XII AESOP Sustainable Food Planning Conference

Wednesday 21 October 2026 - Saturday 24 October 2026

IUAV

Scientific Programme

Description of the Conference theme

We are living in a period marked by profound ecological, social, economic, and geopolitical emergencies that are deeply reshaping food systems and exposing structural vulnerabilities within contemporary urban and regional contexts.

These conditions reveal persistent failures, including the uneven progress in guaranteeing the right to equitable and sustainable food for all. At the same time, they call for a critical reflection on the plurality of values that diverse actors and local communities attribute to food as: heritage, livelihood, culture, and care, but also as a site of commodification, geopolitical tension, and technocratic intervention.

Within this complex landscape, sustainable food planning practices are increasingly required to position themselves critically among often divergent, contested, and non-neutral value systems.

In this context, the XII AESOP Sustainable Food Planning Conference invites scholars, practitioners, activists, and policymakers to explore how food values are mobilised, negotiated, and transformed across spaces and scales of fragility. Food has become a central arena for urban and territorial policies, involving a growing number of actors with heterogeneous interests and priorities. As such, food activates a dense and conflictual constellation of values, intertwined with the environmental, social, economic, and political fragilities that characterise many contemporary territories. Climate change, war, political instability, and widening inequalities challenge not only food systems, but also the institutional, spatial, and governance frameworks through which food is planned and managed.

The conference seeks to investigate how urban and regional food planning can bridge tradition and change by mediating between place-based knowledge, community practices, and emerging socio-technical responses.

Particular attention is given to the spatial dimension of food policies and practices, understood as a means to integrate policy frameworks with territorial and urban projects, producing place-based and context-sensitive responses that acknowledge specific conditions.

Key questions guiding the Conference include:
. How do values rooted in food heritage, cultural practices, and local ecologies inform contemporary planning approaches?
. How are socially innovative initiatives and agroecological urbanism practices reimagining food systems in contexts of precarity, disruption, and uncertainty?
. How can food planning support community agency while respecting diverse food identities and mediating conflicts around food and space?
. What institutional transformations are needed to safeguard food commons, promote socio-ecological justice, and enable alternative forms of production, distribution, and governance to take root?

We welcome contributions that critically engage with these questions, illuminating the political, social, ecological, and spatial dimensions of food planning among fragility, and advancing debates on how food values can sustain transformative pathways toward more resilient, caring, and democratic food systems.

1 | Negotiating the values of land, soil and water in planning practices

This track explores and investigates the multiple “values” of land, soil and water as essential components of both natural-ecological and socio-economic systems. It aims to re-think land and soils in planning as a three-dimensional feature, with distinct qualities, providing a series of functions useful for social development, climate change adaptation, biodiversity, and living quality, as well as essential for addressing important new dimensions like the water-energy-food-ecosystem nexus.

In the context of increased competition over natural resources, how can spatial planning support alternative values? How do land tenure, land access, and property relations frame (constrain, facilitate) possible food systems transformations? How does spatial planning currently frame sustainability, access to and control over land, soil, water?

Contributions that examine the dynamics of productivity and the reproduction of resources, food production from terrestrial and marine environments are welcome. New theoretical/analytical frameworks are also welcome, that help to bridge the gap between soil and spatial planning and design. Discussions on the notions of commons and commonalities, as well as the complex regimes of land and water property that shape access and use, are encouraged.

2 | Planning and design approaches to food urbanism in fragile territories

This track explores the intersections between food landscapes, design, and spatial practices in disciplines such as architecture, urban design, and planning, which have historically been sensitive to issues of territorial vulnerability and fragility. It will focus on the spatial, cultural and infrastructural dimensions of food production, distribution and consumption in particularly fragile contexts. Contributions that explore how food spaces shape territories and identities, as well as their power to influence (positively and negatively) environmental and socio-economic issues, are welcome. Particular attention will be given to studies focusing on how the spatial and design approaches can contribute to more resilient food systems, and can impact on spatial quality/beauty (on an urban and regional scale), sustainability and inclusiveness of places (according to the principles of the New European Bauhaus).

The track will also address forms of system design related to food systems, focusing on the material and organisational infrastructures that support contemporary food networks, novel neighbourhood infrastructures through spatial design approaches. Topics also include innovation in packaging, resource management, and strategies for reducing food waste and loss.

3 | Reclaiming urban food governance and the right to food

This track addresses the complex relationships between food governance, socio-environmental justice, and the right to food, particularly in contexts marked by social vulnerability, health inequalities, climate pressures, geopolitical conflicts, or migration dynamics. On the one hand, the section examines how different governance approaches, monitoring perspectives, or food system interventions may privilege certain values over others, addressing some challenges while leaving others unacknowledged or not adequately explored. On the other hand, this section tackles key concepts – such as socio-ecological justice, food democracy, and the right to food – asking how they are addressed and redefined through actors’ interactions, governance practices, and

policy-making, particularly in times of critical urgencies and values' redefinition.
Linking urban food systems governance with wider ethical, ecological, and social concerns, the track invites to critically rethink the very foundations in which governance dynamics unfold and how this may provide new grounds for creating powerful alliances and advancing contemporary food system action.
It invites contributions that focus on food-related needs and rights, with particular attention to the spatial implications of these dynamics: in which places and spaces do needs manifest themselves? Are rights constructed? Are alliances consolidated?

4 | Critical thoughts on the role and impact of technology and AI in food planning

This track addresses the transformative role of technology and AI in reshaping food systems and their implications for spatial planning, infrastructure and governance. Digitalisation, automation and data-driven innovation are increasingly reconfiguring supply chains, logistics and food mobility, with significant potentials as well as consequences for urban and regional planning. Technologies – such as vertical farming, soil-free production systems and drone-based distribution – are often promoted as solutions for sustainability and resilience, yet their spatial, social and political dimensions require critical assessment. Historical experiences highlight the need for a critical planning perspective on technological transitions.
In the agroecology debate, alternative pathways – including open-source software, digital commons and technologies that support producer-led empowerment – are under discussion. Attention is given to social, health and environmental implications, including food accessibility, food justice, soil health, climate resilience and more-than-human relations.
The track foregrounds questions of power, ownership and control in food-related technologies. It asks who benefits from technological innovation, who is excluded, and how new forms of dependency are produced through digital platforms, proprietary technologies and data extraction.

5 | Dealing with patrimonialisation, foodification and changing foodscapes

This track investigates the complex relationships between the valorisation of food conceived as "heritage", and processes of economic and tourism development, examining how the cultural and economic promotion of gastronomy transforms territories and neighbourhoods from a spatial and socio-economic perspective. It explores the ambivalent effects of these transformations and the way they change foodscapes, from the strengthening of local identities to forms of territorial gentrification and socio-spatial inequality.
Key themes include accessibility to food and land, as well as the "dark side" of food labels and districts and the commodification of culinary heritage. Addressing phenomena such as food deserts and unequal access to quality food, the track also reflects on the broader phenomenon of foodification and patrimonialisation (Davallon, 2006; 2015) of productive territories, in which food becomes a driver of urban change, territorial branding and cultural capital. Contributions on how people navigate changing foodscapes and access food while their neighbourhood or city is affected by foodification are also welcome. Linking perspectives on cultural, tourism and economic implications, the track invites critical contributions on how food-based territorial development can reconcile authenticity, inclusiveness and sustainability.

6 | Bridging research and practice for a food transition

This year AESOP Sustainable Food Planning will foresee a specific track dedicated to contributions from professionals, practitioners, NGOs, administrators, and policy stakeholders, to continue fostering an essential dialogue between research, policies, and practices. We are open to abstracts and sessions contributions in a variety of formats – e.g. open meetings, roundtables, panels, work-in-progress – that link to themes and approaches of the conference.

7 | Special session proposal