodesy, the UL FGG Quality Committee and the UL FGG Senate, based on a self-evaluation report. Student representatives are also involved in this process. At the end of each semester, the Department of Geodesy organises a pedagogical day to discuss implementation, identified shortcomings, and opportunities for improving the content and delivery of the programme. This also provides an opportunity to focus on interdisciplinary integration and a shared understanding of programme implementation.



Photo: C. Arak

The Koprivnik workshop – analysis by students (2016).

Students participated in a workshop on spatial development issues in the Municipality of Koper with local residents (October 2022).



Photo: G. Mrak

### Flipped Learning, Project Work, Interdisciplinary Spatial-Urban Planning Workshops

The programme emphasises project-based learning and the innovative flipped classroom method, following the '4F' model (fail, flip, fix, feed) while making use of GIS and interdisciplinary workshops. It also includes visits to foreign urban planning institutions, professional field trips and guest lectures from colleagues in public agencies and private companies. Some teaching is delivered in a more traditional format, with theoretical knowledge presented in lectures and exercises where students apply theory to practical examples or complete seminar assignments. This approach is particularly applied in subjects such as law, economics, spatial sociology and statistics. The core of the programme comprises project work, flipped learning and interdisciplinary spatial-urban planning workshops, whose added value lies in their interdisciplinary character and international participation.

Project work is based on real-world problems, so the success of student workshops depends on the collaboration between educational institutions (universities and faculties) and local communities. Working on real-world problems positively influences students' development as future professionals, as they move beyond the classroom and engage with real work environments. As educators, we recognise the many benefits of this approach: students acquire goal-oriented skills and knowledge; they

focus on problem solving, critical thinking, collaboration, communication and the pursuit of innovative solutions; they explore the questions posed and seek appropriate answers; we encourage creativity and self-initiative; students develop a critical perspective on their own work and that of others in the group, and learn collaboration and communication skills. Some workshops are part of projects by domestic or international research groups. For example, the Tracking LUR 2013 Workshop, in collaboration with the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana, the Vienna University of Technology, and the Regional Development Agency of the Ljubljana Urban Region, placed students in international groups identifying the functions and role of the Ljubljana Urban Region in a broader context by analysing and understanding its operations. We also organised a workshop in collaboration with the Faculty of Architecture in Zagreb, in which students explored the significance and role of the 'eastern diagonal', the area along Radnička Street in Zagreb, in relation to the wider urban space, and proposed comprehensive concepts for the urban development of the city corridor, from Pleso Airport to Slavenska Avenue. We also make use of opportunities provided by the CEEPUS network and the Erasmus+ programme to organise international workshops. In this way, students become familiar with various spatial and urban planning approaches used by faculties in other countries, while also learning about their legislation and regulations governing spatial interventions.



Photo: G. Mirak

The Radnička Street Workshop in Zagreb was a collaboration between two faculties from Croatia and Slovenia. Students learned about different approaches to solving problems in spatial planning (May 2017).

Numerous interdisciplinary workshops have been held in Slovenia, involving students from various Slovenian universities and faculties. The issues addressed ranged from reflections on shaping a vision for Slovenia's spatial development to proposals for the development of rural villages in different Slovenian regions. Most workshops were thematically linked to the local level, with topics including proposals for settlement development, planning local cycling routes, improving quality of life in the local environment, and leveraging identified spatial potential for further development of the areas considered.

The assignments in the workshops and other student projects are based on studying the theoretical framework of the problem, analysing and mapping the area, and formulating proposals for further spatial development. Students also use survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with various stakeholders. This approach aims to gather in-depth information on the subject and the activities of stakeholders in the area. Students present their work orally and in writing through reports, publications and final projects.

An important part of the educational process in the Spatial Planning programme also includes mandatory multi-day study excursions abroad and practical training, which lasts at least three weeks and takes place at a spatial planning firm or a public institution, at any administra-



Photo: J. Breznik

The international workshops are a good opportunity for students to compare their knowledge with that of students from different countries.

Taking classes outside the country provides knowledge of regional and international aspects of spatial planning. Workshop in Osijek, Croatia (April 2022).



Photo: G. Mrak

tive level. During field trips, students visit spatial planning firms, research and public institutions, and learn about the work of spatial planners in other countries. The field trips also include visits to completed projects, where students learn about good and bad planning practices.

As part of the mandatory practical training, students gain hands-on experience with the work of a spatial planner and insight into employment opportunities.

Maintaining the quality of the study programme also depends on the continuous professional development of faculty members, particularly in project-based learning, workshop facilitation, the use of ICT and assessment. Training and education are primarily organised within the University of Ljubljana and are free of charge for all university employees. Recently, significant efforts have been made to monitor progress in the development of AI in spatial planning and its gradual integration into the academic curriculum.

### Most Relevant Quality Recognition Criteria for the Programme's Showcase Practices

Programme distinctiveness / Spatial foci / **Cross-disciplinarity** / Global context / **Contemporary socio-spatial challenges and opportunities** / Professional ethics / **Research and inquiry** / Independent learning and group learning / **Practical reasoning and judgement** / **Reflexive praxis** / Student diversity / Recognition and promotion of excellence / Student/alumni/employer engagement in the development of the programme curriculum

# MSc Programme in Spatial Planning



**Utrecht  
University**

**Faculty of Geosciences,  
Utrecht University**

**Authors:**

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Assistant Professor Martijn van den Hurk  
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**Reviewer:**

Professor Tijana Dabović,  
University of Belgrade

**Email of the corresponding author**

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### **Name and level of the programme**

MSc in Spatial Planning

### **Name of the school**

Faculty of Geosciences, Utrecht University

### **City, Country**

Utrecht, Netherlands

### **Website**

<https://www.uu.nl/en/masters/spatial-planning>

### **Official representative**

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### **Duration, ECTS, start year**

1-year, 60 ECTS, start year: 2002

### **Average number of students per year**

65

### **Language(s) of the programme**

English

### **AESOP Certificate of Quality Duration**

2019-2025

### **Link to the AESOP Certificate of Quality and Evaluation Report**



## Programme Highlights



### Purpose

The programme addresses contemporary and complex planning challenges through an open-governance approach, with close interaction between academia and planning practice.



### Focus Areas

Academic attention to contemporary urban planning challenges (e.g. sustainability, digitalisation, energy transition, land and real estate development) and the professional skills needed to address these challenges (e.g. governance approaches, emphasis on teamwork).



### Regional & National Context

Close interaction between academia and planning practice through research-driven internships, in preparation for the Dutch labour market.

**Educational orientation:** We offer a broad perspective on spatial planning, in particular stressing the connection to experiencing (simulated) practice, for instance through an international field trip and a planning studio module. These aspects give the programme a distinct flavour, especially through the incorporation of reflexive praxis. The current MSc programme focuses on training all-round spatial planners, with a special emphasis on conceptions of sustainability and governance perspectives.

**Key planning perspectives, knowledge, skills and attitudes:** Students start with in-depth courses on planning theory and conceptions of sustainability, reflecting contemporary socio-spatial challenges and incorporating different spatial foci. Next, students are equipped with methodological experience in the research methodology and planning studio modules, and they have room to specialise through an elective course. These modules promote cross-disciplinary learning, both independently and in groups. The focus then shifts to applying the acquired knowledge and skills in research and practice, for instance in the governance module, the international field trip, and the individual master's dissertation. The dissertation is optionally linked to a research internship in planning practice, giving students the opportunity to develop their practical reasoning and judgement. Finally, students complete a planning professionalisation module, addressing questions around professional ethics, before entering the labour market.

### Key learner-centred pedagogical approaches:

The key learner-centred pedagogical approaches include, on the one hand, interdisciplinary collaboration and, on the other hand, studio-based and experiential learning. As the backgrounds of undergraduates have been diversifying over the past years, most of the group work within the courses has increasingly become of an interdisciplinary nature. Furthermore, a planning studio module was recently introduced that not only fosters this interdisciplinary orientation, but also allows students to explore complex problems and experiment with different types of innovative planning solutions.

### Key institutional settings for quality assurance and relevance:

The MSc degree programme adheres to the university's quality control cycles and was recently re-accredited by an external committee for the upcoming six years. One of the recommendations of the assessment panel was to increase the collaboration with professionals and external stakeholders. This was already pursued through guest lectures and internships, but we are now also working to establish a stakeholder advisory council that can regularly check in and reflect on the development of our programme.

Serious gaming in Urban Governance Module 1.



Serious gaming in Urban Governance Module 2.



### 1: Linking academia and practice within the Urban Governance module

One of the oldest modules in the Spatial Planning Master's Degree at Utrecht University is the Urban Governance in Spatial Planning module (coordinated by Dr Patrick Witte from 2014 until 2024). The key objective of the Urban Governance module is to familiarise students with theoretical perspectives on urban governance while linking them to spatial planning practice, developing students' reflexive praxis in relation to contemporary socio-spatial challenges. The intrinsic link between academia and practice has been one of the main distinctive characteristics of our programme for many years (see the 'Programme's Key Characteristics' section above).

The Urban Governance module is structured around a series of lectures that provide theoretical depth, and it discusses different scholarly readings on urban governance. Topics include the origins of the governance concept, theories of urban governance, complexity theory and multi-level governance, actors and participatory governance, the just city and democratic legitimacy, and integrated perspectives on governance and spatial planning.

Alongside the lectures, students work individually or in groups on one or more assignments that have a clear link to spatial planning practice and that go beyond the typical assessment format of the written exam or the written essay. These assignments require students to apply their skills in practical reasoning and judgement, both independently and in group settings. These are examples of the different working formats that have been used over the years: writing a popular book review, a

policy brief or advisory report, or a bid proposal, giving a (sales) pitch presentation, recording a knowledge clip, creating a poster presentation, creating an infographic, editing a special issue, and playing a serious gaming / role-playing exercise.

The focus of the assignments has always been on simulating real-world assignments and creating efficiency for the students. For instance, the book review was performed on a book relevant to the student's MSc dissertation topic, the infographic's focus was on translating the crux of the theoretical readings to a lay audience, and pitch presentations were given during lectures on the respective readings. The structure of the course and the different creative working formats continued via online teaching in times of the COVID-19 pandemic. Students have appreciated the practical orientation of the assignments and the efficient links with the content of urban governance and the reality of spatial planning practice (see quote).

One of the pinnacles of the Urban Governance module is the serious gaming / role-playing exercise, which synthesises core skills, around reflexivity, practical reasoning and judgement, with what it means to be an ethical professional. In this exercise students simulate a special committee meeting of a municipal council on the redevelopment of a local shopping centre, with approximately 15 key stakeholders (aldermen, municipal officers, business representatives, shop owners, residents, interest groups, consultants, urban designers, an independent chairman, etc.). Half of the group observes, while the other half performs the full meeting of 2-2.5 hours. Since the design of the role-play exercise is based on a real planning project and teachers do not interfere

at all, the learning experience resembles real practice very closely. For instance, the meeting can be adjourned by the chairman. In addition, students stay in their role during the coffee breaks, simulating the informal negotiations 'at the coffee machine' that also take place in practice. Afterwards, teachers and observers share their reflections on whether a stakeholder's goals were achieved and how.

## 2: Experiential self-directed learning in the international field trip

The master's programme in Spatial Planning at Utrecht University was recently revised, creating time and space to include an international field trip component to the one-year program, and ensuring that the programme clearly reflects the global context. The traditional field trip casts an expert (i.e. the teacher) as the tour guide and the students as an audience who follows along. Its success depends on two ingredients: the weather, of course, and the charisma of whoever is invited to act as a tour guide (mostly the teacher, but it could also be a local expert at the field trip location). In our MSc in Spatial Planning programme we follow a different premise. We expect our students to be well-equipped to co-design and lead learning activities in an unfamiliar city for their peers. In small groups, they research a neighbourhood and topic, develop a hands-on field ac-

tivity and execute it on location, with teachers providing scaffolding and feedback. Students can come up with anything from neighbourhood walks to photo exercises, scavenger hunts, visits to planning-relevant sites or activities designed to change what peers think they already know or expect about a place. We find that autonomy invites creativity and students are also highly engaged with each other's work in a way that a traditional guided walk rarely produces. Students find designing an activity a meaningful form of learning. Doing this in unfamiliar European cities precisely tests the collaborative, reflective and practical competences that planning education also focuses on. Good weather helps, obviously, but so does handing over the reins to the students sometimes.

### Students' notes

'At the time, I really enjoyed the role-playing exercise we did in the context of the Urban Governance course. Now I work as policy advisor for the national ministry and often find myself in real-life settings comparable to the serious game. I want to stress how closely real planning practice mirrors the game we played during the governance course.'

– alumnus of MSc in Spatial Planning, cohort 2023-2024

Coffee break for continued discussions - Urban Governance Module.



### Most Relevant Quality Recognition Criteria for the Programme's Showcase Practices

Programme distinctiveness / Spatial foci / Cross-disciplinarity / Global context / **Contemporary socio-spatial challenges and opportunities** / Professional ethics / Research and inquiry / **Independent learning and group learning** / **Practical reasoning and judgement** / **Reflexive praxis** / Student diversity / Recognition and promotion of excellence / Student/alumni/employer engagement in the development of the programme curriculum



# BEng Programme in Spatial Management



Faculty  
of Human Geography  
and Planning

Faculty of Human Geography  
and Planning,  
Adam Mickiewicz University

**Authors:**

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**Reviewer:**

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## Name and level of the programme

BEng in Spatial Management

## Name of the school

Faculty of Human Geography and Planning,  
Adam Mickiewicz University

## City, Country

Poznań, Poland

## Website

<https://wgseigp.amu.edu.pl/eng>

## Official representative

prof. Paweł Churski, the Dean

## Institutional e-mail

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## Duration, ECTS, start year

3.5 years, 210 ECTS, start year: 2012/13

## Average number of students per year

90

## Language(s) of the programme

Polish

## AESOP Certificate of Quality Duration

2021-2027

## Link to the AESOP Certificate of Quality and Evaluation Report



QUALITY  
RECOGNITION  
AESOP

## Programme Highlights



### Purpose:

The programme prepares practice-ready spatial planners who are capable of diagnosing spatial challenges, exercising professional judgement and formulating well-founded solutions in the public interest.



### Focus Areas:

Integration of multi-scalar planning (local, regional, European) with interdisciplinary project work, GIS-based spatial analysis, planning law and governance, infrastructure and transport, and environmental/green space planning, strengthened by compulsory professional practice.



### Regional and National Context:

Rooted in the Polish planning system and local-government practice, while embedding learning within European frameworks and addressing Central and Eastern European (post-socialist) development and governance realities.



Field exercises in the regeneration area in Lublin.

**Educational orientation:** The programme prepares graduates for the Polish planning system, where local governments and statutory planning instruments play a central role, while embedding learning within a European perspective (European integration, EU regional policy, cross-border cooperation). It promotes a multi-scalar understanding of spatial development (European–national/regional–local) and is distinctive due to its explicit Central and Eastern European focus, addressing post-socialist transformation, decentralisation and institutional change. Core thematic areas include spatial planning and management, urbanism/architecture basics, cartography and geodesy, GIS and spatial analysis, local and regional planning, planning law, technical infrastructure and transport, local economics, and green space planning, reinforced by compulsory professional practice and an engineering thesis; elective modules extend this scope (e.g. urban regeneration, environmental planning, public participation, remote sensing, 3D visualisation).

**Key planning perspectives, knowledge, skills and attitudes:** Planning is taught as a multi-level, multi-scalar practice shaped by environmental, socio-economic and institutional conditions. Students develop knowledge of environmental foundations through the relevant scales, socio-institutional dynamics, spatial analysis methods (incl. digital tools), selected technical stan-

dards, and participation (incl. the role of NGOs). They build skills in GIS/CAD-based analysis and production of text-and-map planning outputs, impact assessment and basic quantitative/qualitative research (statistics, surveys, interviews), leading to planning documents such as diagnoses, strategies and regeneration programmes. The programme fosters teamwork, responsibility for decision outcomes, ethical awareness and sensitivity to social, environmental and cultural impacts.

**Key learner-centred pedagogical approaches:** Interdisciplinary project work integrates socio-economic, environmental and technical perspectives; field classes support inquiry-based learning; simulations and role-play (e.g. participation and location decisions) develop negotiation and professional judgement; a supervised 120-hour work placement provides experiential learning with documentation reflecting the tasks conducted.

**Key institutional settings for quality assurance and relevance:** Ongoing relevance is supported through practitioner involvement in selected modules, a Programme Council comprising practitioners and alumni, systematic student evaluations with corrective actions, and links to research and international cooperation (including mobility and field learning).



### 1: Compulsory Professional Practice as a structured bridge from university learning to engineering-oriented planning work

**Pedagogical aim.** The compulsory professional practice develops students' practical judgement and helps them translate academic knowledge into planning practice with an engineering-oriented profile, working with data, regulations, technical documentation and GIS-based outputs in real organisations. It seeks to consolidate core technical competences and show how they operate under real institutional constraints.

**Where and how it is applied.** The professional practice is completed after Semester 4 (120 hours / 15 working days) and is an integral element of the BEng Programme in Spatial Management. Students choose work placements aligned with the programme's applied profile, typically in local or governmental administration, planning offices, municipal companies (e.g., transport, utilities), or private consultancies (e.g. spatial analysis, surveying/geodesy, EU-funded project support). It is formalised through an agreement between the faculty and the host institution, and backed by dual supervision (academic + workplace).

**What students learn.** Students learn how planning and spatial management decisions are produced end-to-end: interpreting legal acts and planning documents, classifying cases, assembling evidence, and using technical tools (especially GIS/graphic software) to produce implementable outputs.

**Assessment and reflection.** Students keep a structured practice log documenting tasks and learning outcomes, confirmed by supervisors. The workplace super-

visor provides an assessment based on agreed criteria (task completion, substantive/methodological preparation, professional conduct). Internship documentation and feedback also inform programme improvement.

Typical outputs/results. Students deliver an internship log and a documented portfolio of tasks (often linked to planning documentation, spatial analysis and mapping). The key result is stronger professional judgement and clearer awareness of competence gaps to address in later modules.

### 2: Interdisciplinary, project-based learning using 'real planning objects' and role-based simulations

**Pedagogical aim.** This practice trains students to solve complex spatial problems as they occur in planning practice by integrating socio-economic, environmental and technical perspectives, and to produce coherent, evidence-based outputs that can be discussed with stakeholders. It supports the 'engineering link' by requiring students to justify solutions in terms of feasibility, standards and implementation logic.

**Where and how it is applied.** Interdisciplinary project work covers the entire curriculum and becomes more demanding over time. It is rooted in three disciplinary pillars (socio-economic geography and spatial management; architecture and urban planning; earth and environmental sciences). Students work with 'real planning objects' (e.g. local spatial development plans and related analyses) that are revisited from legal, environmental, socio-economic, infrastructural and design perspectives, creating continuity across courses.

**What students learn.** Students learn to manage constraints and trade-offs, select methods appropriate for

the task, justify decisions with evidence, and communicate planning reasoning. In modules such as Physical Planning at Local Level and Local Economy, they prepare planning/strategic studies that combine natural conditions, socio-economic diagnosis and spatial/urban design requirements, supported by iterative critique and discussion.

**Simulations and professional dilemmas.** Role-based simulations are used in selected practice-focused modules, notably Public Participation in Physical Planning and Location Decisions. Students adopt stakeholder roles, prepare proposals and formal critiques (e.g. petitions), and practice negotiation, compromise-building and ethical reasoning in realistic decision settings.

**Typical outputs/results.** Outputs include integrated text-and-map documents, and project portfolios and presentations, plus assessed participation in debates and negotiations. A key result is the ability to propose solutions that are technically feasible, socially legitimate and institutionally defensible.

### 3: Early-stage active and independent learning through field-based regional classes and structured peer learning

**Pedagogical aim.** This practice builds student autonomy early by placing responsibility for inquiry and interpretation on the learner. It strengthens 'engineering-style' competence in spatial management: collecting evidence, analysing it systematically and translating it into clear, communicable conclusions.

**Where and how it is applied.** Active learning begins in the early years and is reinforced through field-based and regional classes. A flagship example is Regional Classes: Socio-economic Foundations of Spatial Management (seven days, after Semester 2), conducted in host communities and focusing on real local challenges. This early fieldwork experience helps students progress from guided tasks to more independent project work in later semesters.

**What students learn.** Students learn how to define a research problem, design data collection methods and interpret results in relation to local conditions. They



A workshop on the interpretation of strategic documents.

prepare and moderate discussions on observed issues (e.g. local economic base, transport, waste management, suburbanisation pressures), conduct community surveys (often linked to local government needs), analyse results in groups and present findings.

**Peer learning and collaboration.** Structured peer learning is applied in modules such as Project Management and Financing from European Funds, using the 'snowball' method to develop project proposals iteratively: defining the project, identifying implementers (local government/private/NGO), building activity structures and budgets, preparing problem-goal logic trees, schedules (e.g. Gantt charts) and specifying outputs/outcomes/impacts.

**Typical outputs/results.** Outputs include survey tools and results, field-based reports, project applications with logical frameworks and budgets, and public presentations. The key result is increased independence and the ability to move from diagnosis to feasible, implementable proposals.

## Most Relevant Quality Recognition Criteria for the Programme's Showcase Practices

Programme distinctiveness / Spatial foci / **Cross-disciplinarity** / Global context / Contemporary socio-spatial challenges and opportunities / **Professional ethics** / **Research and inquiry** / Independent learning and group learning / **Practical reasoning and judgement** / **Reflexive praxis** / Student diversity / Recognition and promotion of excellence / Student/alumni/employer engagement in the development of the programme curriculum



# MSc Programme in Urban Planning and Policy Design



School of Architecture Urban Planning  
Construction Engineering,  
Polytechnic University of Milan

**Authors:**

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**Reviewer:**

Assistant Professor Federica Scaffidi,  
Leibniz University Hannover

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### **Name and level of the programme**

Urban Planning and Policy Design, Master of Science

### **Name of the school**

School of Architecture Urban Planning Construction Engineering, Polytechnic University of Milan

### **City, Country**

Milano, Italy

### **Website**

<http://www.auic.polimi.it>

### **Official representative**

Professor Andrea Campioli

### **Institutional e-mail**

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### **Duration, ECTS, start year**

4 semesters, 120 ECTS, start year 2013

### **Average number of students per year**

200

### **Language(s) of the programme**

English (with part of the educational offer available in Italian to those who are interested)

### **AESOP Certificate of Quality Duration**

2021-2027

### **Link to the AESOP Certificate of Quality and Evaluation Report**



## Programme Highlights



### Purpose

Training skilled planners capable of linking spatial design and public policy, focusing on the conception, evaluation and management of complex urban and territorial transformations across multiple scales.



### Focus Areas

Combines design studios with theoretical and analytical courses on planning theory, urban policies, territorial challenges, sustainability, infrastructure and socio-economic dynamics, fostering integrated and transdisciplinary approaches.



### Regional & National Context

The programme is rooted in the Italian and European planning tradition, yet it is explicitly international; it addresses contemporary challenges such as urban inequality, climate transition and governance complexity, while remaining adaptable to diverse institutional and territorial contexts.

**Educational orientation:** Strengthening educational environments aimed at confronting complex urban and territorial issues. Through different educational innovations, the programme has progressively consolidated a pedagogical model capable of combining rigorous disciplinary foundations, interdisciplinary openness and direct engagement with complex territorial realities. This model reflects a broader ambition to educate planners able not only to operate technically within changing urban environments, but also to critically interpret, mediate and transform the social and spatial conditions shaping contemporary cities and territories.

**Key planning perspectives, knowledge, skills and attitudes:** The programme offers a combination of perspectives from the Mediterranean tradition of spatial planning, Anglo-Saxon policy analysis, design, urban studies and social sciences. Ethics and reflexivity are integrated in the exploration of planners' neutrality within contexts of power. The distinguished teaching team brings a wide variety of planning and policy expertise to the curriculum.

**Key learner-centred pedagogical approaches:** The learning approach of the Master's is based on situated, problem-oriented and research-based interdisciplinary learning environments delivered mainly through curricular and thematic studios, and interdisciplinary courses. In some cases, the educational offer foresees 'innovative learning' modules, with a combination of on-line and offline learning activities, intensive workshops,

summer and winter courses focused on an urban and territorial challenge, and Honours Programmes on different topics, which involve non-academic partners. Internship activities and the final dissertation are compulsory and serve to develop students' practical reasoning and practical judgement skills.

**Key institutional settings for quality assurance and relevance:** The study course, as all study courses in Italy, is accredited annually by the Ministry of University and Research (MUR), with the approval of an annual datasheet submitted by the study course itself, and a full review of educational objectives and results every five years. Furthermore, support to curriculum development is provided by an advisory board constituted by diverse stakeholders and experts at Italian and international level, and by an ongoing relationship with alumni, who support enrolled students by sharing knowledge about the job market. The programme has also expanded challenge-based and excellence-oriented educational opportunities addressed to selected students, also in connection with ongoing initiatives promoted by Politecnico di Milano across different schools and programmes.



The MSc in Urban Planning and Policy Design (UPPD) has progressively strengthened and diversified its educational offer along two closely interconnected paths that today contribute to the core identity of the programme, alongside its disciplinary focus. On the one hand, the MSc has consolidated a pedagogical approach centred on the capacity to address complex urban and territorial challenges through situated, problem-oriented and research-based learning environments. On the other hand, it has reinforced interdisciplinarity as a fundamental dimension of planning education, promoting critical dialogue across different disciplinary traditions, epistemologies and methodological approaches needed to better understand and address contemporary urban and territorial transformations. Together, these two paths reflect a broader commitment to placing the student learning experience at the centre of the programme while preparing graduates to operate within increasingly uncertain, unequal and rapidly transforming urban and territorial contexts.

A first strategic direction concerns the strengthening of educational environments aimed at confronting complex urban and territorial issues. This objective stems from the awareness that contemporary planning problems cannot be addressed through narrow sectoral approaches, but require the capacity to work across scales, actors and forms of knowledge, combining technical expertise with critical understanding and collaborative skills.

This perspective has been implemented through an articulated educational structure that spans different curricular paths and learning experiences. A central role is played by the curricular studios, which are conceived as integrated learning environments where students are asked to interpret, analyse and intervene in concrete territorial situations (frequently located within the Milan metropolitan region, but not exclusively) characterised by multiple actors, conflicting interests and institutional complexity. They are strongly grounded in empirical and situated forms of learning, which typically include extensive fieldwork activities such as on-site visits, mapping exercises, direct observation, interaction with local stakeholders, public administrations and civil society organisations, and in some cases moments of public discussion and presentation of project outcomes. The emphasis on field-based learning also contributes to strengthening students' teamwork, communication, negotiation and reflexive problem-solving capabilities.

Particular attention has also been devoted to the thematic studios offered during the second year of the programme. The two main thematic studios (Housing and Neighbourhoods, and Energy, Climate and Urban Planning) have recently been reinforced through the integration of an additional disciplinary module in each. The objective has been to provide students with broader an-

alytical tools and diversified theoretical perspectives for interpreting major contemporary urban challenges. This pedagogical structure also supports the development of individual research trajectories, frequently opening pathways toward final dissertation work and, in several cases, toward doctoral studies and further research experiences.

Alongside curricular activities, the MSc has also expanded challenge-based and excellence-oriented educational opportunities addressed to selected students. In recent years, the MSc has proposed advanced Honours Programmes designed to complement curricular learning through additional interdisciplinary and applied experiences.

Significant examples include the 'Honours Programme in Urban Regeneration and Large-Scale Urban Developments' (2023–2025) and the recently established 'Honours Programme in City Science for Transformative Urban Futures' (2025–2026). These programmes represent innovative learning platforms in which students engage directly with emerging urban questions through combinations of theoretical reflection, applied research and interaction with institutions and policy actors. A strong emphasis is placed on hands-on and collaborative learning. Students analyse international experiences while simultaneously working with Italian cities to explore how innovative approaches can be adapted, tested and critically assessed within different local contexts.

The second major direction in which the MSc has evolved concerns the consolidation of interdisciplinarity as a structural and methodological principle of the programme. The educational structure of the MSc has been progressively organised in order to accompany students from a first phase characterised by stronger disciplinary grounding towards more explicitly interdisciplinary forms of learning. In particular, the first semester of each year is mainly devoted to providing students with solid disciplinary foundations, a phase which allows students to acquire the conceptual and methodological bases necessary to engage critically with planning issues. In the second semester, both in year 1 and 2, the programme increasingly emphasises interdisciplinary training through both studios and dedicated courses. The curricular studios themselves already operate as interdisciplinary environments where planning issues are approached through the integration of spatial, social, environmental, economic and institutional perspectives.

This path has recently been reinforced through the introduction of new interdisciplinary courses specifically designed to address emerging territorial challenges. The Territorial Challenges and Urban Space course engages students with open and complex urban questions (e.g. related to migration, socio-spatial inequalities, segrega-

tion, demographic transformations, environmental crises and climate change). Students are encouraged to interpret an emerging phenomenon through multiple perspectives. Similarly, the Fragility and Antifragility in the Spatial Realm course (developed in collaboration with the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies' CRAFT Competence Centre on Antifragile Territories) focuses on the concepts of fragility and antifragility as interpretative and operational frameworks for contemporary territorial governance. The course encourages students to critically reflect on how urban and territorial systems can respond to shocks, crises and uncertainty through adaptive and transformative strategies.

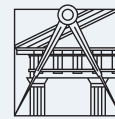
Finally, the MSc will further strengthen this path through the activation of a new interdisciplinary course titled: Territories and Polycrisis: Policy, Governance and Spatial Justice. The course will provide students with the opportunity to critically analyse the territorial implications of intertwined global and regional crises (including climate change, geopolitical instability, socio-economic inequalities and energy transitions) while developing interpretative and operational tools that can be applied to urban planning, governance studies and critical geography.

### Most Relevant Quality Recognition Criteria for the Programme's Showcase Practices

Programme distinctiveness / Spatial foci / **Cross-disciplinarity** / Global context / **Contemporary socio-spatial challenges and opportunities** / Professional ethics / **Research and inquiry** / Independent learning and group learning / **Practical reasoning and judgement** / **Reflexive praxis** / Student diversity / Recognition and promotion of excellence / Student/alumni/employer engagement in the development of the programme curriculum



# MSc Integrated Programme in Architecture - Concentration in Architecture, Urbanism, City and Territory



**FACULDADE DE ARQUITETURA**  
LISBON SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE  
UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA

**Lisbon School of Architecture**  
**Universidade de Lisboa**

**Author:**

Assistant Professor with Habilitation Sofia Morgado

**Acknowledgement:**

Programme Coordination (Professor Carlos Dias Coelho, Associate Professor Filipa Serpa), Communication Office (Dr Alexandra Luís, Miguel Miranda), Mobility Office (Assistant Professor João Leite), and Academic Office (Cláudio Ribeiro)

**Reviewer:**

Associate Professor Juliana Martins,  
University College London

**Email of the corresponding author**

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### **Name and level of the programme**

Integrated Master's in Architecture.  
Concentration in Architecture, Urbanism, City  
and Territory

### **Name of the school**

Lisbon School of Architecture,  
Universidade de Lisboa

### **City, Country**

Lisboa, Portugal

### **Website**

[www.fa.ulisboa.pt](http://www.fa.ulisboa.pt)

### **Official representative**

Associate Professor with Habilitation Cristina  
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### **Institutional e-mail**

[ccavaco@fa.ulisboa.pt](mailto:ccavaco@fa.ulisboa.pt)

### **Duration, ECTS, start year**

2-year, 120 ECTS, start year: 2021

### **Average number of students per year**

~24-26

### **Language(s) of the programme**

Portuguese and English

### **AESOP Certificate of Quality Duration**

2022-2028

### **[Link to the AESOP Certificate of Quality and Evaluation Report](#)**



The school's main building.

## Programme Highlights



### Purpose:

The programme provides students with advanced skills in understanding and intervening in cities and territories, preparing them for careers in architecture, urban planning and design, fostering excellence and ethics.



### Focus Areas:

The curriculum covers urban design, planning theories, landscape architecture and history, focusing on public spaces, heritage and urban regeneration. Key topics include climate action, housing affordability, the circular economy and community-led design.



### Regional and National Context:

The programme is accredited by the A3ES Agency, complies with legislation, and is recognised by the Portuguese Institute of Architects. Students work on local issues with municipal and national agencies, taking into account international best practices.

**Educational orientation:** The programme is a two-year concentration in Architecture, Urbanism, City and Territory, that is part of the five-year Integrated Master's Degree in Architecture. The curriculum stands out for its focus on urbanism, its examination of territorial systems at multiple scales, and its promotion of sustainability concepts to address climate change. The programme maintains high academic standards, aligning with professional requirements for practising architecture in Portugal and the European Union.

**Key planning perspectives, knowledge, skills and attitudes:** The curriculum is designed to encourage professional and reflective practice, exposing students to issues of public interest and equity. These priorities are reflected in students' engagement with critical issues such as housing affordability, urban rehabilitation, climate action, the circular economy and community-led design. Interdisciplinary teaching is emphasised by embedding theories, methods and approaches from various disciplines within urban design thinking. Key areas of the curriculum include urban design, planning theory, landscape architecture, history, urban infrastructure and urban regeneration.

**Key learner-centred pedagogical approaches:** A core pillar of the programme is its studio-based, learner-centred approach, which involves exercises and discus-



Photo: Miguel Miranda, GEC

sion-based activities devised to promote 'progressive autonomy'. This approach to architectural and urban design education covers a range of subjects in design studios, developing the practical reasoning and ethical judgement needed to understand the requirements of individuals, social groups and authorities. Pedagogical strategies involve close collaboration with non-academic partners, such as municipal urban planning departments, on real-world territorial and urban planning challenges.

**Key institutional settings for quality assurance and relevance:** The institutional framework fosters a culture of continuous improvement, ensuring the programme remains receptive to contemporary societal changes. A dedicated Quality Office oversees an integrated Quality Management System to promote continuous improvement in teaching and research. There is an active engagement with external stakeholders and professionals in the field, and a network of around 120 international partnerships in 40 countries (including the Erasmus Agreement, UNITE! Alliance, etc.) that provides the faculty and students an international context. A Student Tutoring Office offers mentoring and targeted support. The school promotes excellence by awarding prizes, encouraging participation in competitions, and showcasing exemplary work to inspire future students. Furthermore, the school's adherence to the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) demonstrates its commitment to maintaining an up-to-date and ethical research environment that aligns with European standards.



Design studio.

Photo: Miguel Miranda, GEC

### Practice 1: Studio-Based Engagement with Real-World Urban Challenges

This practice is rooted in a long-standing tradition of studio-based learning, in which project work engages students directly with real-world problems. These challenges are often identified in partnership with municipal urban planning departments, which provide students with authentic materials, site data and expert support from multidisciplinary teams. Design topics alternate annually between the municipality of Lisbon, which focuses on Lisbon-specific issues and urban development, and a different municipality in the Lisbon metropolitan area. Topics involve societal and critical issues such as housing affordability, climate action, emerging ways of living and working, real estate pressure, and urban decay and vacant land. Recent topics addressed urban regeneration and mobility as strategies for urban development.

The levels of regional and municipal integration are key factors, as well as the local impacts on the built environment. Together, these two factors bring the built environment and public space together. Each academic year introduces a new or refreshed topic, allowing for critical updates and to bring stakeholders and participants up to date. Teaching strategies include immersive weeks, seminars or other open activities held at a location related to the semester's topic. The learning environment extends beyond the classroom through fieldwork, workshops and public exhibitions, where students present their proposals to local citizens and stakeholders.

Such a pedagogical approach fosters practical reasoning and judgement by requiring students to make informed decisions in complex practical situations. Engaging with



Design studio, Model under development.

Photo: João Leite

issues of public interest and equity also encourages a reflexive praxis, prompting students to participate in a cyclical process of self-reflection and disciplinary awareness through regular feedback and public debate.

A significant share of current students and alumni are actively engaged in local associations concerned with spatial change and community involvement, involving professors, researchers, activists, volunteers and the media, to create bottom-up development practices.

Excellence is recognised and encouraged by awarding prizes and using outstanding students' work as a benchmark for future cohorts. Archiprix, to mention one, is a highly competitive international competition involving schools of architecture, urbanism and landscape design, and students from the programme have already won awards.



Photo: Miguel Miranda, GEC

Design studio.

## Practice 2: Interdisciplinary Synthesis and Multi-scalar Territorial Focus

The programme emphasises a multi-scalar approach, training students to explore the vital links between local architectural design and regional territorial systems. This is achieved through an interdisciplinary framework that integrates theory, methods and perspectives from subjects such as urban design, landscape architecture, infrastructure, social sciences, history and theory directly into the core design studios. Recently, internationally recognised landscape architects have contributed to these studios, addressing climate action and urban diversity.

Planning and design are considered across multiple scales, from regional to local and from metropolitan to neighbourhood level, in various courses, particularly in design studios. Rather than focusing on a single site, students are required to understand the territory as a system, and to explore pivotal, multi-level links by identify-

ing common elements, such as large landscape features and metropolitan infrastructure.

The laboratory and design-focused studios primarily facilitate this method by linking theoretical knowledge to practical application within specific sites and contexts. This interdisciplinary approach culminates in the final master's dissertation, which integrates research into the design process. The approach to administrative and statistical regional scales is addressed in complementary courses, which cover strategic programmes and the statutory planning framework and tools. Final projects are expected to address different scales (territorial, municipal and local) systematically, considering both analytical and design components.

Final projects or dissertations are options for students seeking to obtain a master's degree. Such studies are typically co-supervised by experts from various disciplines, encouraging curiosity and critical enquiry.

### Most Relevant Quality Recognition Criteria for the Programme's Showcase Practices

Programme distinctiveness / Spatial foci / **Cross-disciplinarity** / Global context / **Contemporary socio-spatial challenges and opportunities** / Professional ethics / **Research and inquiry** / Independent learning and group learning / **Practical reasoning and judgement** / **Reflexive praxis** / Student diversity / Recognition and promotion of excellence / Engagement in the development of the programme curriculum



# MSc Programme in Regional Planning

**İTÜ**



Faculty of Architecture,  
Technical University of Istanbul

**Authors:**

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Sabah

**Reviewer:**

Professor Zeynep Enlil,  
Yildiz Technical University

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### **Name and level of the programme**

MSc Regional Planning

### **Name of the school**

Faculty of Architecture,  
Istanbul Technical University

### **City, Country**

Istanbul, Turkey

### **Website**

[https://www.tyyc.itu.edu.tr/ProgramHakkinda.php?Program=SBP\\_BP\\_YL&Dili=EN](https://www.tyyc.itu.edu.tr/ProgramHakkinda.php?Program=SBP_BP_YL&Dili=EN)

### **Official representative**

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### **Institutional e-mail**

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### **Duration, ECTS, start year**

2-years, 75 ECTS, start year: 1989

### **Average number of students per year**

10

### **Language(s) of the programme**

Turkish-English (30% English Programme)

### **AESOP Certificate of Quality Duration**

2022-2028

### **Link to the AESOP Certificate of Quality and Evaluation Report**



The Faculty of Architecture building - Taşkılla.

## Programme Highlights



### Purpose

The programme is designed to analyse interregional disparities and rapidly growing metropolitan regions, developing alternative solutions based on empirical research.



### Focus Areas

The economic, social, environmental and policy aspects of regions, and analytical methods for understanding these.



### Regional & National Context

Its educational orientation aligns with national and international dynamics, reflected in its adaptation to the EU accession process, the establishment of Regional Development Agencies in Türkiye, and global paradigms in regional development.

**Educational orientation:** The programme focuses on analysing interregional disparities and the dynamics of rapidly growing metropolitan regions, producing evidence-based solutions. It aligns with national and international dynamics, including Türkiye's EU accession process and regional development policies. The curriculum is structured around four modules: Economy-Policy-Governance, Sectoral/Spatial Development, Environment and Sustainability, and Analytical Tools/Methods. It combines theoretical and methodological approaches to understand regional processes. Established in 1989, the programme is a pioneer in its field, with a distinctive interdisciplinary approach that is strongly connected to international regional science networks.

**Key planning perspectives, knowledge, skills and attitudes:** The programme provides a multidimensional understanding of spatial challenges. Students gain theoretical knowledge of planning systems, socio-economic and environmental dynamics, and institutional frameworks. It develops skills in analytical thinking, research, quantitative methods, communication and collaborative problem solving. The programme also promotes values such as social justice, economic welfare, democratic participation, respect for diversity and protection of natural and cultural heritage, while emphasising professional ethics.

**Key learner-centred pedagogical approaches:** The programme adopts a learner-centred approach that integrates theory and practice. Studio-based learning is central, with students preparing strategic spatial plans



Research Presentation: Researchers presenting their studies.

for the regions. Projects address real-world issues such as smart development and urban-rural relations, often in collaboration with public institutions. Interdisciplinary collaboration is encouraged through diverse student backgrounds. Experiential learning methods, including simulations, workshops and role playing, support practical understanding and stakeholder engagement.

**Key institutional settings for quality assurance and relevance:** The programme maintains relevance through continuous quality assurance and strong professional engagement. Regular evaluations improve curriculum quality. Professionals from both the public and private sectors, as well as NGOs, contribute to teaching and studio work. Feedback from advisory boards, alumni, and students informs programme development. International collaborations and Erasmus partnerships ensure alignment with global planning practices and sustain academic and professional relevance. Furthermore, programme students have won several awards in national dissertation competitions.

Research presentation: researchers presenting their studies.



### Showcase Practice 1: Regional Planning Studio – Bridging Theory and Practice with Real-World Regional Challenges

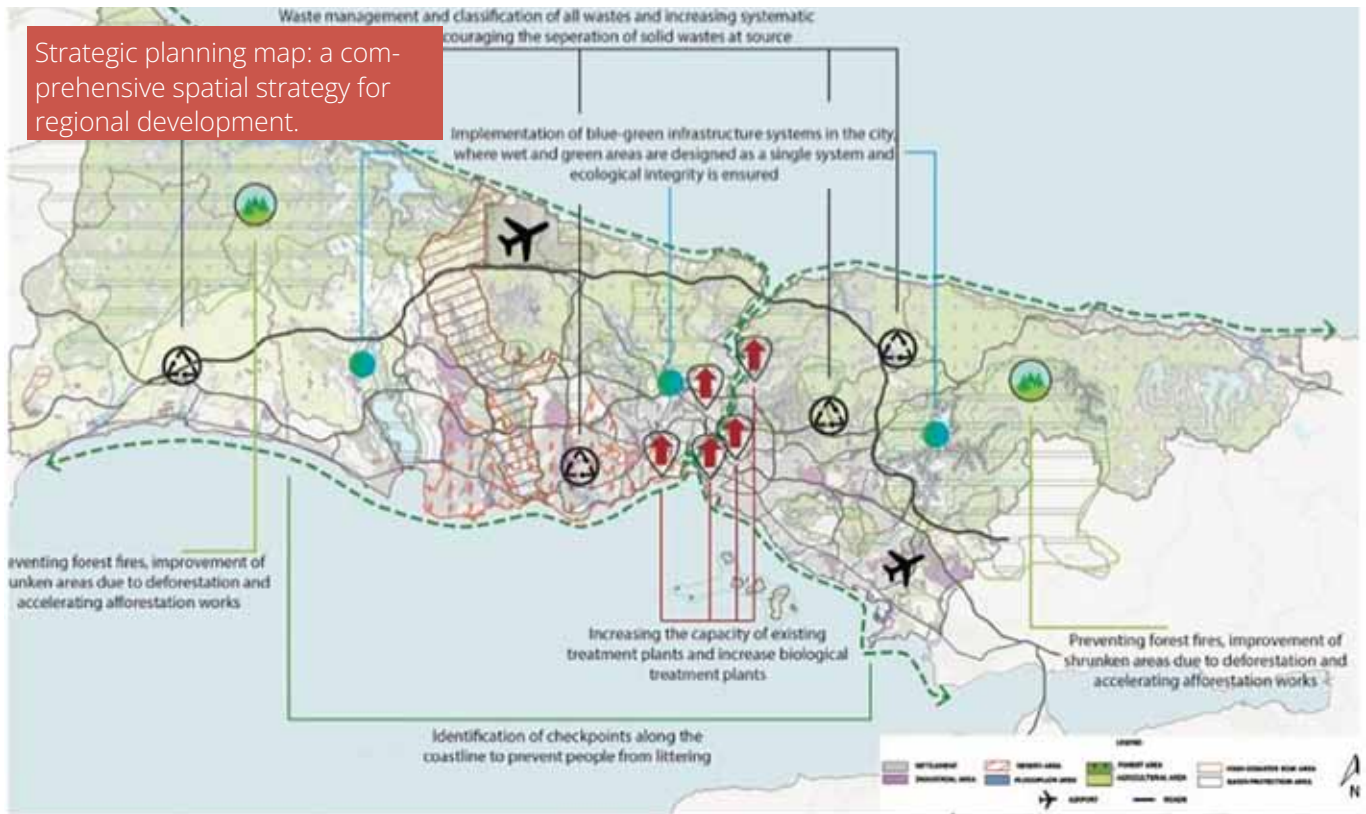
The core of the programme's pedagogy is the Regional Planning Studio, structured as a two-semester sequence that allows students to apply the knowledge and skills gained in other courses to real regional development challenges. In Studio I, students prepare a strategic spatial plan for a selected region. They identify key challenges, analyse regional conditions and develop a strategic vision. In Studio II, they build on this work by preparing action plans and project proposals.

The learning environment is designed to be highly interactive, flexible and interdisciplinary. Studio themes are based on real-world problems and often focus on the Istanbul Metropolitan Area or other regions (NUTS2) of Türkiye. Basically, contemporary socio-spatial challenges are the major topics of the studios, including climate change, disaster mitigation and resilience, migration and socio-spatial inequalities. Students develop their projects using different research methods, including data analysis, literature reviews, policy reviews, field studies and stakeholder interviews. The pedagogy also uses scenario and role-playing techniques to foster practical reasoning. These exercises enhance students' ability to understand the

conflicting expectations of different groups, and the wide range of responsibilities required in professional practice.

The programme's interdisciplinary approach with students from different disciplines including urban planning, architecture, landscape planning, economics, sociology, engineering, public administration and law is leveraged as a pedagogical tool, allowing students to learn from one another within the collaborative nature of planning practice. The programme reflects a strong commitment to embedding professional ethics into the curriculum. Through studio discussions and the Seminar Course, students reflect on topics such as social justice, democratic participation, economic welfare and the protection of natural and cultural heritage. This encourages them to consider the wider impacts of planning decisions on society.

The studio is also closely connected to professional practice. Experts from municipalities, development agencies and other public institutions regularly participate in studio juries and discussions. Studio themes are developed with input from advisory experts to ensure their relevance. Some studio projects have later been developed into applications for local and international funding programmes, and two have already received local funding support. Projects prepared for different regions of Türkiye have also been shared with Regional Development Agencies, enabling students to experience the potential policy implications of their work.



## Showcase Practice 2: Institutional Leadership and Global Networking in Regional Science

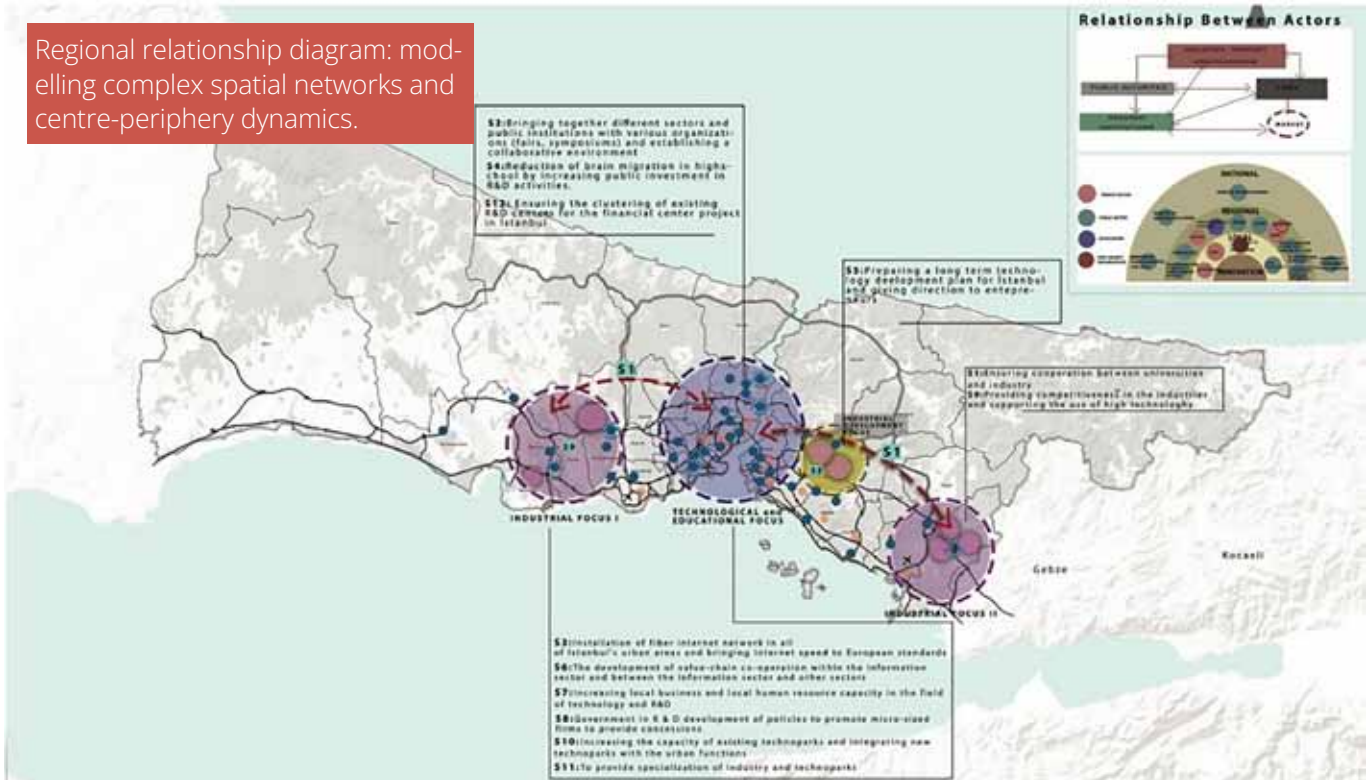
A defining characteristic of the programme is its 'niche' position as a pioneer of Regional Science in Türkiye. The programme's institutional identity is closely linked to the Turkish Regional Science Association (the national section of the Regional Science Association International - RSAI), which was established by the programme's founders. Students take part in national and international research projects led by academic staff, which helps them become familiar with wider research networks. Alumni meetings also support students' career development and strengthen the continuity of their engagement in the programme.

Since 1989, one of the programme's main strengths has been its flexible structure. This allows the programme to continuously adapt to global changes. While it keeps its original focus on regional perspectives from the 1990s, it has also developed to respond to current global and local challenges. This institutional context is reflected in the curriculum and learning outcomes. The programme focuses on tools, methods and theories for analysing regions. In this way, it differs from general urban planning programmes by maintaining a strong focus on regional science. Recent updates have strengthened the Environment and Sustainability module to address climate change and disaster resilience, while expanding the Economy-Policy-Governance module to engage with growing multidimensional inequalities at both global and local scales.

The programme also exposes students to global planning cultures. Academic staff maintain long-term collaborations with international organisations like ERSA, AESOP, RSA and ERES. They also cooperate with universities and research centres in Europe, the UK and the USA. The 'global context' is operationally supported by a strong Erasmus network comprising 25 partner institutions across 14 countries, facilitating student and staff mobility that enriches the local learning environment. Students are also encouraged to participate in national and international conferences and workshops.

The quality of the programme is sustained through regular internal and external review processes. Istanbul Technical University has engaged with the Turkish Higher Education Quality Council (THEQC), receiving full institutional accreditation. The programme received the AESOP Quality Recognition for the 2022-2028 period. The recognition highlights the programme's strong academic structure, pedagogical approach and international orientation. The constructive feedback provided by AESOP was a real learning process for the ongoing quality improvement of the Regional Planning Master's Programme of ITU.

Regional relationship diagram: modelling complex spatial networks and centre-periphery dynamics.



## Most Relevant Quality Recognition Criteria for the Programme's Showcase Practices

Programme distinctiveness / Spatial foci / **Cross-disciplinarity** / Global context / **Contemporary socio-spatial challenges and opportunities** / Professional ethics / Research and inquiry / Independent learning and group learning / **Practical reasoning and judgement** / **Reflexive praxis** / Student diversity / Recognition and promotion of excellence / **Engagement in the development of the programme curriculum**

# BSc in Urban and Regional Planning



Faculty of Architecture,  
Yıldız Technical University

## Authors:

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Associate Professor Doruk Özügül  
Professor Zeynep Meray Enlil  
Research Assistant Araf Öykü Türken

## Reviewer:

Assistant Professor Ana Peric,  
University College Dublin

Email of the corresponding author  
evren@yildiz.edu.tr

### Name and level of the programme

Bachelor's in Urban and Regional Planning

### Name of the school

Faculty of Architecture,  
Yıldız Technical University

### City, Country

İstanbul, Turkey

### Website

<https://sbp.yildiz.edu.tr>

### Official representative

Professor Senay Oğuztimur

### Institutional e-mail

[soguz@yildiz.edu.tr](mailto:soguz@yildiz.edu.tr)

### Duration, ECTS, start year

4-year, 240 ECTS, start year: 1982

### Average number of students per year

58

### Language(s) of the programme

Turkish and English (30% of the courses  
are in English)

### AESOP Certificate of Quality Duration

2023-2029

### Link to the AESOP Certificate of Quality and Evaluation Report



The Faculty of Architecture building.

## Programme Highlights



### Purpose

The programme aims to train planning professionals in line with international and national disciplinary knowledge, skills and professional ethics. Forward-looking and utopic thinking are also encouraged to enhance students' creativity.



### Focus Areas

Planning history and theory, legal-institutional frameworks, sustainability, economics, urban design, heritage conservation, housing and transportation.

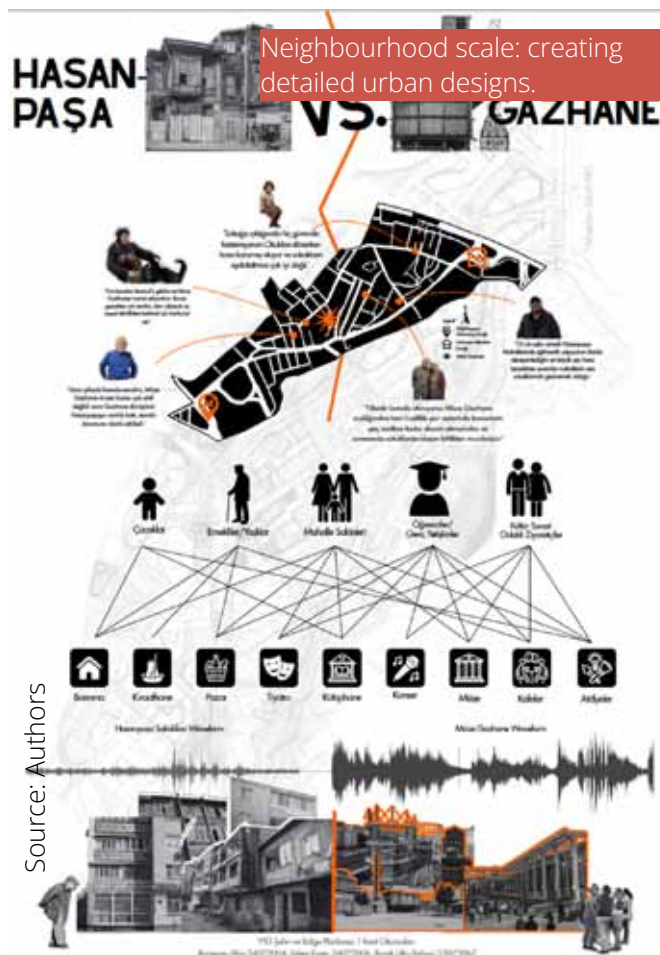


### Regional & National Context

The school is the third oldest of its kind in Turkey, which has evolved from a strong orientation towards practice to a balanced integration of theory and practice. As a pivotal discussion topic of the national planning practice, public good is given utmost importance over political pressures stemming from market forces.

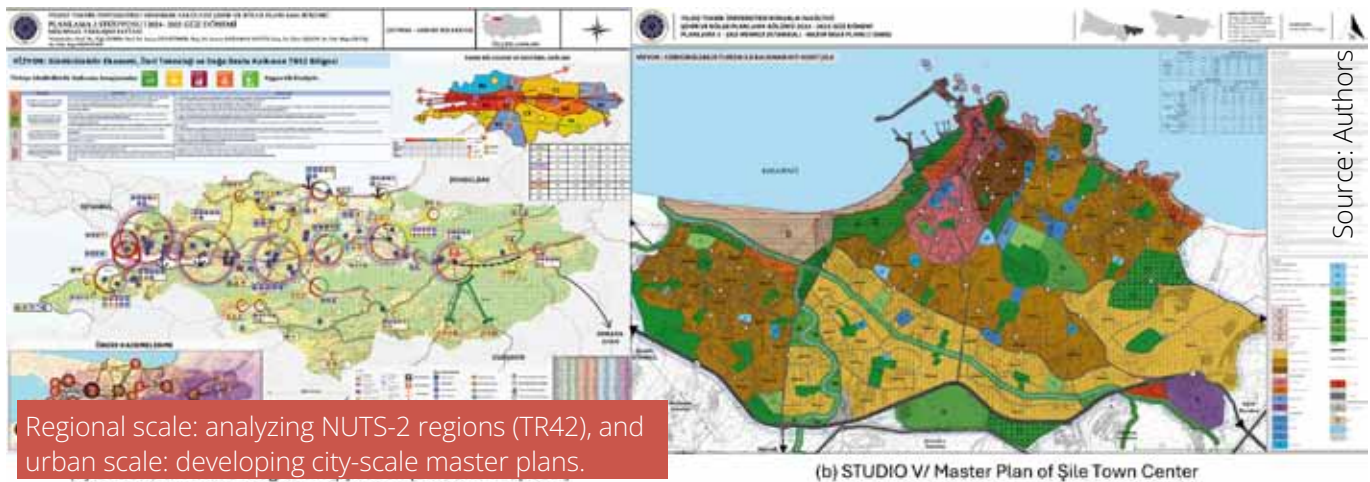
**Educational orientation:** The programme is grounded in the integration of theory and practice, with planning studios constituting the backbone of the curriculum. The curriculum engages with contemporary paradigm shifts and addresses environmental, social and economic challenges, together with their impacts on cities and regions, with particular emphasis on sustainability, resilience, and socio-spatial justice. The educational framework is also aligned with AESOP's Core Curriculum.

**Key planning perspectives, knowledge, skills and attitudes:** Students gain a deep understanding of social, ecologic, economic and institutional aspects of spatial planning through both group-based and individual works. The programme develops competences in real-time data collection, GIS-based analysis, 3D visualisation and multi-scalar problem solving. It strengthens students' ethical awareness through the consistent application of national and international frameworks across all stages of the curriculum. Planning is presented not merely as a technical endeavour, but as a political, multi-actor process shaped by power relations and competing interests. We adopt a multi-scalar perspective in which students work following various scales and are trained with an explicit awareness of the controversial nature of planning.



**Key learner-centred pedagogical approaches:** Planning studios form the backbone of the curriculum, enabling the use of diverse pedagogical tools to ensure active student engagement. Students apply theoretical knowledge and methodological skills to real-world urban challenges. Studios are designed to combine individual performance with group work that facilitates active peer learning. Urban games and role-playing simulations are used as experiential learning methods. Interdisciplinary collaboration is embedded in the curriculum by exposing students to diverse perspectives through guest lecturers and cross-disciplinary courses. A future-oriented transformative pedagogical approach enables students to critically engage with climate change, spatial justice and the pursuit of the public good.

**Key institutional settings for quality assurance and relevance:** The department undergoes an annual quality evaluation process, undertaken by YTU's Quality Control Unit. Stakeholder engagement is supported through institutional collaborations with regional development agencies, local municipalities, the Chamber of City Planners and private planning offices. This institutional ecosystem is enriched with periodical alumni and employer feedback mechanisms, as well as a cooperative education programme (see best practice 2).



Regional scale: analyzing NUTS-2 regions (TR42), and urban scale: developing city-scale master plans.

Source: Authors

### 1: Studio-Centred, Multi-Scalar and Evidence-Based Planning and Design

The Yıldız Technical University Bachelor's Degree in Urban and Regional Planning programme positions planning studios as the backbone of its curriculum, utilising a 'Studio-Based Learning' model that bridges theoretical knowledge with professional planning practice. The curriculum is structured around a rigorous spatial hierarchy that allows students to cope with current planning issues, such as negative environmental externalities relative to site selection and urban growth, the climate crisis and its spatial reflections (flooding, drought, heat waves, etc.), underdeveloped and left-behind regions, quality of life deficiencies in given urban geographies, housing and transportation problems, gentrification, and inequality of spatial opportunities. The studio works emphasise problem framing, collaborative inquiry and iterative design, all of which enable students to engage critically with the spatial, social, economic and institutional dimensions of planning practice while developing professional judgement, communication and teamwork competences.

This structure not only facilitates adopting a multi-scalar perspective, ranging from the macro scale to the micro scale, but also requires executing multi-dimensional problem-solving methods. Within the current structure of the curriculum, while the first-year studios focus on basic design principles/site analysis/planning and design, and their application to the neighbourhood level, the second- and third-year studios follow a step-by-step approach, which enables students to think analytically at national, regional, metropolitan, urban and neighbourhood levels (Figure 2; Figure 3). In this context, students can apply their knowledge through a strong integration of analytical rigour and design. This involves producing analytical reports that systematically combine structure-based SWOT and BEEM analyses, conceptual frameworks, GIS-based mappings and 3D visualisations/models. Regarding the use of GIS technologies, students are particularly encouraged to use various innovative and technological tools during site visits. In this context, Sur-

vey123 (for online questionnaires) and Field Maps mobile applications (for the analysis of the built-up environment) were used, while the geospatial data infrastructure was established using the ArcGIS Pro and ArcGIS Online platforms. This 'evidence-based planning' approach ensures that planning and design proposals are grounded in empirical work rather than purely conceptual ideas.

The final year, however, is reserved for students to prove their professional knowledge and skills on a given specific planning problem. Herein, students are expected to work independently of their tutors and demonstrate their professional maturity by designing the threefold planning process (analysis-synthesis-plan) on their own. This studio culture encourages a reflexive learning environment where peer learning/critique, iterative feedback and strategic instructor intervention foster independent professional reasoning.



Neighbourhood scale: creating detailed urban designs.

Source: Authors



Exhibition and jury analysis of Planning Studios 5 and 6 with the participation of Burdur Municipality officials, Spring 2018.

Source: Authors

## 2: Institutionalised Practice-Academia Interface and Strong Stakeholder Engagement

The abovementioned studio-based learning model is supported by a unique academic-institutional climate in which strong stakeholder engagement plays a pivotal role. The department enables this via various channels, with the foremost functioning through the active role played by the academic staff in various real-life planning practices. These include preparing expert reports for planning disputes in courts, providing part-time consultancy services for planning practices conducted by central and/or local authorities (e.g. regional development agencies, local municipalities, ministries), and participating in various planning and design competitions. An engagement

as such does not only provide a two-way knowledge flow between academia and practice, but also feeds through to students in terms of exchanging experience, both through theoretical courses and studios.

In addition, since almost every studio is designed around a real-life planning problem, students are naturally expected to actively communicate with various planning professionals in municipalities during data collection phases. Stakeholders' active engagement is also fostered by encouraging these planning bureaucrats to act as guest lecturers and/or studio jury members (Figure 4; Figure 5). This application directly addresses the programme's commitment to maintaining relevance in a competitive labour market. By placing students in different professional environments and inviting practitioners into the studios, the programme effectively resolves the



Field trip to Bergama within the context of Planning Studio 7, Fall 2023

Source: Authors

theory-practice gap. This enables Yıldız graduates to start their careers one step ahead in comparison to their national peers elsewhere.

Having launched in 2022, the bachelor's programme employs a 'Cooperative Education (CO-OP)' model to address the challenge of the so-called gap between academic education and real-life uncertainties. This model allows especially fourth-year students to engage in 'learning by doing' within professional planning offices, regional development agencies, municipalities and planning-related NGOs.

Last but not least, the department has a welcoming research culture for its students. In almost all of the scientific research projects conducted by the academic staff, students are considered active team members. They are also encouraged to apply to scientific research programmes - especially the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey's 2209 coded projects - and conduct their research on their own. Here, the role of the department is to provide students with supportive mentorship and workspaces.

### Most Relevant Quality Recognition Criteria for the Programme's Showcase Practices

**Programme distinctiveness / Spatial foci / Cross-disciplinarity** / Global context / Contemporary socio-spatial challenges and opportunities / Professional ethics / Research and inquiry / Independent learning and group learning / **Practical reasoning and judgement / Reflexive praxis** / Student diversity / Recognition and promotion of excellence / Student/alumni/employer engagement in the development of the programme curriculum

# MSc in Architecture and Urbanism – Spatial Planning Module



Faculty of Architecture,  
Czech Technical University in Prague

**Authors:**

Associate Professor Jakub Vorel  
Professor Karel Maier  
Associate Professor Veronika Šindlerová  
Assistant Jan Bittner

**Reviewer:**

Assistant Professor Ana Peric,  
University College Dublin

**Email of the corresponding author**  
vorel@fa.cvut.cz

### Name and level of the programme

MSc in Architecture and Urbanism – Spatial Planning module

### Name of the school

Faculty of Architecture  
Czech Technical University in Prague,

### City, Country

Prague, Czechia

### Website

<https://www.fa.cvut.cz/en/faculty/organisational-structure/institutes/129-department-of-spatial-planning>

### Official representative

Professor Dalibor Hlaváček, PhD, the Dean

### Institutional e-mail

[andrea.vondrakova@fa.cvut.cz](mailto:andrea.vondrakova@fa.cvut.cz)

### Duration, ECTS, start year

2-year, 120 ECTS, start year: Faculty of Architecture 1976, Spatial Planning from 2015/2016

### Average number of students per year

Architecture and Urbanism 180; the Module Spatial Planning up to 5

### Language(s) of the programme

Czech / English

### AESOP Certificate of Quality Duration

2023 – 2029

### Link to the AESOP Certificate of Quality and Evaluation Report



Building of the Faculty of Architecture,  
Czech Technical University in Prague.

## Programme Highlights



### Purpose

The Spatial Planning Module builds upon the previous Bachelor's degree in Architecture and Urbanism, particularly the creativity and skills of architecture students. It prepares students for a professional career as spatial planners.



### Focus Areas

The teaching is focused on cases of selected Czech towns and their regions. The research conducted in the theoretical background courses supports relevant studio projects.



### Regional & National Context

The Architecture and Urbanism study programme is recognised by the Czech Chamber of Architects. The graduates of the Module enjoy the same recognition and they can apply for the authorisation for spatial planning. This way, they are prepared for a professional career as part of plan-making firms, as well as public institutions.

### Contextual information about the planning programme:

The Spatial Planning Module, as part of the Master Programme in Architecture and Urbanism delivered at the Czech Technical University in Prague, enriches students' knowledge on urban and regional planning, regional policy and development. Therefore, the Module offers students of the Architecture and Urbanism study programme added value, expanding their professional capabilities to the field of spatial planning. The programme is followed by research-oriented doctoral studies.

**Educational orientation:** The Module provides students with broad research competence, from the basic

skills for conducting fundamental research to those inherent in applied research, as well as the dissemination of research results. At the same time, it aims at preparing spatial planners for practice within the Czech legal environment of strategic, urban and regional planning and regional policy. In studios (at the core of the education process), students develop their individual real-world studio projects, receiving assistance from a multi-professional team of pedagogues, as well as inputs from real-world stakeholders.

### Key planning perspectives, knowledge, skills and attitudes:

The Module enriches students' knowledge in the field of regional policy and development, transportation planning, geography and social ecology, while improving their skills in applied statistics, spatial analytics, ICT and GIS. The knowledge and skills are used to respond to the challenges of climate change, energy transition, spatial and social polarisation, and other current aspects of sustainable development.

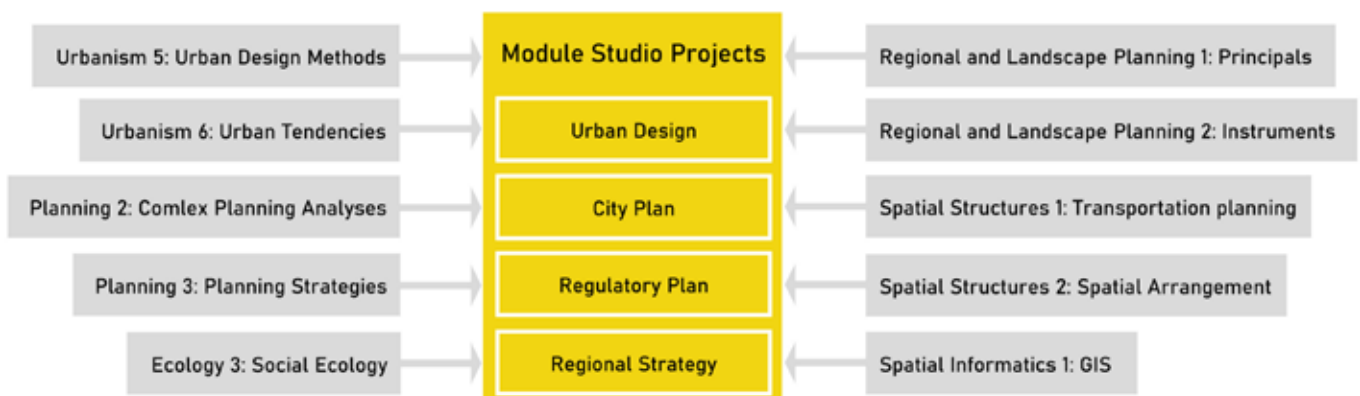
### Key learner-centred pedagogical approaches:

The Module's pedagogy aims at strengthening active and independent learning through an array of diverse student tasks (essays, seminars, studio work, thesis), with a studio project as the final outcome. Time and space are provided for practical reasoning and judgement. In this way, the students receive broad competences for planning: from basic skills for conducting research to support evidence-based plan-making and territorial management, to the dissemination of research results in projects and plans.

### Key institutional settings for quality assurance and relevance:

The real-world assignments and participation of practice-related professionals and stakeholders in the process of studio work guarantee the relevance of the Module for future professional careers. The final outcomes of the studio projects are evaluated by an external committee. The experiences from the Module will be applied to a newly planned study programme: Planning and Development.

Scheme of the theoretical courses required for the Spatial Planning module and their connection to the module's studio projects.



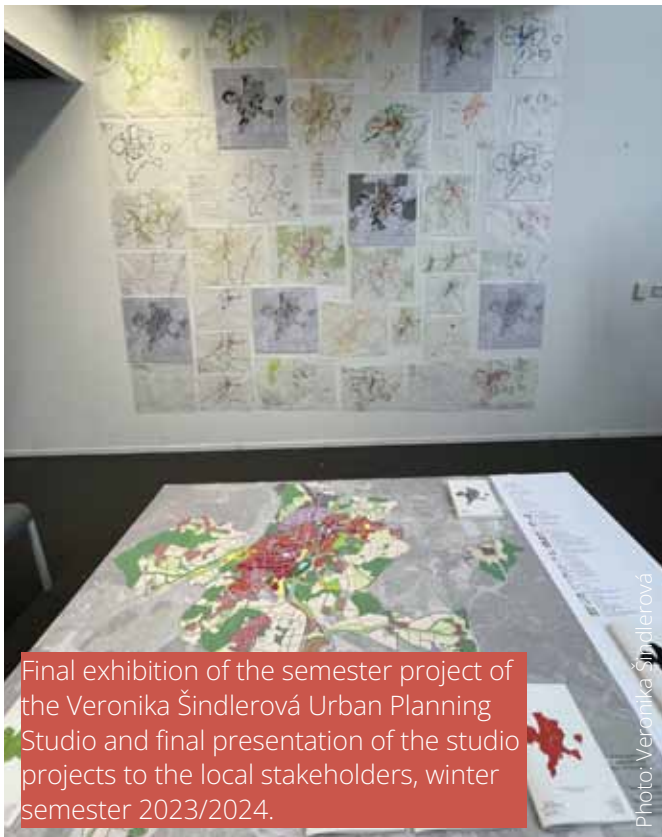
Consultation between teachers and students in the Veronika Šindlerová Urban Planning Studio.



Photo: Veronika Šindlerová

The pedagogy and teaching methods of the Spatial Planning Module are based on a close integration of the content of the module's specialised theoretical courses and the module's design studio assignments. In the theoretical courses of the Spatial Planning Module, students

prepare data and conduct the research necessary for completing studio assignments. The outcomes from theoretical courses provide background evidence for studio instruction. In the GIS instruction courses, for example, the students map land-use limits, site values and development briefs. They compile coordination drawings and perform basic geo-analyses, such as evaluating the accessibility of public infrastructure.



Final exhibition of the semester project of the Veronika Šindlerová Urban Planning Studio and final presentation of the studio projects to the local stakeholders, winter semester 2023/2024.

Photo: Veronika Šindlerová

The integration of theoretical and studio courses is made possible by a unique teaching method for spatial planners: The entire curriculum of the Spatial Planning Module is taught using the administrative territory of a specific city and its catchment area (micro-region) as a case study. This territory then serves as the subject of all theoretical courses and studio assignments within the Module. The model area is selected for each annual iteration of the Module so that it is as didactically illustrative as possible, allowing for the demonstration of the widest possible range of planning tasks. However, it must be of limited size and appropriately complex so that, within the limited time of two semesters, students can become familiar with the area, understand its structure, functioning, potentials and weaknesses, and finally develop a strategy and plan for its future development.

The studio room is available to students all day long. Students have access to a wide range of applications via the



Perspective of the urban design proposal for revitalising the historical core of the city of Příbram, Veronika Šindlerová Urban Planning Studio project, summer semester 2022/2023, student Jakub Naništa.

school intranet: they can make use of a virtual viewer, 3D printer and other technologies. Contact hours for studios are scheduled two half days a week. The structure of the semester studios is well defined, with permanent changes made to the assigned areas for each year of the Module students. Students are expected to complete a total of four semester studios:

- **The first Module studio** focuses on a comprehensive analysis of the current state of the entire area of the municipality and its regional context. It is based

on identifying strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and defining key factors for future development. The analytical part is followed by the vision and spatial concept. The area for transformation is identified and a detailed urban design-based master plan is produced for it, including the system of public spaces, structure of the built environment, transportation services, blue and green infrastructure, and the phasing of development.

- **In the second Module studio**, students produce

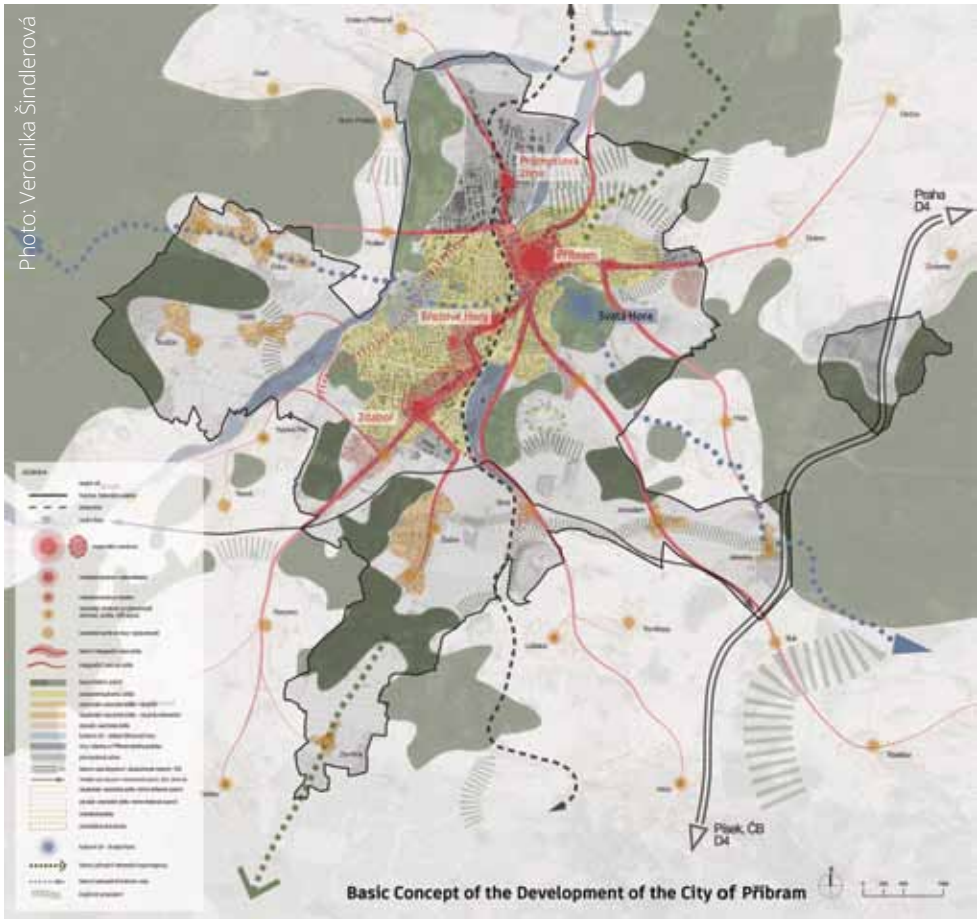


Photo: Veronika Šindlerová

Basic concept of the development of the city of Příbram, Veronika Šindlerová Urban Planning Studio project, winter semester 2023/2024, students Lada Doubravová, Daria Krasnolutska, Jakub Naništa, Tomáš Kadlec and Adéla Novanská.

a development plan following the requirements for a Local Plan of the Czech Building Act. Special emphasis is placed on the process of creating elements, namely urban and landscape structure, public spaces, transportation infrastructure, amenities and public facilities, and utilities. The individual concepts are reviewed by experts and specialists, seeking a clear and comprehensive demonstration of the soundness and appropriateness of the proposed solution for the town's development.

- For the transformation area with **an urban design-based master plan produced in the first Module semester studio**, an 'implementation project' is the theme of the third semester studio, which must follow the requirements of the Czech building law for regulatory plans. This teaches students to translate a specific spatial design into an abstract representation of regulations used in spatial planning. In doing so, students learn to think following binding regulatory conditions and to seek an adequate and justifiable level of regulation with regard to public interests. They test the limits of the proposed regulations using 3D computer models and then adjust the proposed regulations accordingly.
- **The last semester studio of the Module is dedicated to regional development strategies** with a focus on landscape organisation, sustainable networks and good access to public services and infrastructure. Analyses from the first semester studio are updated. An appropriate number of amenities and connections to centres providing job opportunities, and a higher level of services are sought for each settlement within the micro-region.

Several presentation and discussion studio sessions are held during each semester, focusing on the outcomes of specific phases: analysis, concepts, design and final presentation. These sessions are attended by politicians and planners from the municipality in question, as well as external academics to receive feedback. At the end of the final presentation, students are invited to evaluate the entire course of the semester, their role and the work of their teachers. The finished work is usually presented at an exhibition in the city analysed in the current studio, with open-door sessions for the local public being organised during said exhibition.

Teaching within the Module is closely linked to spatial planning practice. Practitioners, politicians and local experts, many of them alumni, actively engage with students by providing feedback through critical discussions during the semester, participating in evaluation commissions and contributing written reports. Distinguished experts are also invited to serve on the jury of the Urban Design Award international student competition. This strong connection to professional practice offers students insight into a wide range of topics, as well as valuable opportunities and contacts that facilitate their transition to their first professional roles.

### Most Relevant Quality Recognition Criteria for the Programme's Showcase Practices

**Programme distinctiveness** / Spatial foci / **Cross-disciplinarity** / Global context / Contemporary socio-spatial challenges and opportunities / Professional ethics / Research and inquiry / Independent learning and group learning / **Practical reasoning and judgement** / Reflexive praxis / Student diversity / Recognition and promotion of excellence / **Engagement in the development of the programme curriculum**

# MSc Programme in Urban and Regional Planning



School of Architecture,  
Polytechnic University of Madrid

**Authors:**

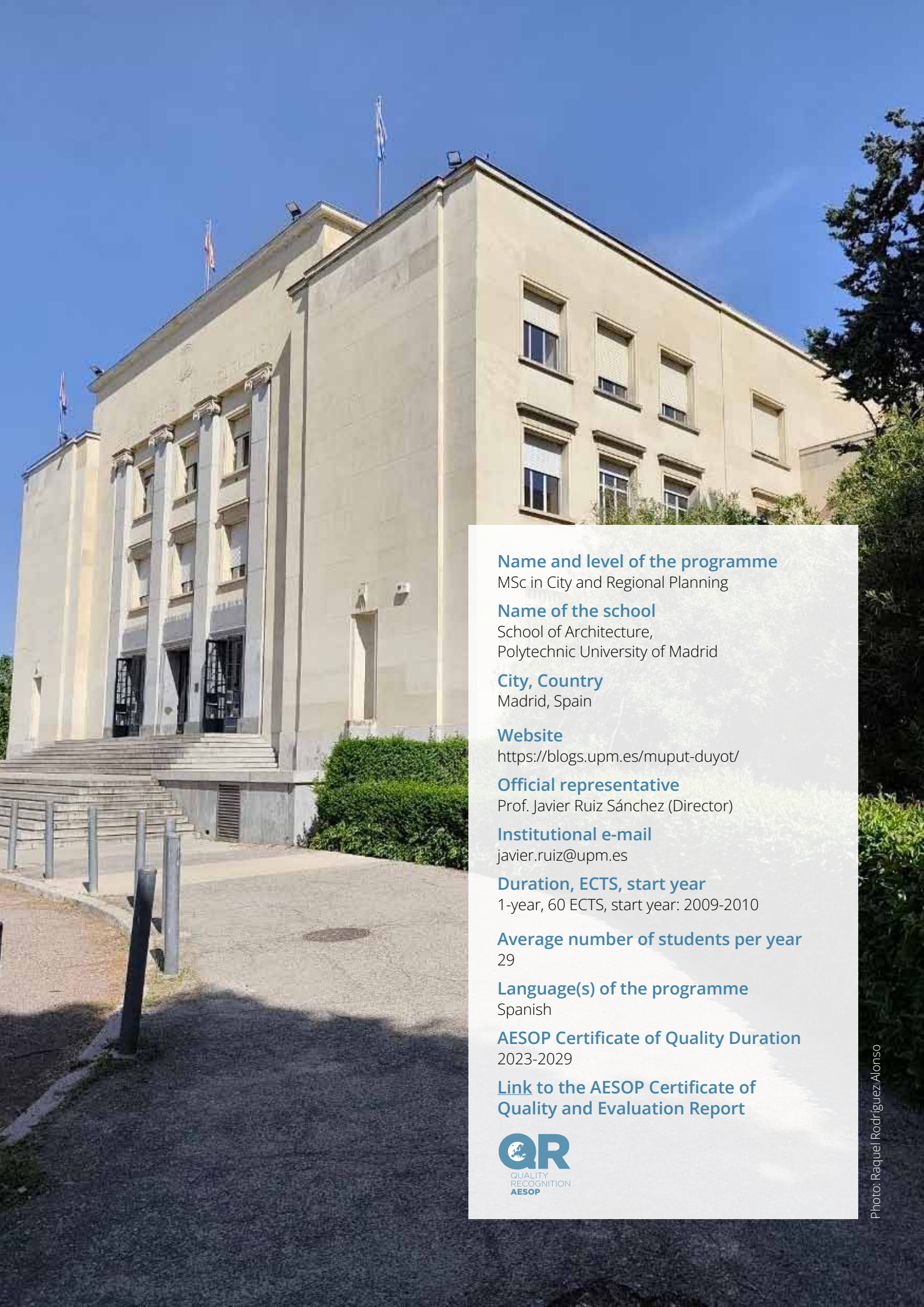
Assistant Professor, Raquel Rodríguez Alonso  
Professor, Álvaro Sevilla Buitrago  
Professor, Ester Higuera  
Professor Javier Ruiz Sánchez

**Reviewer:**

Professor Alenka Fikfak, University of Ljubljana,  
Professor Tijana Dabović, University of Belgrade

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**Name and level of the programme**

MSc in City and Regional Planning

**Name of the school**

School of Architecture,  
Polytechnic University of Madrid

**City, Country**

Madrid, Spain

**Website**

<https://blogs.upm.es/muput-duyot/>

**Official representative**

Prof. Javier Ruiz Sánchez (Director)

**Institutional e-mail**

[javier.ruiz@upm.es](mailto:javier.ruiz@upm.es)

**Duration, ECTS, start year**

1-year, 60 ECTS, start year: 2009-2010

**Average number of students per year**

29

**Language(s) of the programme**

Spanish

**AESOP Certificate of Quality Duration**

2023-2029

**[Link to the AESOP Certificate of Quality and Evaluation Report](#)**



## Programme Highlights



### Purpose

To train students in urban research and professional practice in order to address the challenges of urban and territorial development, sustainability and socio-spatial justice.



### Focus Areas

Urban planning, urban regeneration, climate crisis, social inequality, socio-economic transformations, quality of life, healthy cities, accessibility, equality, human health and urban history.



### Regional & National Context

Alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the New Urban Agenda and the Spanish Urban Agenda.

**Educational orientation:** Our master's programme focuses on urban planning practice and urban studies. It develops professional and research skills for architects with urban design experience, and for engineers, geographers, sociologists and environmental scientists. Students choose between two independent, complementary tracks. The practice-oriented track (Master's in Urban Planning Practice) focuses on sustainable development, urban regeneration and environmental protection across different scales. The research-oriented track (Master of Science) emphasises urban analysis and prepares students for doctoral studies.

**Key planning perspectives, knowledge, skills and attitudes:** The curriculum links local, regional and global processes, examining the economic, environmental, political and social dimensions of urbanisation at multiple scales, including essential global dynamics. Critical reflection is required throughout the course: students critically engage with advanced planning practices and theories, with attention to social impacts and the outcomes of planning decisions. Interdisciplinarity is essential. Students from architecture, engineering, social sciences, environmental sciences and law work mainly in teams, combining their expertise. Most subjects integrate theory and practice, enabling students to apply concepts, strategies and planning tools to specific case studies.

**Key learner-centred pedagogical approaches:** Workshops and studios provide a strong practical component, largely through problem/project-based learning

(PBL) and real-world briefs. Projects address social and spatial challenges. Students visit the study area and work with key local actors (officials, residents, associations and businesses). Collaborating with stakeholders boosts data collection and analysis, and helps share proposals with local authorities and partners.

**Key institutional settings for quality assurance and relevance:** A Quality Committee, with representatives of the faculty, students and ETSAM's Quality Committee, monitors programme delivery and fosters continuous improvement in teaching and organisation. An Advisory Council advises the Master's Commission on philosophy and content, bringing together collaborating organisations and UPM/ETSAM professors. Some faculty members participate in Educational Innovation Groups (GIE) to develop and share new teaching methods.



Photo: Raquel Rodríguez, Alonso

2024–2025 academic year. Exhibition of work produced in collaboration with APS Getafe Urban Laboratory. Plaza de la Unesco, Getafe.



The programme is structured around a coherent combination of compulsory and elective courses that progressively develop both professional and research competences in urban planning and urban studies. The curriculum is divided into successive modules (foundations in urban planning, professional or research specialisation, thematic intensification and the Master's dissertation), ensuring academic progression while allowing flexibility. Core courses establish shared conceptual, methodological and analytical foundations, whereas elective courses enable students to focus on thematic areas such as sustainability, mobility, governance, social equity, historical and theoretical approaches, and global urban challenges.

The programme offers a rich catalogue of elective courses for both areas of specialisation, allowing students to design their path according to their concerns and interests. These include topics such as complexity, gender, health, strategic planning, regeneration, critical-theoretical approaches and the challenges of the Global South. In many courses, assignments allow students to choose their site of intervention or analysis, often linked to their own territorial or professional background. Students work both individually and in groups: group work is emphasised in the first half of the courses, especially for introductory and analytical tasks, while individual work becomes more prominent in later stages and in final assignments. Once the core and elective courses have been completed, students prepare a final master's dis-

sertation, which is always individual and defined according to their personal research interests.

Most courses in the programme include a strong practical component through workshops and studio-based formats. A central pedagogical feature is the systematic use of project-based learning (PBL), where real-world problems are used to support student learning. These learning environments expose students to socio-spatial challenges and require them to produce diagnoses, proposals and research outputs grounded in empirical analysis and theoretical reflection. Studio courses function as applied laboratories in which analytical, critical and interpretive skills are developed through iterative feedback, peer learning and close interaction with teaching staff. The balance between individual and group work reflects both professional planning practice and academic research dynamics.

These projects entail direct engagement with real social and spatial challenges. Students are encouraged not only to visit the areas they work on, but also to establish links with key stakeholders, including local administrations, community groups and economic actors. This interaction fosters collaboration between academia and society, facilitating both data collection and analysis, and enabling the dissemination of results to local authorities and other stakeholders. Project-based and studio-based teaching are therefore central to the programme's instructional model, promoting active knowledge construction rather than passive learning. Continu-

ous feedback supports reflexivity and methodological rigour, while field trips, visiting professors and mobility initiatives broaden learning environments and expose students to diverse planning traditions.

An illustrative example is the 2018-2019 academic year, when Pasaia Bay (north of Spain) was used as a working area due to its complex short- and medium-term challenges. Students, together with teaching staff, visited the area to gain first-hand knowledge of its social, environmental and spatial characteristics. They conducted analyses and diagnoses in close collaboration with professors from different disciplines, addressing real-world problems through both analytical and project-based work. The outputs ranged from sectoral analyses developed in different courses to integrated proposals such as masterplans and research projects, including master's dissertations. Students also presented their proposals in public exhibitions addressed to policymakers, local actors and citizens, creating an open and stimulating forum for discussion.

Strong interaction between students, teaching staff and external stakeholders is a defining feature of the programme. This interaction is institutionalised through studio juries, public presentations, participatory workshops and advisory mechanisms, reinforcing the programme's practice-research orientation. Active and independent learning is promoted through individual assignments, presentations and research tasks, while peer learning is achieved through group work and collective critique. Academic quality is supported by continuous feedback, transparent assessment frameworks and institutional mechanisms that recognise excellence in teaching, research and student achievement.

Most courses combine theoretical and practical approaches, enabling students to apply ideas, concepts and strategies to specific cases. In this context, students are encouraged to reflect on the, often complex, balance between normative planning principles and real-world practice, developing critical awareness of the compromises involved in defining the public interest. The diversity of approaches provides students with a broad toolkit that includes ethical perspectives and social justice criteria, as well as technical instruments such as geographic information systems (GIS), cartographic analysis, and qualitative and quantitative research methods. Critical reflection on planning practices and their social implications is strongly emphasised throughout the programme.

The curriculum also promotes awareness of global change and its implications across spatial scales, encouraging students to situate local and regional issues within broader processes such as climate change, socio-economic transformation and spatial inequality. This perspective is reinforced through case studies, fieldwork, international academic contributions and mobility initiatives, which expose students to diverse planning traditions.

Mandatory courses include introductory subjects dealing with socio-economic and environmental dimensions, as well as research-oriented modules focused on key planning theories and paradigms. Students are trained in a variety of methodologies, including interviews, ethnographic research, discourse analysis, statistics and cartographic techniques, and are encouraged to define research topics for their master's dissertations throughout the programme.

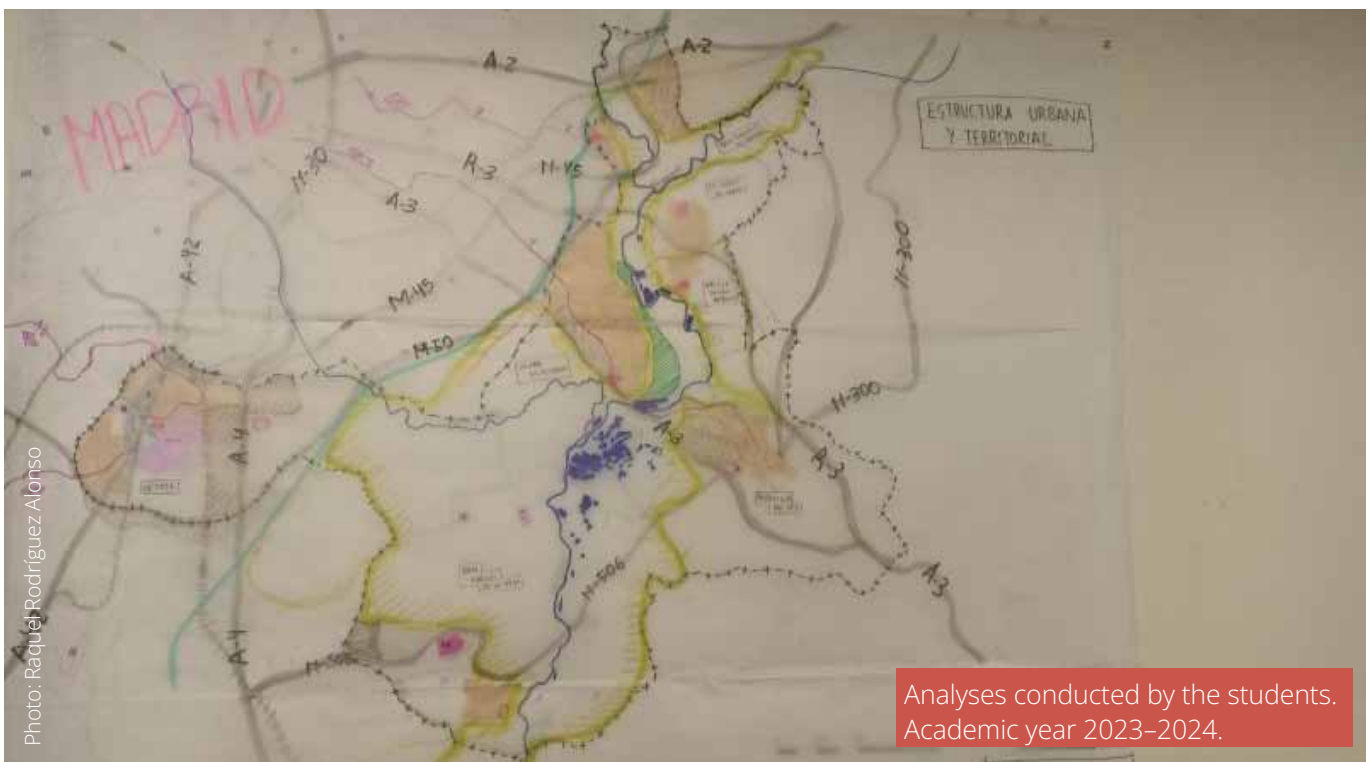


Photo: Raquel Rodríguez Alonso

Analyses conducted by the students.  
Academic year 2023–2024.



Presentation of the progress made by students during the first semester to municipal officials from Madrid City Council. December 2025.

The Quality Recognition process has reinforced internal reflection on curriculum coherence, teaching methods and assessment practices, while highlighting the importance of sustaining studio-based teaching and stakeholder engagement in increasingly complex institutional contexts. Ongoing challenges include balancing depth and diversity of content, adapting pedagogical practices to evolving urban issues, and responding to internationalisation demands while preserving the programme's core identity.

### Most Relevant Quality Recognition Criteria for the Programme's Showcase Practices

Programme distinctiveness / Spatial foci / **Cross-disciplinarity** / **Global context** / **Contemporary socio-spatial challenges and opportunities** / Professional ethics / Research and inquiry / Independent learning and group learning / Practical reasoning and judgement / Reflexive praxis / Student diversity / Recognition and promotion of excellence / **Student/alumni engagement in the development of the programme curriculum**

# MSc in Urban and Regional Planning



Norwegian  
University of  
Life Sciences

Faculty of Landscape and Society,  
Norwegian University of Life Sciences  
(NMBU)

**Authors:**

Professor Jin Xue

**Reviewer:**

Associate Professor Christopher Maidment,  
University of Reading

**Email of the corresponding author**

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### Name and level of the programme

Master in Urban and Regional Planning (BYREG)

### Name of the school

Faculty of Landscape and Society,  
Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU)

### City, Country

Ås, Norway

### Website

<https://www.nmbu.no/studier/master-5-aar/og-regionplanlegging>

### Official representative

Kristine Lien Skog, Head of Department

### Institutional e-mail

kristine.lien.skog@nmbu.no

### Duration, ECTS, start year

Master, 5 years, 300 ECTS, 1968

### Average number of students per year

45

### Language(s) of the programme

Norwegian (primarily), English

### AESOP Certificate of Quality Duration

2023 - 2029

### [Link to the AESOP Certificate of Quality and Evaluation Report](#)



The Tower building

## Programme Highlights



### Purpose

The programme emphasises spatial planning within Norway's landscape, urban and regional contexts, rooted in the Nordic land use planning tradition and international perspectives. The programme equips graduates with interdisciplinary skills for sustainable interaction between society and the environment, integrating key aspects of quality in planning education.



### Focus Areas

Knowledge related to project management, placemaking, local development, comprehensive land use planning and urban, landscape, regional and strategic planning. Procedural and substantive theories and methods in planning. Environmental governance, natural resource management and urban sociology.



### Regional & National Context

The programme is aligned with the Norwegian Planning and Building Act, with expanded perspectives on Nordic and European planning and urban development contexts.

### Key Learner-centred Pedagogical Approaches:

Student-centred and active learning is core to BYREG, which means students' responsibility for their own learning is facilitated and supported by educators. During studio courses, students work, often in groups, in selected areas and regions in Norway with actual and relevant planning issues. Student work is shared with practitioners, and there are established platforms where students' findings are debated. In addition, in the master's dissertation, the students work with a selected area or region in Norway or elsewhere, study planning documents and conduct interviews with, among others, planners, developers and politicians. Expert practitioners are often used as examiners, which provide a good platform for debate and dialogue. These activities make the programme highly relevant to practice.

### Key institutional settings for quality assurance and relevance:

The programme is overseen by the Programme Council (PC), which meets regularly and is responsible for responding to academic and professional challenges raised in the programme. Alongside these tasks, the PC supports the development of new courses and the review of existing courses, as well as periodically revising the programme's overall learning outcomes. The PC is constituted by a chair/leader, two academic staff members, one student and one deputy, appointed via student democracy.

**Educational orientation:** BYREG offers the only five-year master programme in urban and regional planning in Norway. The programme covers a large spectrum of geographies including rural, coastal and marine areas, with a major emphasis on urban areas. The most distinctive aspect of our planning education is how students are trained in interdisciplinary collaboration, especially with landscape architects, land consolidators and real estate developers, in different situations and learning environments throughout their studies. Students acquire competences in analysing issues within different contexts, the links between them and potential conflicts.

**Key Planning Perspectives:** The study programme itself is similarly interdisciplinary, with obligatory courses provided by different departments and schools including planning, property and law, landscape architecture, the school of economics and business, and the faculty of environmental sciences and natural resource management. Wide-ranging courses are offered, ranging from project management and placemaking, to urban morphology, local planning and regional planning. Many courses emphasise the socio-spatial challenges and opportunities at local, regional, and project-site levels, often in direct collaboration with stakeholders, public authorities, landowners and the public in general.



Kassa nova building.

Photo: jin Xue

### APL380:

Environmental Governance for Planning (10 ECTC) is a course for students in Year 5 of the programme. In this course, students gain new knowledge by focusing on environmental governance and its meaning, the radical societal changes (transformations) that are needed and the role (and limits) of the planning profession in contributing to societal transformations. Students acquire knowledge of theoretical perspectives that are being used to predict and explain occurrences of green transformation. The students discuss the relevance of (academic) theory to an applied profession like (environmental) planning. They also explore environmental governance approaches and practices using a number of influential and topical case studies. APL380 primarily addresses three of the Quality Recognition criteria.

### Student Diversity

APL380 is open to several study programmes: planning, landscape architecture, International Environment and Development Studies (Noragric), and Landscape Architecture for Global Sustainability (M-GLA). The audience is interdisciplinary and multicultural, considering the higher presence of international students enrolled in M-GLA and the 2-year master programmes offered by Noragric.

### The Global Context

Through the case studies, the students explore different governance mechanisms, from the traditional national policies to flexible international networks and community-driven initiatives. They also explore how governance can, and has, realigned the relationship between actors and power relations. These subjects are explored by focusing on the following cases:

- Environmental Assessment (known as 'impact assessment' under Norwegian legal terminology). This is a central approach for so-called environmental policy integration in planning that is used the world over.
- Nature conservation in protected areas and in the broader countryside.
- Urban transformations. The majority of the population now lives in urban areas. The course explores the use of urban experiments like a governance intervention, urban living labs and bottom-up initiatives.

### Contemporary socio-spatial challenges and ethics

Students on the course are able to identify the principles of good governance such as participation, efficiency and anticipation. They address the shifting relationship be-



Urbygningen.

Photo: Jim Xue

tween 'public' and 'private' in contemporary planning, the emergence of new constellations of actors and the empowerment and disempowerment of different actors. They can also illustrate conflicts over resource allocation/use or plans for the future.

### Pedagogies used

Among the APL380 assignments, the 'manifestation' exercise and podcasts are examples of innovative learning activities. Students are asked to illustrate aspects of the topics and related concepts through photographs. In the 'manifestation' exercise, students can explain important aspects of environmental governance. The picture used in the 'manifestation' exercise is discussed in groups or among peers. Then, the students are encouraged to post the manifestation on Instagram using the following hashtags: #byreg #nmbu. This is a way to track the posts among APL380 participants and teachers.

The use of the social media aims to:

- connect the APL380 students with experts around the world;
- facilitate communication among classmates;
- offer a platform for sharing ideas.

Students also produce a podcast on an environmental governance issue that is relevant to the work of planning

and planners. The podcasts of a maximum of 10 minutes are produced by interdisciplinary groups of 4-5 students. The podcast can address any topic of the students' choosing providing that it encompasses some form of environmental/sustainability planning problem and has a strong focus on governance. It usually covers a topical issue in Norway (e.g. sustainability in cities, sustainable mobility, climate change, natural conservation and resource use, etc.). It could also address international environmental governance regimes where these have strong links to planning practices (e.g. how to build environmental planning capacity in the Global South for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals / Agenda 2030). Invariably, the generic topic should be adapted to include examples to help ground the podcast.

The group can include, if relevant, short excerpts from interviews with relevant actors (e.g. with actual planners or interest groups). The podcast should be narrated in English so that it is accessible to an international audience. All the podcasts are intended to be made available online for anyone who wants to access them and then publicised after they have been submitted. The podcasts are discussed in the class (through group discussion and peer feedback).

Consequently, students taking the course are able to express themselves through different media outlets. The

learning outcomes of the podcasting assignments are relevant to creativity and collaboration, and provide a sense of community within the course. The students can practice writing and new presentation skills (in addition to the more traditional oral presentations), as well as express their thoughts in spoken form, with the support of music and sound effects (by involving multiple senses).

Finally, students submit an individual, reflective essay of no more than 500 words alongside the podcast. The essay should concisely summarise each student's contribution to producing the podcast and reflect on what lessons they learned about communicating complex planning issues through the exercise. Given the group sizes, all members of the group are expected to make a substantial contribution. The reflections, on the other hand, should address what each student feels he/she has learnt from the exercise about communicating planning issues to an external/lay audience. It is up to the students to decide exactly what they want to focus on in

the reflections. For example, it could address any skills the student thinks they have developed or honed during the exercise; any dimension(s) of producing the podcast that was more difficult than they expected; the challenges experienced in trying to make the subject matter accessible to a broad audience; or the extent to which they feel it is possible to engage people outside the academic community and planning profession on the subject of environmental planning and governance via a podcast.

Future planners should be more aware of both traditional and new tools for communicating the complex planning issues to a highly varied audience of experts and non-experts, who belong to different social and age groups. The combination of these three assignments, in addition to other exercises and group discussions in the class, shows how APL380 is experimenting with new learning activities and encouraging students to use social media and multimedia content, in addition to more traditional written and spoken forms.

### Most Relevant Quality Recognition Criteria for the Programme's Showcase Practices

Programme distinctiveness / Spatial foci / Cross-disciplinarity / **Global context** / **Contemporary socio-spatial challenges and opportunities** / **Professional ethics** / Research and inquiry / Independent learning and group learning / Practical reasoning and judgement / Reflexive praxis / **Student diversity** / Recognition and promotion of excellence / Student/alumni/employer engagement in the development of the programme curriculum

# BSc Programme in Spatial Planning



**Faculty of Geodesy and Cartography**  
Warsaw University of Technology

**Faculty of Geodesy and Cartography,  
Warsaw University of Technology**

**Authors:**

Associate Professor Adrianna Czarnecka  
Associate Professor Wojciech Bartoszczuk  
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Assistant Professor Agnieszka Cieśla  
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**Reviewer:**

Associate Professor Patrick Witte,  
Utrecht University

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### Name and level of the programme

BSc in Spatial Planning

### Name of the school

Faculty of Geodesy and Cartography,  
Department of Spatial Planning and  
Environmental Sciences, Warsaw University  
of Technology,

### City, Country

Warsaw, Poland

### Website

<https://www.gik.pw.edu.pl/zgpinsp>

### Official representative

Professor Janusz Walo, the Dean

### Institutional e-mail

[dziekan.gik@pw.edu.pl](mailto:dziekan.gik@pw.edu.pl)

### Duration, ECTS, start year

7 semesters, 210 ECTS, start year 2005

### Average number of students per year

120

### Language(s) of the programme

Polish

### AESOP Certificate of Quality Duration

2024 - 2030

### Link to the AESOP Certificate of Quality and Evaluation Report



Warsaw University of Technology building.

## Programme Highlights



### Purpose

The programme educates future planners to coordinate sustainable spatial development processes, combining engineering-based analytical approaches with value-oriented planning, aligned with European and international frameworks.



### Focus Areas

It focuses on integrated spatial planning, linking environmental management, urban design and land management with advanced geospatial technologies (GIS, remote sensing, CAD/BIM), and emphasises data-driven, evidence-based decision making supported by interdisciplinary and problem-oriented learning.



### Regional & National Context

The programme is embedded within the Polish planning context, addressing challenges such as post-industrial transformation, spatial conflicts and environmental degradation, while responding to evolving European policy frameworks and labour market demands for technically skilled planners.

**Educational orientation:** The BSc in Spatial Planning at Warsaw University of Technology (Faculty of Geodesy and Cartography) is a seven-semester engineering programme focused on integrated spatial planning for sustainable development, aligned with the Charter of European Planning (2013), EU environmental policy, and relevant international frameworks. The programme is contextualised in Polish planning practice, with emphasis on contemporary environmental challenges, including post-industrial and degraded areas. Planning is understood as a coordinated and negotiated process shaped by legal, institutional, cultural and environmental conditions, combining technical and value-based dimensions.

**Key planning perspectives, knowledge, skills and attitudes:** The curriculum combines core and elective courses structured around planning fundamentals, conditions, processes and specialisations. It integrates environmental, socio-cultural, design and land management perspectives, supported by advanced geospatial competencies (GIS, remote sensing, CAD, BIM, VR/AR). Students may choose between two specialisations: Environmental conditions of spatial planning, addressing environmental, social and economic dimensions with decision-support tools; and Urban design in spatial plan-

ning, focused on planning instruments, urban form and implementation.

The programme provides interdisciplinary knowledge in environmental sciences, planning theory, spatial design, land management and geospatial technologies, grounded in both Polish and European contexts. It develops strong analytical and engineering skills applied in planning studios and project-based courses, including spatial analysis, evaluation of alternatives and evidence-based decision making, alongside communication, teamwork and negotiation competences.

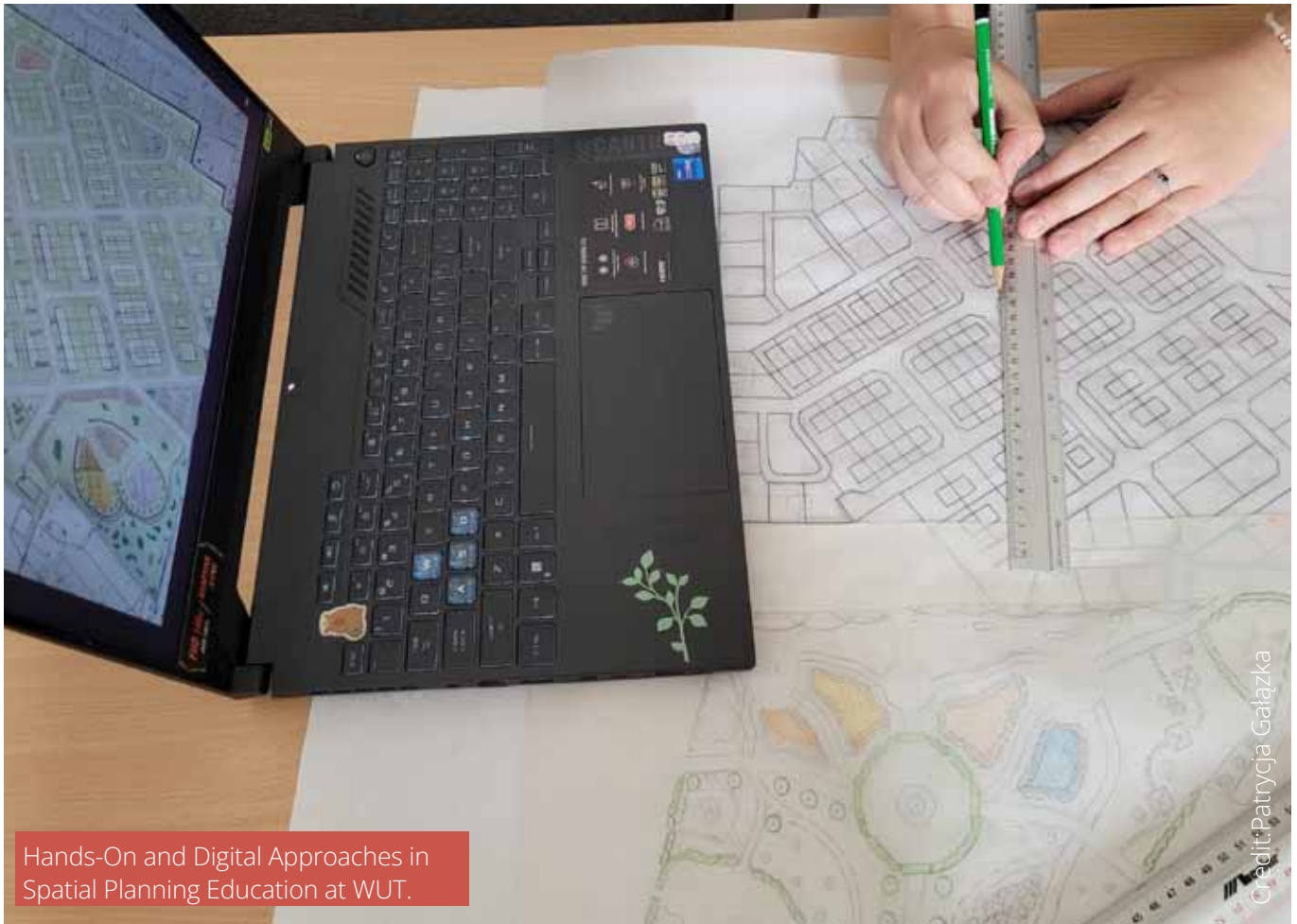
### Key learner-centred pedagogical approaches:

Learner-centred approaches include problem- and inquiry-based learning, studio- and project-based learning, Design Thinking and collaboration with external stakeholders. Experiential learning is supported through real-world projects, case-based learning, interdisciplinary teamwork and reflective practices enhancing critical thinking and professional responsibility.

Key institutional settings for quality assurance and relevance: The programme is continuously developed in cooperation with stakeholders, including employers, public authorities, NGOs and students. External practitioners contribute to teaching, and curricula are regularly updated in response to evolving policy frameworks and labour market needs, supported by institutional quality assurance mechanisms.



Revitalisation project workshop in action. Learning environment in class.



Hands-On and Digital Approaches in Spatial Planning Education at WUT.

### 01: International and Interdisciplinary Co-Creation Workshop in a Virtual Reality Environment

The workshop was initially developed within the Revitalisation Project course and organised as part of a didactic innovation grant under the WUT Excellence Initiative. It constituted one of the pilot implementations of the GeoSpatial Virtual Reality & Planning AR Laboratory, testing immersive technologies as an advanced learning environment for spatial planning education. Spatial Planning students collaborated with landscape architecture students from the American University of Beirut, Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences, Department of Landscape Design and Ecosystem Management, meeting synchronously in a shared VR space to discuss and co-create redevelopment scenarios for a post-industrial urban area.

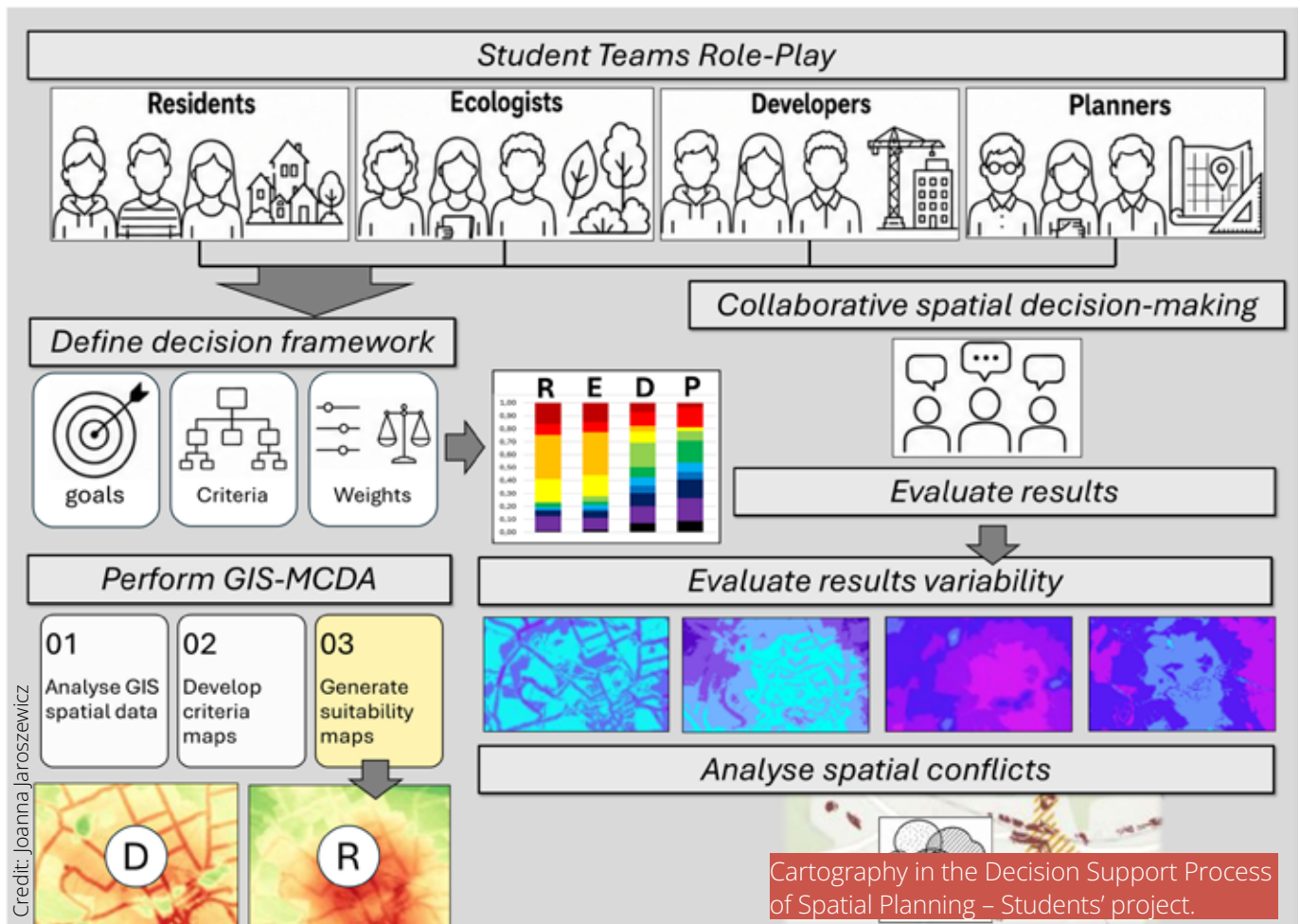
The pedagogical approach was based on co-creation, experiential learning and studio-based collaboration. Students explored the project site in immersive AR, allowing them to assess spatial relationships, scale, accessibility and environmental qualities from a human perspective. The ability to manipulate spatial models in real time supported iterative design thinking, collective problem solving and immediate peer feedback. International and interdisciplinary teamwork required students to negoti-

ate design priorities, integrate different disciplinary logics and communicate spatial ideas across cultural and educational contexts.

The workshop content focused on: revitalisation of post-industrial landscapes, integration of ecological and social considerations into redevelopment strategies, public space quality and inclusivity, and experiential evaluation of spatial interventions at human scale.

Student work took the form of collaboratively developed spatial concepts tested and refined in AR, accompanied by reflective discussions on design decisions, trade-offs and interdisciplinary cooperation. The immersive environment enhanced spatial cognition and supported informed design decision making beyond what is typically achievable through two-dimensional representations alone.

An evaluation of the pilot revealed that the most effective and pedagogically robust use of VR technology occurs when immersive methods are offered as a dedicated learning format, allowing sufficient time for skill development, experimentation and reflection. The VR-based learning environment enables students to conduct research, expanding traditional studio settings through immersive, interactive and collaborative spatial exploration. Independent and group learning are enabled through a strong emphasis on student responsi-



bility, self-organisation and group learning in international teams, while cross-disciplinarity and student diversity criteria are supported by the inclusion of diverse disciplinary backgrounds, cultural perspectives and learning styles, with VR acting as an inclusive medium for spatial communication.

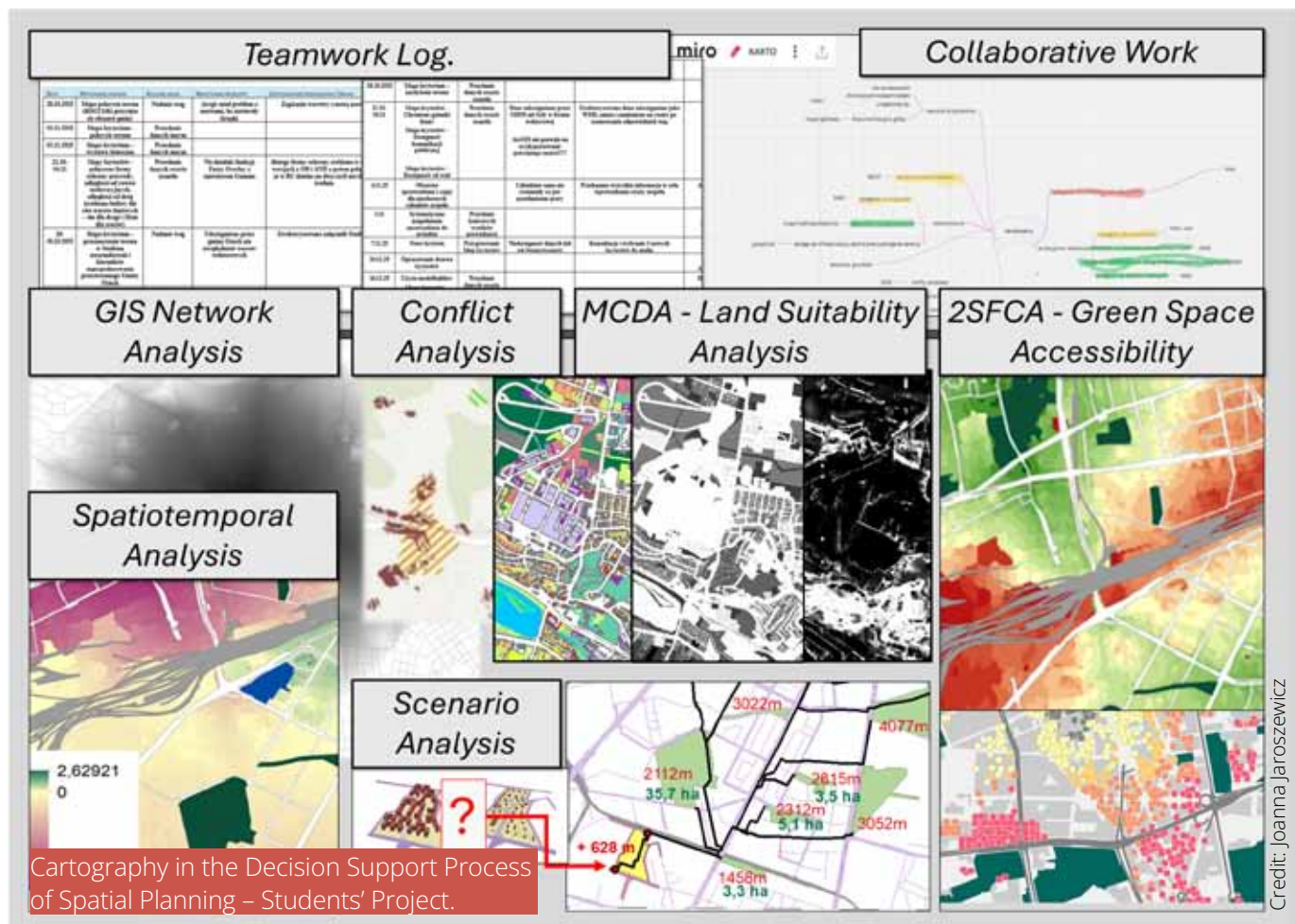
In parallel, selected elements of this innovation continue to enrich compulsory courses. Notably, the Public Realm Design course, where immersive simulations are used to project the perspective of blind and visually impaired users. This application strengthens students' understanding of accessibility and supports the promotion of universal design principles.

This best practice demonstrates how immersive VR environments can be sustainably integrated into spatial planning education, supporting internationalisation, interdisciplinarity, inclusive design thinking and innovative teaching and learning environments, in line with AESOP Quality Recognition principles.

## 02: Cartography in the Decision Support Process of Spatial Planning (7th semester):

As highlighted by the assessors, this course represents a mature integration of GIS, spatial analysis and behavioural decision theory, making excellent use of GIS expertise by training students in data-driven and digitally supported decision-making processes. The course offers opportunities for developing technical knowledge and skills related to complex spatial analysis which are subsequently used as a basis for role-playing while exploring solution scenarios using design heuristic optimisation tools and consensus building methods at different scales.

It introduces advanced multi-objective spatial optimisation for group decision making using cooperative and consensus-based approaches, as well as advanced spatial analysis methods such as accessibility analyses based on the 2SFCA approach. In Project 1, students apply advanced accessibility analysis methods based on the latest scientific research, critically evaluating how changes in demand, supply and spatial connections affect public service provision. In Project 2, students work in small teams that role-play stakeholders with conflicting land-use objectives in spatial planning. Through group-based multi-criteria analyses, they negotiate priorities



Credit: Joanna Jaroszewicz

and reach consensuses, producing a suitability map and designing a simple heuristic algorithm to identify spatial conflicts.

The course addresses how accessibility, land-use decisions and spatial connections vary across territorial levels. By confronting students with spatial conflicts and competing land-use objectives through role-playing, group-based multi-criteria analyses, and consensus building, the course develops competences for collaborative decision making in planning. Research and inquiry are embedded through the critical assessment of methodological choices in scientific literature.

This course builds on competences developed earlier in the curriculum. Fundamentals of Cartography (2nd se-

mester) introduces cartographic communication, spatial reference systems and the integration of diverse data through blended and inquiry-based learning. Through peer review, discussion of anonymised student work and reflection on map design, students learn to communicate spatial information across scales and contexts. Geographic Information Systems (5th semester) extends this basis through project-based learning, teamwork and the full GIS project cycle, from data acquisition to spatial analysis and digital communication, while fostering reflection on data quality and methodological limits. Taken together, these courses form a progressively structured pathway from cartographic literacy, through applied GIS analysis, to advanced, consensus-based and decision-support planning practice.

## Most Relevant Quality Recognition Criteria for the Programme's Showcase Practices

Programme distinctiveness / **Spatial foci** / Cross-disciplinarity / **Global context** / **Contemporary socio-spatial challenges and opportunities** / Professional ethics / **Research and inquiry** / **Independent learning and group learning** / Practical reasoning and judgement / Reflexive praxis / **Student diversity** / Recognition and promotion of excellence / Student/alumni/employer engagement in the development of the programme curriculum

# MSc Programme in Urban Planning and Management



Faculty of Planning, Environment and  
Urban Management, Polis University

**Authors:**

Dr Doriana Musaj  
Professor Besnik Aliaj  
Associate Professor Sotir Dharmo  
PhD student Armela Reka

**Reviewer:**

Professor Alenka Fikfak,  
University of Ljubljana

**Email of the corresponding author**

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### **Name and level of the programme**

Integrated MSc in Planning and Urban Management

### **Name of the school**

Faculty of Planning, Environment and Urban Management, POLIS University

### **City, Country**

Tirana, Albania

### **Website**

<https://universitetipolis.edu.al>

### **Official representative**

Prof. Besnik Aliaj

### **Institutional e-mail**

[besnik.aliaj@universitetipolis.edu.al](mailto:besnik.aliaj@universitetipolis.edu.al)

### **Duration, ECTS, start year**

5-years, 300 ECTS, 2007

### **Average number of students per year**

20

### **Language(s) of the programme**

Albanian (selected courses, workshops, and lectures in English)

### **AESOP Certificate of Quality Duration**

2024-2030

### **Link to the AESOP Certificate of Quality and Evaluation Report**



## Programme Highlights



### Purpose

The programme trains urban planning professionals to address complex spatial challenges through integrative, ethical and public-interest approaches.



### Focus Areas

It focuses on spatial planning, urban design, EU territorial policies, housing, mobility and resilience, combining studio-based learning, research and real-life projects.



### Regional & National Context

It prepares students to operate in dynamic, multi-scalar governance systems, in line with EU planning standards.

**Educational orientation:** The Integrated MSc in Urban Planning and Management at POLIS University is unique within the Albanian and Western Balkan higher education context, as it is the only comprehensive five-year integrated planning programme in Albania. The curriculum is aligned with the AESOP Core Curriculum and European planning education standards, while remaining grounded in the spatial, institutional and socio-economic realities of Albania and the Western Balkans, particularly within the context of post-socialist urban transformation, rapid urbanisation and evolving territorial governance systems.

**Key planning perspectives, knowledge, skills and attitudes:** The programme combines spatial and environmental planning, urban and landscape design, territorial governance, housing, mobility, environmental management and EU territorial policies. Through studios, theoretical modules and applied tasks, it develops competences in spatial analysis, planning instruments, participatory processes, negotiation and strategic territorial development.

Planning is approached as a public interest profession, emphasising ethical responsibility, critical thinking and a multi-scalar understanding of territorial development.

**Key learner-centred pedagogical approaches:** Learner-centred pedagogies, including studio-based learning, problem-based approaches, fieldwork, interdisciplinary collaboration, internships and engagement with real planning processes, are embedded through-

out the programme. Students are encouraged to define problems, test alternatives and justify planning decisions through iterative feedback, public reviews and research-based learning, while integrating analytical, research and design-oriented approaches. The modules are structured to support both individual and collaborative learning, maintaining a balance between independent work and teamwork. During the five years of study, students develop knowledge in urban planning, urban design, environment and urban management, with a strong emphasis on collaborative and interdisciplinary group work.

**Key institutional settings for quality assurance and relevance:** The programme's relevance is reinforced by collaborations with public institutions, civic and professional organisations, research centres and international academic networks, including AESOP, ISO-CARP, OMB-UNECE-UfM and European partner universities. These collaborations strengthen the relationship between education, research and professional practice, while positioning Albania and Tirana as living laboratories for understanding contemporary urban and territorial transformations. (See: [OMB Polis Press](#)).





### 1. Real-life planning studios embedded in governance

The Urban Planning Studio functions as a real planning laboratory in which students engage directly with live territorial challenges developed in collaboration with regional institutions and local stakeholders. Students participate in the full planning process, including spatial analysis, stakeholder engagement, scenario building and preparing planning proposals across different territorial scales. The studio structure encourages students to move between regional, municipal, neighbourhood and site-specific dimensions, while connecting analytical, strategic, and design-oriented thinking.

The studio establishes recurring collaborations with municipalities, public agencies, professionals and local communities directly embedded into coursework and studio activities, enabling students to confront real political, social, environmental and governance constraints while testing alternative development scenarios. The pedagogical methodology combines field visits, territorial analysis, speculative visioning, risk assessment and bottom-up planning approaches focused on resilience, regeneration and local development strategies.

Learning is structured through iterative pin-ups, workshops and public presentations held in open auditoriums, creating a feedback-rich environment that supports critical reflection and the progressive refinement of proposals. Students develop professional judgement,

negotiation skills, ethical awareness and interdisciplinary collaboration skills through direct engagement with contested planning situations and institutional actors. Outputs include territorial analyses, strategic visions, urban design proposals, public exhibitions, visual portfolios and alternative communication formats developed through collaborative studio work.





## 2. Game-based learning and scenario building for strategic planning

Relevant QR criteria: Cross-disciplinarity; Practical reasoning and judgement; Independent/group learning

The integration of game-based learning and scenario-building methodologies constitutes a distinctive pedagogical approach within the programme, positioning students within structured planning environments shaped by uncertainty, competing interests and institutional constraints. Drawing on principles of role play, simulation and game theory, these exercises require students to assume the roles of planners, public authorities, private developers, community representatives and environmental actors, negotiating planning outcomes within complex governance frameworks.

Students gain insights into power relations, behavioural dynamics and negotiation processes that shape real-world planning decisions. The approach enables the exploration of formal and informal planning practices, which are particularly relevant within contexts marked by political influence, rapid territorial transformation and uneven institutional capacity. Working in interdisciplinary teams, students engage in both individual and collective decision making, developing strategies, testing alternatives and critically reflecting on outcomes. Structured debriefing sessions play a central role in consolidating learning, transforming simulation-based experiences into reflexive knowledge and strengthening capacities

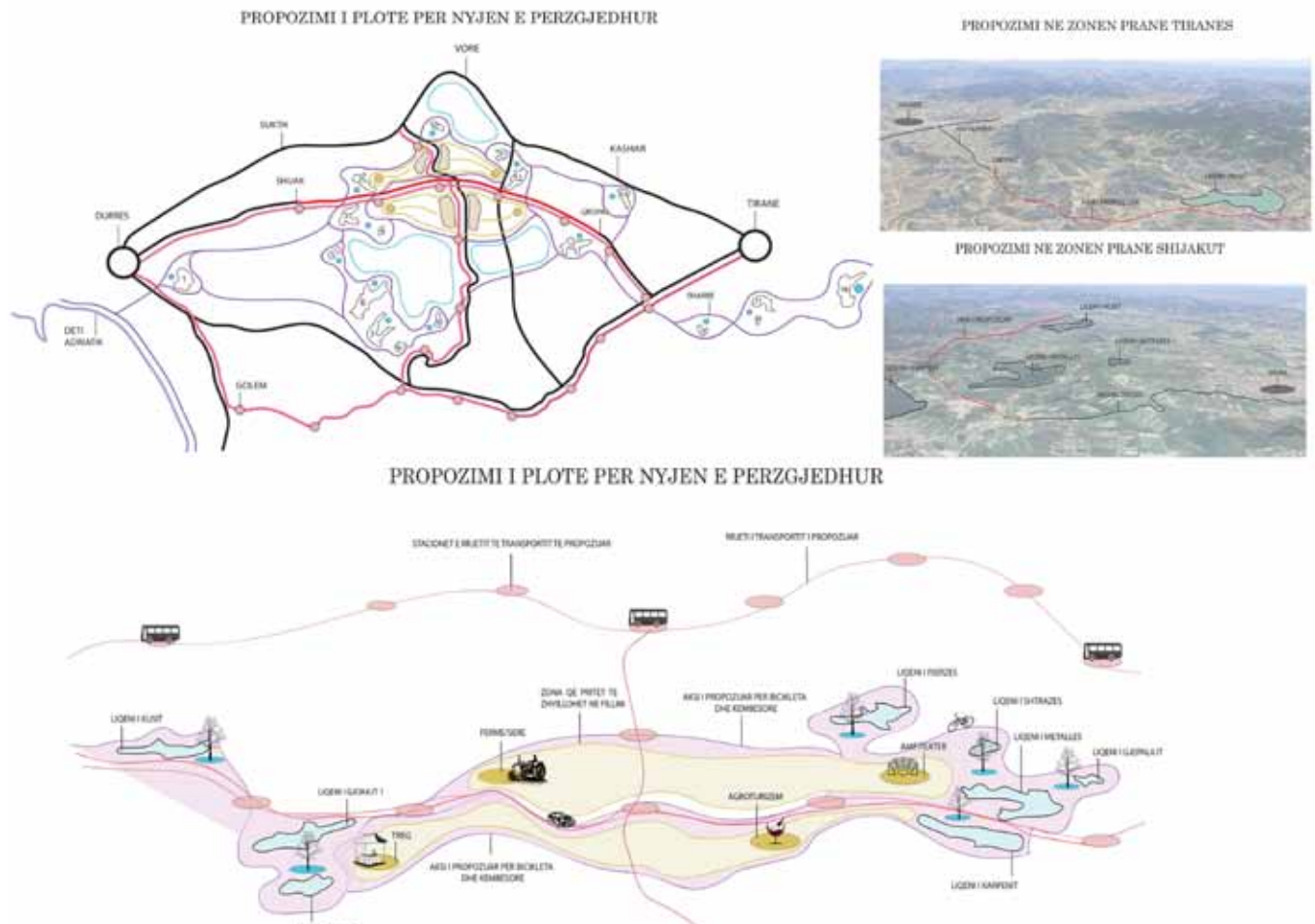
for strategic thinking, ethical awareness, negotiation and collaborative problem solving. These exercises are implemented through workshops, studio modules and intensive collaborative sessions structured around real or simulated territorial conflicts.

## 3. Integration of research-based learning and international engagement

Relevant QR criteria: Research and inquiry; Global context; Cross-disciplinarity

The systematic integration of research-based learning and international engagement constitutes a core pedagogical practice within the programme, where research is approached as an integral component of planning education. Students engage in inquiry-driven learning processes connecting critical thinking, methodological rigour and applied planning practice. Research is embedded throughout the curriculum and culminates in the Final Planning Studio and Master's dissertation, where students formulate research questions related to contemporary socio-spatial challenges and turn findings into spatial strategies and planning proposals. Students are trained in research design, literature review, data collection, territorial analysis and evidence-informed planning.

Students further participate in applied projects through interdisciplinary and practice-oriented units affiliated with the university, including Co-Plan, Metropolis or Tirana-Inc, engaging with external stakeholders on issues



related to housing, territorial governance, environmental sustainability, mobility and regional development. Such experiences position students within real research and planning processes, while fostering collaborative forms of knowledge production.

The international dimension of the practice is reinforced through workshops, open lectures, joint studios and mobility initiatives exposing students to European and international planning debates. Their participation in Erasmus+ and the Bauhaus4EU Alliance supports transnational learning and comparative perspectives. This approach cultivates graduates capable of combining local sensitivities with global awareness, while addressing complex planning challenges across diverse territorial contexts. Research outputs include territorial analyses, planning proposals, conference presentations, public

exhibitions and thesis projects addressing socio-spatial challenges in Albania and the Western Balkans.

## Reflections

The practices showcased in this catalogue entry demonstrate how learner- and practice-oriented, ethically grounded planning education can be sustained within a post-socialist transition context marked by rapid urban transformation, institutional uncertainty and evolving governance systems. The AESOP Quality Recognition process provided an important opportunity for institutional self-reflection and the consolidation of long-term pedagogical approaches linking research, practice and interdisciplinary learning. While rooted in the Albanian and Western Balkan context, these practices offer transferable insights for similarly complex planning environments.

### Most Relevant Quality Recognition Criteria for the Programme's Showcase Practices

Programme distinctiveness / Spatial foci / **Cross-disciplinarity** / **Global context** / Contemporary socio-spatial challenges and opportunities / **Professional ethics** / Research and inquiry / **Independent learning and group learning** / **Practical reasoning and judgement** / Reflexive praxis / Student diversity / Recognition and promotion of excellence / Student/alumni/employer engagement in the development of the programme curriculum

# MSc Programme in Urban and Regional Planning



Polytechnic University of Turin

**Authors:**

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Associate Professor Luca Staricco

**Reviewer:**

Professor Mina Di Marino,  
Norwegian University of Life Sciences

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## Name and level of the programme

MSc in Urban and Regional Planning

## Name of the school

Polytechnic University of Turin

## City, Country

Turin, Italy

## Website

<https://www.polito.it/en/education/master-s-degree-programmes/urban-and-regional-planning>

## Official representative

Professor Luca Staricco,  
Head of the School of Planning and Design

## Institutional e-mail

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## Duration, ECTS, start year

2 years, 120 ECTS, active more than 20 years

## Average number of students per year

70

## Language(s) of the programme

2 full curricula, one taught in Italian, one in English

## AESOP Certificate of Quality Duration

2024-2030

## Link to the AESOP Certificate of Quality and Evaluation Report



School of Planning and Design, Valentino Castle, DIST, Polytechnic University of Turin.

## Programme Highlights



### Purpose

The curriculum offers two tracks and fosters an integrated approach to development and justice, emphasising social inclusion.



### Focus Areas

The programme provides a highly interdisciplinary curriculum that includes technical training in GIS and spatial planning, multidisciplinary studios, and collaboration with local stakeholders.



### Regional & National Context

An advisory board of public authorities and enterprises supports the programme, ensuring graduates are equipped for diverse planning roles and are responsive to local and national sector needs.

**Educational orientation:** The MSc in Urban and Regional Planning delivered at the Politecnico di Torino (PoliTO) university stands out for its two tracks: Pianificare la città e il territorio per la transizione ecologica (PCT) - Urban and Regional Planning for Ecological Transition – and Planning for the Global Urban Agenda (PGUA); which are taught in Italian and English, respectively. The PCT track focuses on training professionals who mainly operate within the Italian regulatory framework and are aware of international changes and policies. The PGUA focuses on training practitioners to operate within the world planning market by focusing on current global challenges identified by the UN 2030 Agenda.

**Key planning perspectives, knowledge, skills and attitudes:** Within the Italian panorama of planning schools, PoliTO stands out for its high degree of interdisciplinarity (taught by experts of several disciplines, with studios organised by multi-disciplinary modules). In particular, the two tracks are characterised by intensive training in the use of GIS, including specific courses on transportation systems and mobility, and a focus on geography for interpreting socio-spatial phenomena. In both the PCT and PGUA track, students are trained to become experts capable of tackling complex urban and territorial issues from a global perspective concerning environmental sustainability, climate change, social and economic justice, global economy and resilience. These major global issues are addressed adopting an integrated approach to development, social inclusion, the right to the city, ecological and energy problems linked to cli-

mate change, and soil protection. All this contributes to constructing a highly distinctive programme in terms of content and the profile of the professionals trained.

**Key learner-centred pedagogical approaches:** Students learn how to develop planning tools at different scales (from local to regional) in urban, spatial and strategic planning. The multidisciplinary studios focus on drafting planning tools at different scales, with a 'learning by doing' approach.

**Key institutional settings for quality assurance and relevance:** The programme has been designed in close contact with local stakeholders with an inter-scalar and multi-area perspective. An advisory board of organisations representing stakeholders such as public authorities, enterprises and professionals ('Club of Institutions, Enterprises and Organizations', established in 2001) supports the programme's design and update. The Executive Board of the programme collects feedback from several points of view: students and their representatives, the organisations hosting trainees and the Committee for Quality Assurance.



Opening of student exhibition at Valentino Castle. Photos taken during a study trip.

Photo: Lorenzo Attardo



Regional scale student project. Outcome of the studio titled 'Progettare con le Nature-Based Solutions' (Design with NBS).

## Recognised forms of pedagogy:

**'Learning by doing'** is predominant in the programme. Students are exposed to ethical dilemmas in near real-life contexts. There is also a strong emphasis on independent and group learning, and on reflexive praxis in their pedagogical practices. The programme's pedagogical environment is based on using different methods to engage students and create a dialogical layer between teaching and research. In both the studios and the more theoretical courses, students are called upon to interact during lectures and to reflect critically on issues. This is facilitated by targeted exercises, assigned by professors, and periodic classroom debates.

**Learning from, and with, diversity fosters group learning among students.** Students are also encouraged to explore research and inquiry, taking advantage of their background and cross-disciplinarity. Diversity, in its different aspects, is a broadly considered topic within the programme to convey its valuable contribution to disseminating values based on inclusion and a sense of community among all students. Reciprocal learning processes with different subject backgrounds and interests are further encouraged through innovative teaching methods, workshops and living labs. In teamwork, mixing students from different backgrounds and nationalities is always highly encouraged.

**Cross-disciplinarity.** Students practice integrating multiple disciplinary perspectives and group work, as happens in professional activities. Specifically, our studios are based on a real case study and try to integrate non-academic stakeholders in the process of knowledge production to define planning and design solutions at various scales and to transfer knowledge to practitioners (in particular to public administrations). From problem setting to their solutions, all the disciplines are involved in integrated courses and studios in both tracks (PCT and PGUA), making the outcome holistic. However, each discipline has full control over the relevant methodology in terms of adequacy and correctness.

## Showcase Practices related to these pedagogies:

**The spatial foci of the MSc also emerge strongly in the various 'out-of-classroom' activities** that the students can experience, such as study trips and the department's action-research laboratories, as in the case of AuroraLAB. This action-research lab, located in a marginalised neighbourhood of Turin, allows students to operate in a multi-problematic and multi-diverse environment, which is also achieved by experimenting with 'service-learning' approaches with school children and local communities in fragile neighbourhoods.



Group work between planning students and primary school children, part of AuroraLAB activities in the library of Parini Primary School, Aurora neighbourhood (Turin).

Photo: Cristiana Rossignolo



Student presentation of the studio titled 'Pianificare il paesaggio e l'ambiente' (Landscape and Environment Planning) to local stakeholders at the Gesso and Stura River Park.

Photo: Claudia Cassatella

In the last two academic years, the MSc was involved in a process of knowledge and design co-production with the Turin City Council called **ScenarioTorino**. During the development of a new masterplan, the city reached out to PoliTO planning and architecture students to experiment and design some areas for future urban developments. Students had the chance to address real case studies as testbeds, facing the requests of the public authority. Their projects were presented twice a year to the city's Deputy for Planning,

and in a temporary exhibition every year at the local urban centre.

**The Planning for Environment and Landscape Protection course introduces the 'landscape approach' to nature conservation** (the nature-culture nexus), illustrating planning tools, raising awareness of cultural bias related to environmental policies, and encouraging a critical approach to real-world technologies. The proposed exercises include measuring and interpreting environmental indicators in a local case study.

In the **'Progettare con le Nature-Based Solutions' (Design with NBS) studio**, there are two simultaneous student groups of 'Urban and Regional Planning for ecological transition' (in Italian) and of 'Landscape architecture' working together to develop a joint project and solutions from the territorial/regional scale to the more detailed ecological actions and NBS.

**The dimension of reflexive praxis is particularly relevant in both studios and theoretical courses.** In the **'Pianificare la Città' (Urban Planning) studio (PCT track)**, in which students implement a structural change (variante) to an Italian city masterplan, discussing the main challenges (environmental, spatial justice, economic development, etc.). This studio and the urban design studio (in PGUA) are the testbeds where students face real case studies, combining requests from public administrations, criteria of planning tools and social demand. These courses teach students to achieve high levels of knowledge and integrity, and lay the foundation for students to be planners and active participants in serving the public interest.

**Peer review and public defence** (facing the class and, often, external stakeholders) train students to communicate. This method is shared by all the studios and courses. Within the courses titled **'Geografia Urbana e Territoriale' (Urban and Territorial Geography); Global Urban Geographies; 'Inclusione Sociale e Partecipazione nelle Politiche Urbane' (Social Inclusion and Participation in Urban Policies)**, and **Methodologies for Social Inclusion and Participation**, social justice issues are addressed theoretically, which are applied experientially within the studios of **'Pianificare la città' (Urban Planning) and Urban Design.**

### Students' notes

This program greatly expanded my understanding of the world, the European Union and different countries. I had work experience in my country, which was much more focused on design. This Master's program really helped me to immerse myself more in urban planning and in the topic of sustainable development.

The programme provides a solid interdisciplinary foundation, combining urban design, environmental planning, policy and GIS skills. Practical workshops and case studies enhance real-world understanding. Professors are knowledgeable and supportive, and the curriculum encourages critical thinking about sustainable urban development.

### Most Relevant Quality Recognition Criteria for the Programme's Showcase Practices

Programme distinctiveness / **Spatial foci** / **Cross-disciplinarity** / Global context / **Contemporary socio-spatial challenges and opportunities** / Professional ethics / Research and inquiry / Independent learning and group learning / **Practical reasoning and judgement** / **Reflexive praxis** / Student diversity / Recognition and promotion of excellence / Student/alumni/employer engagement in the development of the programme curriculum

# MSc Programme in Spatial Planning



**Faculty of Geodesy and Cartography**  
Warsaw University of Technology

**Faculty of Geodesy and Cartography,  
Warsaw University of Technology**

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### Name and level of the programme

MSc in Spatial Planning

### Name of the school

Faculty of Geodesy and Cartography,  
Department of Spatial Planning and  
Environmental Sciences, Warsaw University  
of Technology

### City, Country

Warsaw, Poland

### Website

<https://www.gik.pw.edu.pl/zgpinsp>

### Official representative

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### Duration, ECTS, start year

3 semesters, 90 ECTS, start year: 2009

### Average number of students per year

60

### Language(s) of the programme

Polish and English

### AESOP Certificate of Quality Duration

2024 – 2030

### [Link to the AESOP Certificate of Quality and Evaluation Report](#)



Warsaw University of Technology building.

## Programme Highlights



### Purpose

The programme educates future spatial planners with advanced competences, enabling them to address complex territorial challenges through integrated spatial planning approaches that are evidence-based and public-interest-oriented. These skills are a combination of multi-scalar analytical, design and strategic competences.



### Focus Areas

Environmental planning, urban design, land management and revitalisation, backed by advanced geospatial technologies (GIS, remote sensing, spatial modelling, VR/AR) and interdisciplinary, studio- and project-based learning.



### Regional & National Context

The programme is embedded in the Polish planning context, responding to challenges such as post-industrial transformation, suburbanisation, climate change and housing shortages, while aligning the Polish situation with European policy frameworks and global sustainability agendas.



Photo: Adrianna Czarnecka

**Educational orientation:** The MSc in Spatial Planning at Warsaw University of Technology is a distinctive programme in Poland due to its placement within the Faculty of Geodesy and Cartography, which underpins its strong integration of geospatial technologies with environmental planning, urban design, land management and revitalisation. The curriculum aligns with Polish planning reforms, European policy frameworks and global sustainability agendas, addressing challenges such as post-industrial transformation, climate change, biodiversity loss, suburbanisation and housing shortages. The programme is structured around two main tracks (Environmental Conditions of Spatial Planning and Urban Design in Spatial Planning), complemented by the English-taught specialisation 'Smart Environmental Planning and Design'. Together, they combine shared core modules with specialised content, integrating sustainability, digitalisation and strategic planning.

**Key planning perspectives, knowledge, skills and attitudes:** A strong emphasis is placed on advanced analytical tools, including GIS, remote sensing, spatial modelling and emerging technologies such as VR/AR. Planning is approached as a public-interest activity operating across multiple territorial scales and shaped by legal, institutional, environmental and socio-economic contexts. The programme provides comprehensive

knowledge of planning systems, environmental processes, spatial economics and governance, while fostering analytical, design and research skills through project-based and studio-oriented learning. Students engage with real-world problems, collaborate with stakeholders and develop evidence-based and reflective decision-making capacities.

**Key learner-centred pedagogical approaches:** Learner-centred pedagogies are essential, including problem-based learning, experiential projects and interdisciplinary teamwork. Courses frequently involve collaboration with public authorities and external partners, enhancing professional relevance and practical competence. The programme also promotes critical reflection, communication skills and ethical awareness, particularly in relation to social and environmental justice.

**Key institutional settings enabling its continuing relevance:** Institutional support ensures continuous relevance and quality through structured governance, including curriculum committees with student participation and advisory bodies involving employers. Strong links with practice, combined with incentives for teaching excellence, uphold a high-quality learning environment aligned with evolving professional and societal needs.

Student-developed spatial strategies for urban ecosystem restoration.



Photo: KFF Focus

### **01: International Student Competition as an Integrative Pedagogical Framework** Temporal scope: 2022 (Emilia-Romagna Region, Italy), 2024 (Budapest Metropolitan Area, Hungary), 2025 (Guimarães, Portugal)

This best practice concerns the integration of students' participation in the ECLAS International Student Competition into the curriculum of the Threats and Protection of Urban Ecosystems course. The competition serves as a core pedagogical framework, shaping learning objectives, teaching methods and assessment. Students work in teams of around eight, developing competition entries in response to briefs focused on urban ecosystems, landscape resilience and climate-related threats. The competition provides a realistic professional context that integrates ecological knowledge, spatial analysis, planning instruments and design communication. A key development in the 2024 edition was the introduction of an international collaboration with landscape architecture students from the American University of Beirut, strengthening the global and intercultural dimension of the course.

The practice combines problem- and project-based learning, studio-based learning with iterative critiques, and international and intercultural collaboration, complemented by research-informed, practice-oriented work. Course content addresses ecosystem threats, climate change adaptation, nature-based solutions and multi-scalar spatial governance. Student outputs include

multi-scalar spatial analyses, strategic maps, integrated spatial and landscape proposals, and professionally structured competition panels, supporting visual elements and high-quality visual communication.

The course addresses and reflects a range of important qualities for planning programmes. Students engage with spatial foci, with clearly defined territorial contexts and relationships between spatial scales, visualised through mapping, GIS-based analysis and spatial design. The international competition framework exposes students to global environmental challenges, further strengthened by the non-European collaboration introduced in 2024, clearly addressing the global context. Students take responsibility for teamwork organisation, role definition and deadline management. Independent learning is fostered through self-directed research, while group learning is reinforced through collaboration and peer reflection.

Reflections on Recognised Quality: The AESOP Quality Recognition process highlighted the value of international competitions as a stable, repeatable pedagogical framework. Sustained participation supports continuous curricular learning and responds to growing demands for global competences in planning education. Ongoing reflections address workload management, intercultural teamwork and alignment between academic assessment and competition requirements. Overall, the practice contributes to a spatially grounded, globally oriented and pedagogically reflective planning programme, consistent with AESOP principles of educational excellence.

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Student-developed spatial strategies for urban ecosystem restoration.

Photo: KFF Focus

## 02: Integration of BIM and GIS Technologies in Research-Oriented Planning Education

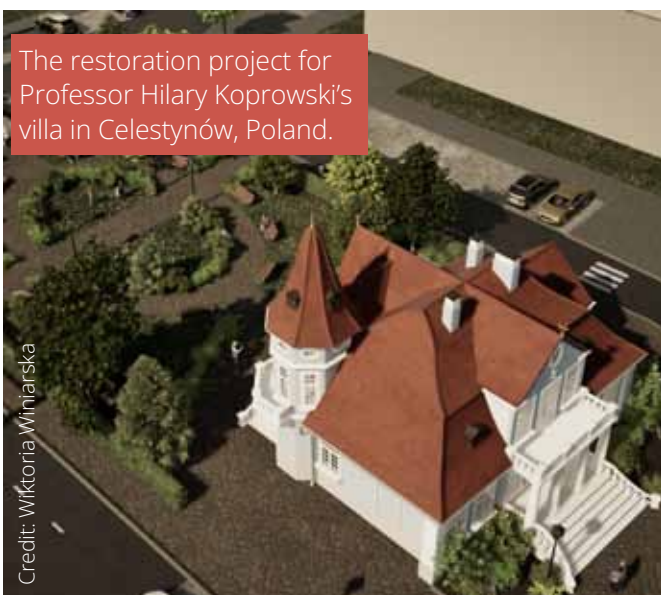
This showcase practice concerns the systematic integration of BIM (Building Information Modelling) and GIS technologies across several courses within the planning programme. Digital tools are embedded in research-oriented and problem-driven learning rather than being taught as isolated technical skills. The pedagogical approach supports independent exploration combined with group-based project work, supporting group and independent learning. Beyond BIM and GIS, the programme progressively incorporates emerging digital

technologies, including virtual reality (VR), 3D printing, electronics prototyping, Internet of Things (IoT) platforms, and artificial intelligence (AI) tools. These technologies expand the methodological repertoire available to students and enable them to engage with smart city concepts and spatial data in more immersive and tangible ways.

Students work in interdisciplinary teams, integrating perspectives from spatial planning, urban design, architecture and digital modelling, which strongly contributes to cross-disciplinarity. Assignments require students to define planning problems, collect and analyse data, select appropriate methods and critically interpret results, reflecting a strong research and inquiry-based approach.

In courses such as BIM, students apply analysis and simulation tools to non-standard planning challenges, including pedestrian flow modelling or wind flow analysis. These tasks require abstraction, transfer of knowledge to new contexts and engagement with uncertainty and constraints, thereby developing practical reasoning and professional judgement. Students also use VR environments to explore and evaluate urban design proposals at full scale, while 3D printing enables the physical prototyping of architectural and urban models for stakeholder consultation. IoT sensor networks are used in selected projects to collect real-time environmental data, supporting evidence-based planning decisions. AI-assisted tools, including generative design algorithms and machine-learning-based spatial analysis, further enhance

The restoration project for Professor Hilary Koprowski's villa in Celestynów, Poland.



Credit: Wiktoria Winarska

students' capacity to systematically process complex datasets and explore design alternatives.

Student outputs demonstrate higher-order competences, including critical thinking, information synthesis and the ability to apply digital tools to complex spatial problems. This practice responds to broader challenges in contemporary planning education by combining technological competence with in-depth analysis and reflexive understanding of planning decisions. The integration of electronics and IoT components into project workflows also fosters interdisciplinary collaboration with engineering and computer science students, reinforcing the cross-disciplinary dimension of the programme.

The results collected by students are assessed for their publication potential, leading to numerous student publications in academic journals.

### Most Relevant Quality Recognition Criteria for the Programme's Showcase Practices

Programme distinctiveness / Spatial foci / **Cross-disciplinarity** / **Global context** / Contemporary socio-spatial challenges and opportunities / Professional ethics / **Research and inquiry** / **Independent learning and group learning** / **Practical reasoning and judgement** / Reflexive praxis / Student diversity / Recognition and promotion of excellence / Student/alumni/employer engagement in the development of the programme curriculum

# BSc Programme in Urban Design for City in Transition



Department of Architecture,  
University of Palermo

## **Authors:**

Professor Marco Picone  
Professor Filippo Schilleci  
Professor Barbara Lino  
Lecturer Stefania Crobe  
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## **Reviewer:**

Assistant Professor Federica Scaffidi,  
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Department of Architecture building.

### **Name and level of the programme**

Bachelor's Degree Programme in Urban Design for the City in Transition (UDCT)

### **Name of the school**

Department of Architecture,  
University of Palermo

### **City, Country**

Palermo, Italy

### **Website**

<https://www.unipa.it/dipartimenti/architettura/en/?pagina=cds>

### **Official representative**

Professor Francesco Lo Piccolo, the Dean

### **Institutional e-mail**

francesco.lopiccolo@unipa.it

### **Duration, ECTS, start year**

3-year, 180 ECTS, start year: 2023/24

### **Average number of students per year**

20

### **Language(s) of the programme**

Italian

### **AESOP Certificate of Quality Duration**

2025-2031

### **Link to the AESOP Certificate of Quality and Evaluation Report**



## Programme Highlights



### Purpose:

The Urban Design for the City in Transition (UDCT) programme trains spatial planning professionals to address urban and territorial transformations through integrated analytical and operational competences.



### Focus Areas:

The programme combines urban regeneration, environmental assessment, circular economy, GIS and inclusive design within a studio-based interdisciplinary framework.



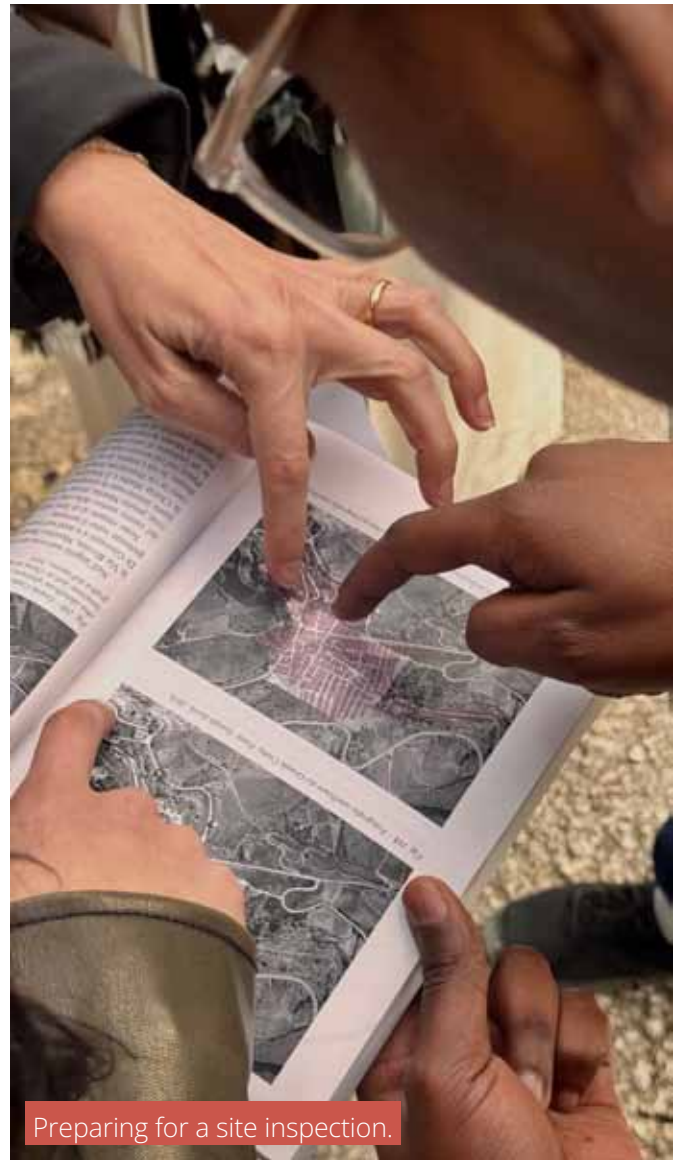
### Regional and National Context:

The programme addresses southern Italy and Sicily's challenges, including urban regeneration, cultural heritage, environmental vulnerability and socio-economic disparities, while maintaining an international perspective, linking local and global planning processes.

**Educational orientation:** The Bachelor programme in Urban Design for the City in Transition (UDCT) operates within Italian and European higher education frameworks, aligned with national, regional and EU planning policies, maintaining a strong international outlook and a focus on sustainable urban transformation, particularly in southern Italy and Sicily. The curriculum integrates planning theory and practice, addressing urban and territorial planning, cultural heritage, environmental sustainability and socially responsive design.

**Key planning perspectives, knowledge, skills and attitudes:** Distinctive features include heritage-led regeneration, a multi-scalar approach and service-learning experiences in studios. The programme provides a solid understanding of planning evolution and the political, legal and cultural dimensions of governance. It addresses key challenges such as climate change, environmental crises and socio-spatial inequalities. Core topics include sustainable land use, regeneration, public space design, circular economy, resilience and social innovation. Through courses in planning theory, governance, history, GIS, spatial analysis and environmental assessment, students develop analytical, design and technical skills, including data handling and scenario building. The programme promotes ethical responsibility, critical thinking and attention to social justice, and environmental sustainability.

**Key learner-centred pedagogical approaches:** Learning is organised around a studio-based model with



Preparing for a site inspection.

annual thematic workshops, integrated with theoretical courses to ensure interdisciplinary coherence. The approach combines problem- and project-based learning, fieldwork, simulations, site visits, flipped classrooms, peer learning and group work. Students engage with real contexts through community-based and service-learning projects, involving local authorities and stakeholders, enhancing practical skills, teamwork and the ability to translate theory into planning solutions.

**Key institutional settings for quality assurance and relevance:** Programme quality and relevance are ensured through structured governance and stakeholder engagement. Students participate in decision making via formal bodies, while evaluations support continuous improvement. Inclusivity is addressed through dedicated support systems. Strong links with practice are maintained through internships and engagement with alumni and practitioners. Internationalisation is fostered through Erasmus+ initiatives and global partnerships, ensuring a dynamic programme aligned with evolving planning challenges.

Library hall of the Department of Architecture



A key strength of the Urban Design for the City in Transition (UDCT) programme lies in its explicitly structured pedagogical model, which combines student-centred learning, interdisciplinarity and service-learning approaches across the entire three-year curriculum. This model is reinforced through the 'horizontal coordination' between courses and studios, which integrates multiple disciplinary perspectives and ensures continuity between theoretical instruction, methodological training and applied practice. This coordination allows students to combine knowledge from planning theory, environmental studies, urban design and social sciences, fostering a comprehensive understanding of urban and territorial phenomena. At the same time, it places students within real socio-spatial contexts, enabling them to confront contemporary urban challenges (such as environmental transitions, socio-economic inequalities and governance complexities) through situated and practice-oriented learning.

The UDCT programme epitomises a distinctive pedagogical approach that integrates academic learning with real-world engagement, fostering both technical skills and social responsibility. Central to this approach is the principle of 'learning by doing', which permeates studio-based courses, fieldwork and community-oriented projects. This approach is implemented through a progressive sequence of studios, where students shift from observation and analysis to design and direct engage-

ment with stakeholders. From the first year, students are actively involved in practical exercises that connect theoretical knowledge to the urban realities of Palermo and its surrounding region. For instance, in the first-year 'Urban Analysis' workshop, students combine foundational skills in digital technologies with site-based observation and mapping, producing interpretative maps and spatial analyses based on fieldwork in selected neighbourhoods. The second-year 'Regeneration of the Contemporary City' studio engages students in revitalising historic centres and deprived areas, while the third-year 'Inclusive Urban Design' workshop emphasises public space design and social innovation processes. This methodology allows students to develop not only professional competences, but also relational skills that prove essential for working collaboratively with communities, public institutions and private stakeholders.

Pedagogical methods used within the programme are diverse and interactive. Studio-based learning remains the core educational tool, providing spaces for project-based experimentation, design development and problem solving. Alongside this, participatory and engaged learning activities are implemented with the support of the CIMDU Teaching and Learning Centre, ensuring that students are involved in reflective and collaborative processes. Digital tools such as Wooclap and Miro are used

in courses like Advanced Spatial Analysis to introduce topics interactively, capture students' initial perspectives and co-create conceptual maps. In the Urban Planning studio, students engage in community mapping exercises, working directly with local actors to analyse urban environments and propose context-sensitive interventions. Furthermore, interactive whiteboards in courses such as Environmental and Economic Sustainability Evaluation enhance traditional lessons by allowing real-time graphical representation, analysis and simulation, supporting both individual and collaborative learning processes.

Moreover, the UDCT programme stands out for its 'service-learning approach', which represents a core pedagogical strength. This approach is not episodic, but embedded across the curriculum and closely integrated with studio activities. This methodology systematically integrates academic learning with real community needs, engaging students in urban and territorial planning projects of concrete societal relevance developed in collaboration with networks of public and private stakeholders. A key example is the service-learning initiative 'Waiting places: a community-learning process for the city in transition', which connects multiple courses (Urban Analysis, Space and Society, Social Innovation Processes) and involves students in the exploration and reactivation of underused urban spaces through fieldwork, stakeholder interaction and design proposals. Projects include collaborations with local schools (PCTO programmes) and community stakeholders, where students participate in workshops, interviews and participatory activities that address concrete urban challenges. Through this structured hands-on framework, students turn theoretical knowledge into practice while developing technical com-

petences, ethical responsibility, civic engagement and a deep understanding of community dynamics and participatory planning processes. By reinforcing the social dimension of urban design education, this approach ensures that graduates are not only technically proficient, but also socially aware and professionally prepared to contribute effectively to ongoing urban and territorial transformation.

The UDCT programme also emphasises multi-scalar, interdisciplinary competences. Courses integrate topics such as urban metabolism, circular economy, biodiversity, territorial governance and landscape design. Students learn about methodological tools including GIS, 3D mapping, spatial analysis and historical research, allowing them to engage with urban phenomena at neighbourhood, city and regional scales. Through collaborative studios and thematic workshops, students learn to combine theoretical reasoning, research skills and practical interventions, addressing complex contemporary challenges such as environmental sustainability, climate resilience and socio-spatial justice.

In summary, the programme's focus on interactive, community-oriented and technology-enhanced pedagogies represents a distinctive quality that aligns educational objectives with contemporary urban challenges. By placing students in real urban contexts and emphasising collaborative, ethical and research-informed practice, the UDCT programme not only prepares future planners for professional roles, but also actively contributes to the ongoing innovation, regeneration and sustainable development of cities. Continuous monitoring, feedback loops and the integration of student, alumni and employer



Student site inspection.

perspectives into programme design further ensure that the programme remains adaptive and forward-looking. This reflective, inclusive and practice-based approach exemplifies the programme's commitment to cultivating a generation of urban designers capable of addressing the multifaceted demands of cities in transition.

### Most Relevant Quality Recognition Criteria for the Programme's Showcase Practices

Programme distinctiveness / Spatial foci / Cross-disciplinarity / Global context / Contemporary socio-spatial challenges and opportunities / **Professional ethics** / **Research and inquiry** / **Independent learning and group learning** / **Practical reasoning and judgement** / **Reflexive praxis** / Student diversity / Recognition and promotion of excellence / Student/alumni/employer engagement in the development of the programme curriculum

# BSc Programme in Urban and Regional Planning



Department of Thematic Studies (TEMA)  
University of Linköping

**Authors:**

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Senior Associate Professor Dick Magnusson

**Reviewer:**

Professor Mina Di Marino,  
Norwegian University of Life Sciences

**Email of the corresponding author**

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### **Name and level of the programme**

Bachelor's Programme in Urban and Regional Planning

### **Name of the school**

Department of Thematic Studies (TEMA),  
Linköping University

### **City, Country**

Linköping, Sweden

### **Website**

<https://liu.se/utbildning/program/f7ksp>

### **Official representative**

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### **Institutional e-mail**

[ida.grundel@liu.se](mailto:ida.grundel@liu.se)

### **Duration, ECTS, start year**

Bachelor, 3 years, 180 ECTS, started in 2017

### **Average number of students per year**

48

### **Language(s) of the programme**

Swedish

### **AESOP Certificate of Quality Duration**

2025-2031

### **[Link to the AESOP Certificate of Quality and Evaluation Report](#)**



Campus Valla, spring.

## Programme Highlights



### Purpose

A foundational programme that builds strong skills in urban and regional planning, sustainability and interdisciplinarity.



### Focus Areas

Urban and regional planning with a key focus on sustainability, communication, analytical skills, GIS and mapping.



### Regional & National Context

Aligned with Swedish planning regulations, international sustainability goals and real case studies from a local context.

**Educational orientation:** The programme has a core curriculum with a distinct focus on urban and regional planning, setting it apart from other programmes in Sweden. This is enriched by a cross-cutting focus on sustainability and an interdisciplinary perspective that leverages the department's diverse expertise.

**Key planning perspectives, knowledge, skills and attitudes:** The curriculum fosters a progressive understanding of planning as a scientific discipline, gradually integrating perspectives from related fields. There is a strong commitment to reflective praxis, considering the role, responsibilities and future competences of the planner, ethical principles underpinning the profession, and students' personal and academic growth as learners.

**Key learner-centred pedagogical approaches:** The programme draws on interdisciplinarity. Students work on concrete planning tasks within interdisciplinary courses. An important feature is to integrate research findings and methodologies into educational practices to enhance learning and working with real cases. From knowledge to action: students learn how to lead consultations and be engaged in co-creation processes with communities, interest groups and different stakeholder groups. Moreover, leading seminars and workshops are central forms of examination. Both individual and group learning are essential. Students work in both small and large groups, in courses, seminars, laboratories and practice-oriented work. Individual learning occurs in relation to group work, individual reflections or written examinations.

**Key institutional settings for quality assurance and relevance:** The progress of ongoing and recently finished courses is discussed in monthly teaching meet-

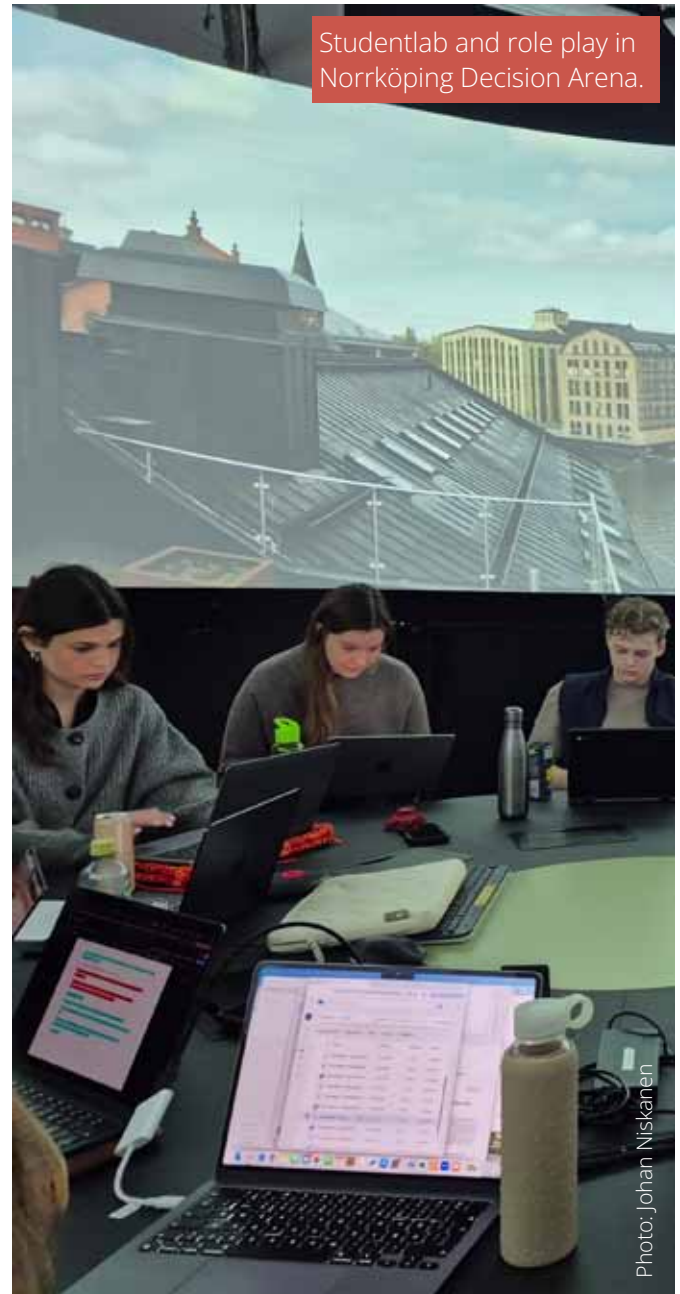


Photo: Johan Niskanen

ings and pedagogical lunches. This is an excellent way for teachers to share both best practices and pedagogical innovation. Part of the pedagogical excellence at the department is the requirement of pedagogical courses for obtaining a position as a senior lecturer. Through a university-wide quality assurance system, all courses are automatically subject to an evaluation. Additionally, all programmes are systematically assessed in six-year cycles to increase their quality, relevance and attractiveness. This model also supports active communication and exchange of experiences between faculties. To support and advise the programme director, there is an external programme board with representatives from, as well as the university, municipalities and national and regional authorities. We are also part of an Urban and Regional Planning education network, where all programme directors in Sweden are invited annually to discuss planning and education-related matters.



Photo: Ida Grundel

### 1. Role-play a fictional consultation

As part of the 'Urban and regional planning processes' course, students carry out a laboratory exercise where they prepare and set up a fictional public consultation through a role-play activity. This showcase aligns with several AESOP QR criteria including spatial foci, cross-disciplinarity, professional ethics, independent learning and group learning, but also practical reasoning. More specifically, the exercise addresses the students' ability to go from knowledge to action and their capacity to conceive, devise and evaluate spatial interventions from a multi-actor perspective. Throughout the course, students develop knowledge about i) citizen movements and democratic planning processes, and ii) the political, legal, institutional and cultural contexts and power relations in planning, including ideal planning versus the reality, and illegality. Students mainly develop their competences in i) integrating different types of knowledge for plan development, ii) developing design, drawing and visual representation skills, and iii) being in touch with civil society, organising and leading consultations and engaging in co-creation processes with communities, interest groups and stakeholders at various spatial levels. The exercise is based on a consultation process, as consultation is central to allow stakeholders to express their views in the planning process. Students work in groups to plan, design, conduct and document a fictional consultation process, which can be, for example, a hearing based on a real planning case, or a consultation that targets a specific group of citizens or planning objective. Throughout the years, students have focused on, for

example, hearings in relation to plan proposals for new parks and green areas, sports facilities, schools, housing, offices and services. The learning outcomes of the exercise are to i) explain the drivers and ambitions to initiate and support planning processes and how conflicts of interest can arise and be managed, and ii) use tools to organise and drive planning processes and lead projects. The consultation is carried out as a role-play activity in the Norrköping Decision Arena, a venue designed to promote dialogue through visualisation and facilitate the discussion of complex issues and processes. It is an interactive facility where different types of information can be illustrated and compared transparently on a cylindrical screen (<https://liu.se/artikel/samhallsplanerarnarollspelar-i-beslutsarenan>). This kind of exercise helps students develop an understanding of, and responsibility for, i) the value dimension of planning, ii) the ethical implications of planning, iii) the cultural embeddedness of social processes and collective action, and iv) democratic processes and rights.

### 2. Field Courses - Cities and Urban Planning

Several excursions and field trips take place throughout the programme, but Field Courses - Cities and Urban Planning specifically addresses current research, planning theories/ideologies and urban development in a European context in relation to theoretical and methodological aspects of field studies. Students conduct a joint field trip to a selected city or region (the two last years to Hamburg), and a central part is to investigate and make a first presentation in the field. After the field trip, stu-

Field trip.



dents analyse their materials, write a report and present their full results. Crucially, students work with field diaries. Before the field trip, students prepare and work in a workshop with different methods of using field diaries such as notes, pictures or videos. Based on the field diaries that are expected to be used in the report, students also hand in an individual reflection after the field trip, focused on their own learning process. Most students partake in this elective course. We see this kind of fieldtrip as key for learning about planning processes. In relation to the AESOP QR criteria, the fieldtrip addresses several of these criteria, as it both has a spatial foci and addresses contemporary socio-spatial challenges and opportunities. Thus, the field trip as such helps students develop their understanding of spatial dynamics across different scales by developing knowledge about i) processes of spatial change in anthropogenic environments, ii) socio-economic dynamics, including social conflicts, inequalities, migration, demographics, cultural change, property and real estate markets, and power relations within society, and iii) location-specific factors of spatial dynamics. Doing fieldwork and being in the field

also helps students to i) develop practical knowledge in experiencing, exploring and analysing the natural and anthropogenic environment, ii) learn techniques of qualitative and quantitative data collection, analysis and synthesis. In addition, assessing data reliability improves students' skills related to research and inquiry, and their practical reasoning and judgement, as well as their reflexive practice. These two showcases, together with consistent interactions between students and external stakeholders across several modules in the programme, also contribute to the students' capability of assuming the societal responsibilities of spatial planners by developing knowledge of i) professional practices that contribute to spatial planning and ii) values associated with spatial planning professional ethical codes. Moreover, they develop their practical competences in i) reflective practices and ii) critically reflecting on the consequences and understanding the risks of decisions and actions. Students should also develop an understanding of, and responsibility for, i) open-mindedness and ii) adopting a reflective and critical stance on professional practices, legal frameworks and planning policies.

### Most Relevant Quality Recognition Criteria for the Programme's Showcase Practices

Programme distinctiveness / Spatial foci / **Cross-disciplinarity** / Global context / **Contemporary socio-spatial challenges and opportunities** / **Professional ethics** / Research and inquiry / **Independent learning and group learning** / **Practical reasoning and judgement** / Reflexive praxis / Student diversity / Recognition and promotion of excellence / Student/alumni/employer engagement in the development of the programme curriculum



# BSc in Spatial Management



Faculty of Earth Sciences and  
Environmental Management,  
University of Wrocław

**Author:**

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**Reviewer:**

Associate Professor Patrick Witte,  
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### **Name and level of the programme**

BSc in Spatial Management

### **Name of the school**

Faculty of Earth Sciences and Environmental Management, University of Wrocław

### **City, Country**

Wrocław, Poland

### **Website**

<https://wnoz.uwr.edu.pl/>

### **Official representative**

Professor Maciej Kryza, the Dean,

### **Institutional e-mail**

[Maciej.Kryza@uwr.edu.pl](mailto:Maciej.Kryza@uwr.edu.pl)

### **Duration, ECTS, start year**

3 years, 180 ECTS, start year: 2015/16

### **Average number of students per year**

34

### **Language(s) of the programme**

Polish

### **AESOP Certificate of Quality Duration**

2025-2031

### **[Link to the AESOP Certificate of Quality and Evaluation Report](#)**



Faculty building.

## Programme Highlights



### Purpose

The programme provides education in spatial planning, combining environmental, spatial and social perspectives, and preparing students for planning practice.



### Focus Areas

It focuses on urban, regional and environmental planning, spatial policy, urban design, revitalisation, participatory planning and technical skills such as GIS and field methods.



### Regional & National Context

The programme is aligned with the Polish planning system and embedded in the regional context of Lower Silesia, with links to local and regional stakeholders.



Photo: Sławomir Czerwiński

**Educational orientation:** The Spatial Management programme at the University of Wrocław is grounded in geography, environmental protection and spatial planning, and aligned with the Polish Spatial Planning and Development Act as well as European priorities related to sustainable development, climate resilience and participation. The programme focuses on urban, regional and environmental planning, and is strongly embedded within the regional context of Lower Silesia, while also addressing broader national and European planning challenges.

**Key planning perspectives, knowledge, skills and attitudes:** More than 60% of the curriculum consists of planning-related subjects. The programme covers urban design, spatial policy, revitalisation, environmental protection, planning law and participatory planning, supported by training in GIS, CAD, spatial data analysis and field-based research. Students develop competences in spatial diagnosis, problem identification, data interpretation, strategic thinking and the preparation of planning proposals responding to socio-spatial challenges.

The programme combines technical, environmental and social perspectives, emphasising interdisciplinary cooperation and the integration of theory with practice. Students engage with issues such as climate change, urban inequalities, accessibility, environmental justice and sustainable land use. The curriculum also promotes ethical awareness, critical thinking and an understanding of the public role of planners.

**Key learner-centred pedagogical approaches:** Learner-centred pedagogies are embedded throughout the programme. All courses include practical components such as exercises, workshops, project work or field activities. Students work individually and in groups on real planning problems, often in cooperation with municipalities, public institutions, NGOs and local communities. A distinctive element of the programme is the Social Participation Laboratory, which supports participatory planning projects and enables students to gain experience in stakeholder engagement and collaborative problem solving.

**Key institutional settings for quality assurance and relevance:** The programme maintains close links with the socio-economic environment through partnerships with local governments, planning institutions and external stakeholders. Its continuing relevance is supported by regular curriculum evaluation, student feedback, cooperation with employers and alumni, and the activities of the Faculty Stakeholders Council. Internationalisation is strengthened through Erasmus+ mobility and collaboration within the ARQUS European University Alliance.



### 1: Social Participation Laboratory

The Social Participation Laboratory plays a central role in linking teaching with real-world planning practice and functions as a coordinating platform within the programme. It enables cooperation with external stakeholders - including neighbourhood councils, municipalities, NGOs and private-sector actors - who introduce real spatial challenges into the educational process.

A key feature of this practice is the integration of stakeholder-driven projects into coursework. Whenever possible, collaborations are embedded within project-based courses; when this is not feasible due to timing constraints, students may engage in them outside formal classes. This flexible model allows the programme to respond to real societal needs while maintaining its alignment with learning objectives and the academic structure of the curriculum.

Students are involved in the full planning process, from problem definition to proposal development. Their work includes surveys, spatial inventories, analytical mapping and semi-structured interviews with residents and stakeholders. Based on collected data, students develop planning proposals addressing specific spatial problems. Outputs include reports, visual materials and presentations delivered to stakeholders and, in some cases, used in consultation and planning discussions.

Many activities focus on neighbourhood revitalisation and public space. Students analyse the quality and ac-

cessibility of urban greenery, assess underutilised areas and propose alternative spatial solutions. Through these activities, they gain experience in negotiating between different interests and understanding the institutional and social context of planning.

The Laboratory also supports workshops and public debates related to sustainable development and climate adaptation. Students assist in organising events, moderating discussions and documenting outcomes, which strengthens their communication skills and their understanding of planning as a socially embedded and participatory process.

From a pedagogical perspective, this practice reflects learner-centred, problem-based and experiential learning approaches. It fosters interdisciplinary collaboration and requires students to apply technical, environmental and social competences in real contexts. Students work individually and in groups, developing skills in spatial analysis, stakeholder engagement and proposal development, while also reflecting critically on their work and its limitations.

A key reflection concerns balancing real stakeholder expectations with educational goals. While engagement enhances the relevance of learning, it requires careful coordination to ensure that students remain learners rather than service providers. Maintaining this balance is both a challenge and a defining strength of the programme.



Photo: Paulina Dudzik-Deko



Photo: Paulina Dudzik-Deko

## 2: Stakeholder Council as a mechanism supporting programme relevance

The Stakeholder Council operates at the faculty level as a structured platform for cooperation between the university and the socio-economic environment. It brings together representatives of public institutions, local and regional authorities, private-sector actors and non-gov-

ernmental organisations, creating a forum for regular dialogue on programme development.

The Council plays an important role in ensuring the continued relevance of the programme in a changing socio-spatial context. Its members provide input on curriculum development, learning outcomes and graduate competences, taking into account labour market needs, planning practice and emerging challenges.

This cooperation goes beyond formal consultation. Feedback from the Council informs curriculum adjustments, course content and the identification of new teaching areas. It contributes to shaping graduate profiles by reflecting expectations from professional practice and supporting the alignment between academic training and real-world planning requirements.

The Stakeholder Council complements other forms of external engagement, including project-based collaboration and field-based courses. While the Social Participation Laboratory operates at the level of student learning and project work, the Council functions at a strategic level, supporting long-term programme development and ensuring coherence with professional practice.

An important feature of this practice is the establishment of a continuous and structured mechanism for stakeholder involvement, rather than relying on ad hoc collaborations. This strengthens the programme's capacity to adapt to changing socio-economic conditions while maintaining its practical orientation and institutional stability.



Photo: Alicja Zalewska



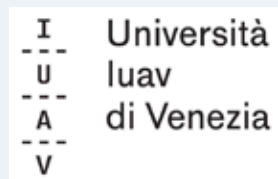
Although its impact on teaching is indirect, it is significant. By influencing curriculum design and content, the Council ensures that students are exposed to current planning challenges and professional expectations. It also facilitates opportunities for guest lectures, expert input and further cooperation with external partners.

A key reflection concerns balancing academic autonomy with external input. While stakeholder engagement strengthens practical relevance, it is essential to ensure that curriculum development remains guided by academic values. The Council therefore acts as an advisory body, supporting programme development while preserving its independence.

### Most Relevant Quality Recognition Criteria for the Programme's Showcase Practices

Programme distinctiveness / Spatial foci / Cross-disciplinarity / Global context / **Contemporary socio-spatial challenges and opportunities** / Professional ethics / Research and inquiry / **Independent learning and group learning** / **Practical reasoning and judgement** / **Reflexive praxis** / Student diversity / Recognition and promotion of excellence / **Engagement in the development of the programme curriculum**

# MSc Programme in Urban and Spatial Planning



Department of Architecture and Arts,  
IAUV University of Venice

**Authors:**

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Assistant Professor Filippo Magni  
Post-Doc Researcher Gianfranco Pozzer

**Reviewer:**

Associate Professor Juliana Martins,  
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## Name and level of the programme

MSc in Urban and Spatial Planning

## Name of the school

Department of Architecture and Arts,  
IAUV University of Venice

## City, Country

Venice, Italy

## Website

<https://www.iuav.it/en/didattica/lauree-magistrali/urbanistica-e-pianificazione-del-territorio>

## Official representative

Professor Giulia Lucertini,  
MSc programme coordinator

## Institutional e-mail

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## Duration, ECTS, start year

2-year, 120 ECTS, start year: 2021/2022

## Average number of students per year

30

## Language(s) of the programme

Italian, English

## AESOP Certificate of Quality Duration

2024-2030

## Link to the AESOP Certificate of Quality and Evaluation Report



The Cottonificio Veneziano building,  
home to Iuav's teaching activities.

## Programme Highlights



### Purpose:

The programme offers high-level interdisciplinary theoretical and practice-oriented education in urban and spatial planning, aimed at providing future planners with the analytical and design skills required to develop cities capable of responding to complex global challenges



### Focus Areas:

Key areas of study include environmental sustainability, climate change adaptation, and the planning and design of inclusive and socially just urban environments



### Regional and National Context:

The programme is based on the specific context of Venice, with particular attention to climate change adaptation, as well as the governance of overtourism and long-term demographic and housing transformations

**Educational orientation:** The MSc programme provides high-level training for urban planners, integrating theoretical and practice-oriented considerations with the trends that currently dominate transnational, European and national urban agendas, as well as planners' international and national codes of ethical practice. The programme's distinctive features include its emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches, as evidenced by its curriculum, which encompasses core planning courses and integrates disciplines such as sociology, geography, economics, political science and ecology.

**Key planning perspectives, knowledge, skills and attitudes:** The programme fosters a holistic approach, blending theoretical, practical and ethical education. It promotes interdisciplinary knowledge, methods and approaches to provide planners with innovative skills in designing plans and policies at various territorial scales. Ethical responsibility is a cornerstone, encouraging students to address socio-spatial inequalities and global challenges while balancing stakeholder interests. Additionally, the programme cultivates students' practical reasoning and judgment skills in both individual and group contexts when confronted with complex, real-world planning situations.

### Key Learner-centred Pedagogical Approaches:

The programme prioritises hands-on learning through real-world case studies, design studios, workshops and internships with public institutions and private companies. Within the design studios, students develop critical thinking skills and advanced competences in design de-

velopment, engaging in iterative and reflective processes. These studios constitute the privileged learning environment in which academic knowledge and professional practice are meaningfully integrated and mutually reinforced. Such a pedagogical approach places significant value on diversity, promoting the inclusion of students and fostering collaboration within multicultural and multidisciplinary teams. Furthermore, it enhances students' ability to effectively communicate their design proposals to a wide range of stakeholders, strengthening both the technical and relational skills that are essential for professional practice.

### Key institutional settings for quality assurance and relevance:

Various institutional frameworks have been established in order to guarantee the constant evaluation of the educational quality provided by the planning programme, as well as to facilitate the active involvement of stakeholders and students in the development of the educational offer. These frameworks include the evaluation of the educational offer and teaching activities by students and alumni, as well as commissions specifically designed to assess the quality assurance.



Students relaxing and observing the city (Barcelona, ES, 2013).



### Joint international educational activities

The MSc programme in Urban and Spatial Planning at luav has a long-standing tradition of offering joint educational activities with international higher education institutions, as part of the university's internationalisation strategy. Collaborations with universities such as MIT (Boston), Drexel and Jefferson University (Philadelphia), Tongji University (Shanghai), the Autonomous University of Barcelona, the University of Girona and the University of Lisbon exemplify a consolidated practice combining international exposure, practice-based learning and critical reflection. These initiatives usually take the form of short, intensive educational programmes (summer schools or intensive workshop) in Venice and other international locations. They involve a selected group of approximately 10 luav students, chosen through an internal call based on motivation letters, together with students from partner institutions. The provision of financial support is instrumental in ensuring the initiatives' broad accessibility. They represent a temporary but highly immersive setting where learning is achieved through collaboration, experimentation and direct engagement with planning challenges. To date, the topics explored have primarily concerned climate change mitigation and adaptation, the inclusion of diverse and vulnerable popula-

tions in urban public spaces, the regeneration of coastal environments in response to sea-level rise, and local development policies aimed at addressing peripheral and marginal areas, such as mountain regions. Workshops typically last between 7 and 12 days, depending on the international programme to which they are linked. In some cases, the duration is defined by the requirements of EU-funded projects (which set structured timelines and deliverables), while in others it varies according to the level of funding provided by participating universities. Teaching duties are usually shared among the academic staff, who collaboratively design and deliver international learning activities. Owing to the strong engagement with local contexts, external stakeholders, including political representatives and technical experts, are regularly invited to present ongoing territorial projects and experiences. The programme is structured around diverse learning formats: some sessions focus on technical aspects of planning processes, others on bottom-up territorial perspectives, and others on direct interaction between students and local administrative actors.

From an educational perspective, these activities are grounded in studio-based and experiential, situated learning approaches. Students are invited to engage in a critical examination of the theories, concepts and analytical tools acquired during their academic careers through direct involvement in planning tasks. Rather than repro-



Preliminary project proposals  
(Rosolina Mare, IT, 2022).

Photo: Filippo Magni IUAV

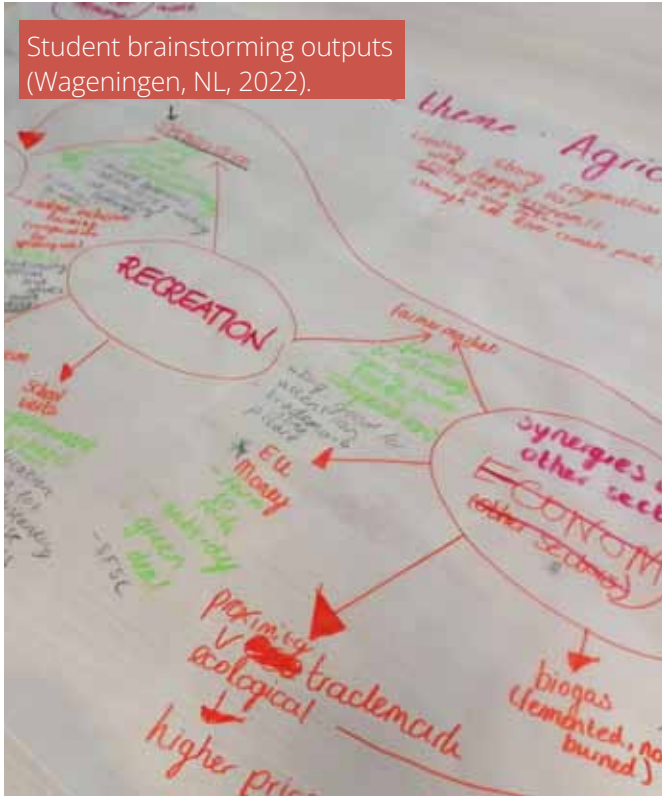
ducing predefined solutions, they are required to actively construct knowledge by designing plans, projects or policy proposals in response to concrete spatial situations. In this sense, knowledge emerges through action, reflection and iteration. The intensive format has proved to enhance students' capacity for autonomous learning, while fostering collective learning dynamics within small groups. A fundamental pedagogical aspect of these experiences is their engagement with real-world case studies and real-client planning demands. Public institutions, private actors and civil society organisations frequently contribute to the definition of the workshop brief and actively engage in meetings and reviews. This interaction exposes students to the social and political dimensions of planning practice, requiring them to negotiate between competing interests and values. In this way, students develop competences through participation in contexts that closely resemble professional practice. At the same time, students enhance their communicative and problem-solving skills, learning to justify planning choices and adapt proposals to feedback from diverse stakeholders. In several cases, the outcomes of the workshops have contributed to ongoing policy discussions, reinforcing the idea that educational activities can operate as meaningful interfaces between academia and professional practice. The international composition of student groups and teaching teams plays a central role in shaping learning outcomes. Working on shared planning challenges enables students to explore how global issues are articulated differently across local contexts, depending on institutional frameworks, socio-economic



Developing an urban masterplan  
(Girona, ES, 2022).

Photo: Filippo Magni IUAV

Student brainstorming outputs  
(Wageningen, NL, 2022).



conditions and planning cultures. This comparative perspective fosters multi-scalar thinking and supports the development of reflexive skills, encouraging students to question assumptions that are taken for granted within their own planning traditions. Collaborative work in international and multicultural groups also contributes to the development of transversal competences related to teamwork and professional ethics. Differences in communication styles, cultural norms and professional expectations require students to engage in continuous negotiation and mutual learning. Ethical dimensions of planning practice are explicitly addressed throughout the process: students are encouraged to reflect on professional responsibility, public interest, socio-spatial inequalities and inclusive decision making, paying particular attention to marginalised groups and environmental concerns. Ethical reasoning thus becomes embedded in the learning process. Finally, these workshops are characterised by an explicitly interdisciplinary orientation. Planning problems are addressed as complex and multidimensional, requiring the integration of perspectives from different disciplines to deal with contemporary societal challenges. Ongoing reflections among the teaching staff underscore the importance of maintaining and strengthening relationships with external stakeholders. Continuous engagement with public institutions, private actors and civil society ensures that workshops remain grounded in real-world planning challenges and evolving policy agendas. At the same time, economic, geopolitical and energy-related constraints, including visa difficulties and rising travel costs, are prompting the use of blended formats combining online and in-person activities.

### Most Relevant Quality Recognition Criteria for the Programme's Showcase Practices

Programme distinctiveness / Spatial foci / **Cross-disciplinarity** / **Global context** / Contemporary socio-spatial challenges and opportunities / **Professional ethics** / Research and inquiry / **Independent learning and group learning** / **Practical reasoning and judgement** / Reflexive praxis / Student diversity / Recognition and promotion of excellence / Student/alumni/employer engagement in the development of the programme curriculum

# MSc Programme in Spatial Planning



Department of Architecture,  
University of Palermo

**Authors:**

Professor Marco Picone  
Professor Filippo Schilleci  
Professor Barbara Lino  
Lecturer Annalisa Contato  
Lecturer Stefania Crobe

**Reviewer:**

Professor Mina Di Marino,  
Norwegian University of Life Sciences

**Email of the corresponding author**  
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**Name and level of the programme**

Master's degree in Spatial Planning (SING)

**Name of the school**

Department of Architecture,  
University of Palermo

**City, Country**

Palermo, Italy

**Website**

<https://www.unipa.it/dipartimenti/architettura/en/?pagina=cds>

**Official representative**

Professor Francesco Lo Piccolo, the Dean

**Institutional e-mail**

francesco.lopiccolo@unipa.it

**Duration, ECTS, start year**

2-year, 120 ECTS, start year: 2023/24

**Average number of students per year**

30

**Language(s) of the programme**

English

**AESOP Certificate of Quality Duration**

2025-2031

**Link to the AESOP Certificate of Quality and Evaluation Report**

View of the Department of Architecture, University of Palermo.

### Programme Highlights



#### Purpose

The Master's in Spatial Planning at the University of Palermo prepares highly qualified planners to address complex spatial transformations through critical, integrative and ethical approaches.



#### Focus Areas

The curriculum combines theoretical knowledge, technical skills and professional training to equip students to design sustainable strategies and policies for urban, regional and environmental systems.



#### Regional & National Context

The programme is embedded in Sicily and Italy's planning context, connecting Mediterranean and European issues with global debates (with a major focus on the Global South), and trains professionals capable of operating in both regional and international planning environments.

#### Key learner-centred pedagogical approaches:

Service-learning and real-world engagement are integral parts of the programme, which has a learner-centred pedagogy with experiential and studio-based learning at its core. Planning studios function as interdisciplinary labs where theoretical knowledge is applied to project work, combining learning-by-doing with critical reflection and linking conceptual frameworks to real-world contexts. Workshops, field visits, simulations and community-engaged projects immerse students in real-life planning scenarios, exposing them to diverse actors, conflicts and case studies from various world regions to promote cultural and geopolitical understanding. A required internship with public authorities provides direct professional experience and supports the final dissertation.

#### Key institutional settings for quality assurance and relevance:

The programme's quality is ensured by institutional structures that encourage ongoing dialogue with professionals and society. Regular feedback from alumni and employers keeps the curriculum relevant, while strong partnerships with public institutions and community organisations facilitate collaboration in studios and internships, ensuring a dynamic learning environment that integrates academic excellence, professional relevance and social responsibility.

**Educational orientation:** The Master's in Spatial Planning is an international programme delivered in English, aligned with national regulations, European standards and global debates on sustainable territorial development. The curriculum is rooted in Mediterranean and Southern European planning contexts, connecting them to wider global discourses, including a focus on the Global South.

#### Key planning perspectives, knowledge, skills and attitudes:

The programme addresses key challenges such as climate change, inequality, migration, energy transition and urbanisation through a combination of theoretical courses and hands-on laboratories. Core thematic areas include urban and regional planning, landscape and environmental planning, technological design for settlements, energy and mobility policies, and strategic environmental assessments across different territorial scales.

Students develop the ability to critically and ethically engage with complex spatial contexts, viewing territories as socio-ecological systems shaped by history, relationships and multi-scalar governance. Analytical skills are cultivated using both qualitative and quantitative spatial analysis methods. A strong emphasis is placed on mediation between institutions, communities and environmental constraints, fostering responsibility, reflexivity and public commitment.



The Spatial Planning programme stands out for its strong international orientation, being the only international master's degree programme in planning in southern Italy which is entirely taught in English. This global dimension situates the programme within a broader international context and prepares students to engage with complex socio-spatial challenges in diverse urban and territorial environments.



The curriculum addresses urban, regional and environmental aspects of planning, integrating cross-disciplinary perspectives through contributions from multiple fields and a **horizontal coordination of courses**. Horizontal integration is facilitated by continuous dialogue among coordinators of different modules and studios, ensuring intentional links between theoretical courses and practical studio activities. Through collaborative pedagogical practices, studio coordinators and lecturers jointly harmonise syllabi, case studies and educational goals, allowing students to approach spatial planning challenges from a systematic and integrated perspective. For example, case studies are often shared across a range of courses to provide a systematic, integrated approach to learning that connects theoretical frameworks with applied practice. An illustrative example occurs in the first-year 'Planning I' studio, where a common study area is selected and explored across several courses through complementary disciplinary lenses. In 2025, a collaborative project involving the Social Geography and Participatory Practices studio and Landscape Ecology examined the Oreto River area, analysing processes of urban transformation and rapid urbanisation, as well as their socio-spatial and environmental justice implications through field visits, on-site research and meetings with local stakeholders.

A key pedagogical characteristic of the programme is its focus on applied experimentation that is closely connected to theoretical knowledge. This is achieved **through a service-learning** approach, where students engage in workshop-based courses and work directly with communities, institutions and local stakeholders. This innovative method combines 'learning by doing' with critical reflection, allowing students to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios through

practical implementation, while identifying community needs and developing professional and civic responsibility. By integrating academic learning with community engagement, the 'service-learning' approach creates opportunities for students to apply planning concepts in real-world contexts, fostering technical competence, active citizenship and critical reflection. The approach is applied from the first year (particularly through courses such as 'Planning Studio I', 'Social Geography' and 'Participatory Practices' Studio, and Landscape Design Studio), ensuring consistent exposure to practical applications of planning concepts while fostering independent learning, teamwork and collaborative problem solving. Studio activities represent a central component of the learning environment, designed to integrate multiple disciplinary perspectives. Each studio coordinates with other studios and teaching units to promote a multidisciplinary and comprehensive understanding of spatial planning issues. Students are encouraged to carry out complex and specialised diagnoses related to cities, territories, landscapes and the environment, acquiring exclusive expertise in strategic environmental assessment (SEA) and technical feasibility evaluations of urban and territorial plans and projects.

The connection with real urban and territorial contexts is further strengthened through direct engagement with public institutions, community organisations and local stakeholders. For example, within the second-year integrated course comprising the Planning II Studio and Urban and Regional Policies modules, students interact with local actors such as Local Action Group (LAG) Sicani and municipal administrators from the territories where design explorations are conducted. Through the analysis

of existing planning instruments, regulatory frameworks and direct dialogue with decision makers, students develop a deeper understanding of the spatial contexts in which they operate, enabling them to formulate proposals aligned with local needs and with integrated and sustainable visions for territorial development.

This combination of technical skill development with critical, reflective practice ensures students develop their capacity for informed judgement and reflexive praxis.

The programme also places particular emphasis on inclusivity and the recognition of student diversity. Flexible teaching approaches and strong faculty support foster student autonomy and skill development, creating a supportive learning environment that addresses the needs of diverse student groups. Furthermore, the programme promotes the recognition and encouragement of excellence by providing opportunities for students to demonstrate initiative and leadership in both academic and applied settings.

The integration of theory and practice, the international and multidisciplinary orientation, and the emphasis on service-learning collectively contribute to the distinctiveness of the programme. By engaging students in the practical application of planning concepts within real urban and territorial contexts, the programme fosters professional ethics, civic responsibility and critical thinking, while developing research and inquiry skills through applied projects and case studies. This approach exemplifies a comprehensive model of contemporary planning education, which is simultaneously rigorous, socially engaged and oriented towards addressing the complex challenges of contemporary urban environments.



SING students' site inspection.



Overall, the Spatial Planning programme represents an integrated and innovative pedagogical practice where international orientation, cross-disciplinary collaboration, applied research and service-learning converge to create a learning environment that is both intellectually rigorous and socially responsive. Students' work, ranging from strategic environmental assessments to community-based planning interventions, reflects the programme's commitment to practical reasoning, ethical practice and reflexive engagement with the urban and territorial contexts in which they operate.

### Most Relevant Quality Recognition Criteria for the Programme's Showcase Practices

Programme distinctiveness / Spatial foci / **Cross-disciplinarity** / Global context / Contemporary socio-spatial challenges and opportunities / Professional ethics / Research and inquiry / **Independent learning and group learning** / **Practical reasoning and judgement** / **Reflexive praxis** / **Student diversity** / Recognition and promotion of excellence / Student/alumni/employer engagement in the development of the programme curriculum





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