

Call for papers

1st International Congress

Vernacular architecture, a new paradigm?

September 18 - 19, 2025

The "Vernacular Architecture / Silk Roads" (RéSOIE) network aims to develop research on themes that focus on the way in which architectural and urban design, as well as lifestyles, adopt an environmental approach and adapt to climate change, by observing in particular the resilience of the structure and organization of buildings in relation to natural phenomena and extreme weather events (heat waves, droughts, floods, storms, etc.).

Based on study sites located along the ancient Silk Roads, from China to the Mediterranean and via Japan, Southeast Asia, India, the Persian world, the Bosphorus and the Balkans¹ and Africa, this conference focuses on the circulation of models related to housing and accommodations that welcome travelers on these land and sea routes. We will also question the ways in which these specific architectures can help us to design projects that are based on these models, which are often built in connection with local and climatic specificities.

In the early 1960s, at a time when international architecture was dominating the scene, Bernard Rudofsky's manifesto exhibition, *Architecture Without Architects*², brought the question of vernacular architecture back to the forefront. It valued indigenous building traditions, breaking with the principles of architectural modernism and denouncing the modern architecture that no longer responded to the essential desires and sensibilities of humanity. Since then the publication of books on vernacular architecture has continued to grow³, encouraging the development of a contemporary architecture related on local resources and construction methods and on traditional know-how.

Vernacular architecture is making a comeback, becoming a new horizon for contemporary architects. Deeply rooted in local contexts, it opposes the homogeneity of standardized models while reflecting the heritage of cultural exchanges, particularly those arising from the Silk Roads. Based on local construction traditions, it focuses on bio-based and geo-based materials and techniques specific to the local environment. This architectural approach adapts to the needs, climatic conditions and cultural specificities of a region, without depending on universal standards or a globalized aesthetic.

In light of research and of the projects that have emerged, particularly in France, over the past ten years⁴, the fears of a backward-looking, reactionary or nostalgic vision now seem to be outdated. This is also testified by the conference recently organized at ENSA Toulouse, "From the vernacular to the

¹ http://www.balkanarchitecture.org/about/introduction_2.php (accessed 23.10.2024).

² Bernard Rudofsky, *Architecture Without Architects, An Introduction to Non-Pedigreed Architecture*, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1964.

³ It is impossible to cite the abundant existing bibliography. The most exhaustive overview of which, for the period prior to the 1980s, was provided by Gwyn Meirion-Jones in the publication resulting from his thesis *The Vernacular Architecture of Brittany: An Essay in Historical Geography*. J. Donald; Exclusive distribution in the United States of America and Canada by Humanities Press, 1982, which was preceded by Eric Mercer's book, *English vernacular houses. A study of traditional farmhouses and cottages*. Royal Commission on Historical Monuments England, London, H. M. Stationery Office, 1975. Closer to us, we can also mention: Paul Oliver, *Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, 3 volumes and more recently Pierre Frey, *Learning from Vernacular : pour une nouvelle architecture vernaculaire*, Arles, Actes Sud, 2010, 173 p.

⁴ See, for example, the work of Atelier zéro carbone: <https://atelierzerocarbone.com/> or that of LAO architecture: <https://www.lao-scop.com/projet>.

contemporary: towards a low-carbon architecture", which aimed to focus on the fields opened up by the use of geo-based and bio-based materials⁵.

The symposium organized by the "Vernacular Architecture / Silk Roads" (RéSOIE) network in September 2025 proposes to explore the links between form, geographical location and climate in architectural construction from vernacular housing and travelers' accommodations along the ancient Silk Roads, considering their associated urban forms.

We also know that the ancient Silk Roads are still a dream for adventure seekers and fans of distant and exotic travels. Travel agencies continue to offer to hit the roads taken by famous explorers such Marco Polo or Ella Maillart. Archaeologists and geographers have travelled these routes since the nineteenth century and it is interesting to see how their stories, as well as the travel guides in French, Italian, German, English, Arabic, Turkish, Persian, Mandarin, etc. describe the architecture of the oasis-fortresses, the caravanserais and more generally the structures that housed the travelers. It will be interesting to evaluate how the discourses of these publications contribute to build a representation of the architectural specificities of each territory and to preserve a vernacular architecture, inspired by the traditional local habitat. This makes possible to assess the impact of tourism on the preservation and enhancement of a local architectural heritage, whose construction techniques, materiality and resilience also deserve to be carefully studied in order to draw lessons that could be useful to a Europe facing climate change.

The eyes of architects, landscape architects and urban planners, who are also travelers⁶, on vernacular architecture deserve to be questioned in depth to understand the place that this model holds in the development of human habitation over the centuries. We know that even the Moderns were able to decode the constructive, environmental and spatial qualities of these "architectures without architects" in various geographical and cultural realities, making them a source of inspiration for their projects.

Thus, we will try to answer several questions: To what extent do the specific spatial arrangements of vernacular habitats testify to a great resilience face of natural phenomena? What are the constructive implemented logics and to what extent do they reflect the reasons of rationality, whether in terms of project economics, choice of materials or spatial organization? What lessons can be learned from these spatial devices in order to improve thermal comfort and natural ventilation? How to mobilize the knowledge of specific territories, disseminate local knowledge and ensure its reception and appropriation by the global architectural scene but also by the general public? What is the impact of tourism on the preservation of a local architectural heritage? What narratives have been established by the designers of the space to enhance or appropriate the vernacular habitat over time? What measures have been selected and implemented? Can we place the current reception of this architecture in a series of receptions and how can it be characterized in relation to the others?

The approaches expected in the framework of this conference therefore aim at disciplinary crossovers and a wide coverage of the territories to be explored. They can be submitted by teachers and researchers engaged in professional practice or in various fields of research: architecture, cities and territories, science and technology for architecture, urban history, history of representations, history of tourism, geography, ethnography, anthropology, etc.

The expected contributions must enrich one of the following themes:

- Spatial arrangements and resilience to natural phenomena
- Constructive logics and reasons of rationality
- Impact of tourism on the preservation of a local architectural heritage
- Narratives and devices of contemporary architecture and urbanism in relation to vernacular housing
- Circulation of models and local specificities. Identity and form of authenticity, aesthetics

⁵ « Du vernaculaire au contemporain : vers une architecture bas carbone »

<https://lra.toulouse.archi.fr/lra/activites/colloques-manifestations-seminaires/ArchiBasCarbone> (accessed 23.10.2024)

⁶ See the international study days of the cycle "The Architect's Travels", coordinated by Antonio Brucculeri.

How to proceed

Proposals for papers will include the following elements:

- surname(s), first name(s) of author(s)
- position and institution (university, laboratory)
- Contact (e-mail address, telephone)
- title of the paper
- summary of the communication (objectives, issues, problem, methodology, results) - 3000 characters (including spaces)
- Short bio-bibliography

Calendar

Proposals for papers should be sent (word .docx or .odt format) by February 15, 2025 at the latest to the following address: av.resoie@paris-belleville.archi.fr

The Scientific Committee will give its response in March 2025.

The publication of the proceedings of the conference is scheduled for 2026, with the texts expected to be submitted in November 2025.

The valorization of scientific results through a selection of articles will be carried out on the dedicated Hypotheses notebook (<https://vernarchasr.hypotheses.org/credits>), from December 2025.

Proposals for the second conference in 2027 will be sent in February 2027.

Organizing Committee:

The organizing committee will be provided by the master's and doctoral students of the 4 laboratories involved, with:

Enrico Chapel (Professor ENSA Toulouse, LRA)

Thierry Mandoul (Associate Professor ENSA Paris Malaquais, ACS – AUSser)

Cristiana Mazzoni (Professor ENSA Paris Belleville, IPRAUS – AUSser)

Joanne Vajda (Associate Professor ENSA Paris Malaquais, AHTTEP – AUSser)

Scientific committee:

Meghal Arya (Professor, Faculty of Architecture, Centre for Environment Planning & Technology - CEPT University, Ahmedabad, India, to be confirmed)

Stefana Bădescu (Associate Professor Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning of Timisoara, Romania)

Enrico Chapel (Professor ENSA Toulouse, LRA)

Paolo Girardelli (Professor Boğaziçi University, Bebek-Istanbul, Turquie)

Thierry Mandoul (Associate Professor ENSA Paris Malaquais, ACS – AUSser)

Cristiana Mazzoni (Professor ENSA Paris Belleville, IPRAUS – AUSser)

Marius Miclaus (Architect, president of the Archaeus Foundation, Romania)

Daniel Pinson (Professor Emeritus of Aix-Marseille University)

Joseph Rustom (Director of the Oriental Library, Saint Joseph University, Beirut, Lebanon)

Anda-Lucia Spânu (Historian, Specialist in Historical Images of Cities, Institute of Socio-Human Research Sibiu, Romanian Academy, Romania)

Panayotis Tournikiotis (Professor, Dean, School of architecture, National Technical University of Athens)

Joanne Vajda (Associate Professor ENSA Paris Malaquais, AHTTEP – AUSser)