

Dr.-Eng. Zahra Breshna

Architect | Urban Planner | Researcher

Profile

Zahra Breshna is an architect, urban planner, and researcher with more than 20 years of experience across cultural contexts, scales, and institutions. Her work bridges theory and practice, tradition and innovation, ranging from architectural design to large-scale urban development. Based in both Berlin and Kabul, she integrates academic research, planning expertise, and institutional leadership. She has contributed to post-conflict reconstruction, urban governance reform, and cultural heritage safeguarding. Zahra founded URBAN STEPS as a means to rethink planning in rapidly evolving, often fragile urban environments through responsive and context-based strategies.

Professional Experience (Selection)

Selected Professional Milestones

- **Founder & Director, URBAN STEPS** | 2021–present
a cross-cultural urban learning and applied research program. Developed five methodological approaches, to strengthen planning systems in fragile contexts.
- **Director, Breshna Foundation for Culture** | 2021–present
Nonprofit platform to preserve, promote, and pioneer Afghanistan's 20th-century cultural heritage.
- **Head of Urban Planning, Kabul New City / DCDA** | 2010–2012
Strategic planning for a new metropolitan area of over 3 million inhabitants; inter-agency coordination in post-conflict conditions.
- **Founder & Consultant, ZBC – Zahra Breshna Consulting** | 2007–present
Transnational planning and architecture consultancy with cross-sectoral cooperation and award-winning designs.
- **Head of Urban Heritage, Ministry of Urban Development (Afghanistan)** | 2003–2006
Initiated and led Afghanistan's first national safeguarding program for urban heritage; with regulation guidelines, field-based surveys and training formats.
- **Co-Founder, Breshna & Thiele Architects**, Berlin | 1997–2007

Architectural projects, competition awards, and large-scale project management in collaborations.

Academic Background

PhD in Urban and Regional Planning (Dr.-Ing.), Technical University of Karlsruhe (now KIT), 2004

Dissertation: “Das historische Zentrum von Kabul – Grundlagen für eine Strategie der Wiederbelebung” (Strategic guidelines for revival of Kabul’s historic center), published 2007, ISBN 978-386644-104-0)

Diploma in Architecture (Dipl.-Ing.), KIT, 1995

Thesis: “Reorganization of Industrial Wasteland – Linz, Austria,” exhibited in “Die Herausforderung,” (The challenge, 1995)

Contributions

- Author of monographs and journal articles on urbanism and resilience
- Speaker at international conferences and expert panels
- Expert evaluator and advisor to governmental and cultural institutions
- Award-winning designer and evaluator

Gallery of selected contextual images related to URBAN STEPS: 5 methodical approaches

Gallery of selected contextual images related to URBAN STEPS: 5 methodical approaches

Uncover / Study (U/S)

“Transformation begins by making the invisible visible.”

Revitalize / Training (R/T)

Development of safeguarding strategies and guidelines

Revitalize / Training (R/T)

Training a new generation of planners through peer-learning formats

Bridge / Evolving (B/E)

Connecting past and future, tradition and innovation—by evolving

Activate / Planning (A/P)

From insights to implementation: planning as a strategic tool—scenario design