

ENHANCE PhD Winter School 2025

**Urbanism in the age of polycrisis:
Uncertainty, complexity, and transformation**

Call For Participants



Call for participants, September 11
Abstract submission, September 30
Notification of acceptance, October 2
Online phase, November 10-14
On-site Symposium, December 1-2
On-site workshop, December 3-5

Chair and Institute for Urban Design,
RWTH Aachen University

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ORGANISER

KEY DATES

Urbanism in the age of polycrisis: uncertainty, complexity, and transformation

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City-regions are increasingly shaped by converging pressures such as climate change, migration, economic volatility, energy transitions, and technological transformations. Their interaction does not simply accumulate risks but instead generates new, often unexpected dynamics that reorganise spatial, social, and ecological systems. What may appear as isolated shocks—a flood, a housing shortage, or an energy crisis—can cascade across scales and trigger emergent configurations that challenge established trajectories. Research has offered valuable insights into single crises; however, existing frameworks often struggle to capture their interdependencies and emergent effects. Practice, in turn, is confronted with a dilemma: should governance seek to stabilise existing goals, or should it embrace uncertainty as a generative condition for transformation? Therefore, the outlook is far from straightforward. Should city-regions be understood as adaptive systems preserving continuity, or as sites where disruptive pressures produce fundamentally new socio-spatial configurations? Can governance frameworks remain effective if they only react to crises, or must they open space for shifting priorities and unforeseen pathways? And can transitions follow universal models, or do they unfold as plural, context-specific processes?

These questions underline that polycrisis is not only about the accumulation of risks but about the uncertainty of how systems respond. Furthermore, such tensions expose the limits of approaches that seek linear control and highlight the need to view city-regions as evolving through emergence, adaptation, and differentiation. To structure this inquiry, the Winter School adopts three lenses. One lens examines how crises reshape socio-spatial structures, morphologies, and cohesion. Another lens considers governance and knowledge under uncertainty, asking whether tools and institutions should secure continuity or enable transformation. A third lens explores transition pathways, focusing on ecological, infrastructural, and institutional change across contexts. Together, these lenses offer a framework for understanding city-regions in polycrisis as dynamic arenas where disruptions, uncertainties, and transformations intersect.

The winter school offers PhD candidates the opportunity to engage with the three lenses on urbanism in the age of polycrisis through a format that combines debate and collaborative work. It builds directly on the guiding questions outlined above and translates them into a structured two-phase programme. An online preparation phase introduces shared tools and perspectives, ensuring that participants arrive with a common ground for discussion. An on-site week then links symposium debates with collaborative workshops, moving from individual research presentations to comparative, group-based explorations. In this way, the winter school connects thematic engagement with academic practice, creating a setting where participants can exchange across disciplines and regions while strengthening the skills needed to grow as independent researchers.

Key learning outcomes:

- Strengthen research design by revising and testing arguments through structured feedback and peer exchange.
- Communicate research effectively by improving writing, presentation, and debating skills.
- Build international networks and gain experience in collaborative research across disciplines and regions.

We warmly invite PhD candidates to submit an abstract of 150–200 words that presents the core focus of their ongoing PhD research and positions it in relation to one or more of the three lenses outlined above. The abstract should briefly state the research question, methodological approach, and expected contribution, and explain how the work engages with the guiding questions.

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Funding and accreditation: The Winter School is accredited with 4 ECTS by the Doctoral Academy of RWTH Aachen University, ensuring formal academic recognition of participation. At the same time, mobility costs are covered by the ENHANCE Alliance through ERASMUS+, making the programme accessible across partner institutions and providing an excellent opportunity to advance doctoral research in an international setting.

Location: Aachen, Germany

Organiser: Chair and Institute for Urban Design, RWTH Aachen University

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