

The background of the poster is a composite of three aerial photographs. The leftmost image shows a wide river with a sandy or rocky bed and some vegetation on the banks. The middle image shows a dense, dark forest. The rightmost image shows a large, light-colored, textured area, possibly a snowfield or a large body of water with ice.

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International PhD Seminar

Environmental Histories of Architecture

8-9 June 2026

AAC 132, Foyer SG, EPFL

Organising and scientific committee:

Caterina Franco, Postdoctorante, Laboratoire d'Urbanisme, EPFL, caterina.franco@epfl.ch

Nicolas Chachereau, Chercheur, Laboratory for the History of Science and Technology, EPFL, nicolas.chachereau@epfl.ch

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Environmental Histories of Architecture

A dialogue has started in recent years between architectural research and environmental history. This doctoral seminar aims at exploring the heuristic value of further interweaving these fields. How does environmental history, in all its diversity, bring new insights to the study of architecture and of urban and built spaces more generally? Conversely, to what extent can urbanism and architectural history, broadly conceived, enrich historiographies concerned with the reciprocal relationships between human societies and the natural world?

The seminar will provide an opportunity for PhD students and more experienced researchers from the fields of history and architecture to exchange. Furthermore, the seminar will deal with transversal issues, for instance the new archives and sources mobilised by environmental history, the move away from an author-centred approach of architectural history, and the interdisciplinary nature of environmental studies.

Monday June 8 (AAC 132 and SG Foyer, EPFL)

9:00 Welcome

9:15-9:45 Introduction

Caterina Franco (EPFL) and Nicolas Chachereau (EPFL)

9:45-11:30 Climate & Energy

Presentations and discussion with Daniel A. Barber (TU Eindhoven),

Abdulrahman El-Taliawi (Politecnico di Torino), Foivos Geralis (Princeton

University), Leo Paulmichl (Universität Kassel) and Margarida N. Waco (ETH Zürich).

11:30-13:00 Lunch

13:00- 14:45 Materials, Resources & Waste

Presentations and discussion with Sarah Nichols (EPFL),

Riccardo Acquistapace (EPFL), Thiago Maso (TU Eindhoven) and

Chenchen Yan (Princeton University).

Break

15:00-16:45 Risk & Pollution

Presentations and discussion with Alexandre Elsig (Université de Neuchâtel),

Jules Calage (EPFL), Vasileios Chanis (EPFL), Menghe Heloise Guo (TU

Eindhoven) and Jana von Wyl (ETH Zürich).

Break

17:30-19:00 Public Lecture at SG Foyer

“Thermal Practices”, Daniel A. Barber (TU Eindhoven).

What is a practice? Considered patterns and habits in the interiors of the built environment have resonance far beyond the walls of a building or the limits of a city. This is especially so relative to thermal practices - the ways we make ourselves comfortable in buildings. Heating and air conditioning systems require intensive fossil fuels, with numerous radiating effects locally, regionally, and globally. Life indoors is determinant in both equity and opportunity for the present and future. This presentation will frame the challenging discussion of comfort, fuels, and thermal practices by exploring some buildings from the past that offer alternatives, and also exploring how architects can motivate transformative thermal practices in the present.

20:00 Apéritif at Gina Restaurant

Tuesday June 9 (AAC 132, EPFL)

9:00-10:45 More-than-human

Presentations and discussion with Sofia Nannini (Politecnico di Torino), Capucine Foquin (EPFL), Giorgia Greco (Politecnico di Torino), Dimitris Hartonas (Princeton University) and Stefan Sauter (EPFL).

Break

11:00-12:45 Spatial & Temporal Scales

Presentations and discussion with Filippo De Pieri (Politecnico di Torino), Clément Cattin (EPFL), Igor Vlasenko (EPFL), Alexander Rusnak (EPFL) and Yosuke Nakamoto (ETH Zürich).

13:00-14:30 Lunch

14:30-16:00 Closing lecture

**“Choosing the right places, telling the wrong stories: bringing environmental histories on the shore of a pond”,
Filippo De Pieri (Politecnico di Torino).**

16:00-16:30 Conclusion

Nicolas Chachereau (EPFL) and Caterina Franco (EPFL)

The thematic sessions

The seminar is organized around five thematic sessions and two lectures. In the sessions, we explore different points of contact between architecture and the environment (themes are described below). We ask: How does taking environmental themes and concerns into account affect research and narratives on the history of architecture? We aim at reflecting on concepts, theories and approaches that can/could inspire an environmental investigation of architectural history; on the archives and sources that can be mobilized to write such histories; on what is gained in such approaches, what recedes into the background, and what might just be old wine in new bottles.

Session 1: Climate & Energy

On a planet on fire, the history of architecture is paying increasing attention to the relationships between buildings and the climate, understood both locally and globally. It has also inquired about their place in integrated energy systems. Researchers have asked: How was architecture influenced by temperatures and weather conditions in different regions? How was it shaped by the aspiration of creating a stable indoor climate separated from outdoor climate? How was architecture influenced by major energy sources? What was its place in the social processes that brought about global climate change? In this session, we discuss the themes and examples that are brought into

focus by asking such questions, and the concepts and approaches fruitful for these enquiries.

Session 2: Materials, Resources & Waste

By approaching architectural history materially, the researcher moves beyond the study of architecture as simple artifact, by unfolding the political, economic, and ecological processes that lie behind the construction processes. In this perspective, understanding a single building or landscape implies identifying the resources exploited and the waste generated. The movements, the modification of extractions sites, ecological and social consequences paid by exploited territories become visible, in an interconnected planetary geography. In this session, thinking again about concepts and approaches, we question commonly accepted narratives around modern construction materials such as concrete or aluminium. We ask what new geographies emerge through such a focus and how it brings to the fore non-Western construction processes.

Session 3: Risk & Pollution

In this third session, we look at a theme with a long tradition in environmental history, namely pollution. Protests, campaigns and debates over industrial fumes and contaminated water reach back centuries. Despite such repeatedly articulated concerns, we live surrounded by toxicants in the atmosphere, in the

water, in the ground, in buildings, in everyday objects and in plants and animal bodies (including our own). What is the place of architecture in this history? How has it affected human health and ecosystems? To what extent and in what ways were risk and pollution considered by designers and planners? We ask how the history of architecture can contribute to a better understanding of the making of our toxic world, and how a focus on pollution changes the history of architecture. We consider what historians of architecture can learn from other disciplines when it comes to risk, pollution, and toxics. We also reflect on the use of concepts such as “risk”.

Session 4: More-than-human

The way we narrate architectural history has recently been challenged and influenced by philosophers and historians’ attempts to move beyond a human-centered conception of the world and of its history. If planning and designing buildings are human activities, how can we take non-human lives into consideration? How have plants, animals, and bacteria influenced the history of planning land and cities, and of designing and building architecture? Western modernization and industrialization seem to be a history of excluding non-human agencies, commodifying both plants and animals, and annihilating micro-organisms. Could a look at more ancient and non-Western societies reveal alternative inter-species relationships?

We ask: what are the non-human agencies hidden in architectural histories?
Which archives should we explore to include animals, plants, bacteria and other non-human lives into historical narrative?

Session 5: Spatial & Temporal Scales

In this last session, we reflect upon a trend that has become clear in our discussion so far: “environmental histories of architecture” often move beyond the building, focusing on its connections with other entities, sites and landscapes, or even with the planet. Similarly, historians have suggested that the separation between (short) human time and (long-lasting) geological time is called into question by the Anthropocene, when we start considering humans as a geological force. In other words, understanding the history of architecture environmentally seems to face a challenge: At what temporal and spatial scale(s) should we investigate and narrate this history? How can we articulate different spatial and temporal scales? What remains of “architecture” when the buildings and their planners are relegated to the background? In the session, we also consider the city as a way of discussing these questions, in the light of a tendency in recent architecture and planning history to shift the focus away from the urban towards glaciers, deserts or the countryside.

Invited guests

Daniel A. Barber, Professor, Architecture History and Theory,
Eindhoven University of Technology

Alexandre Elsig, Maître d'enseignement et de recherche, Institut d'Histoire,
Université de Neuchâtel

Sofia Nannini, Ricercatrice, Dipartimento di Architettura e Design,
Politecnico di Torino

Sarah Nichols, Assistant Professor, Theory of Environment and Materials in Architecture,
Institute of Architecture, EPFL

Participants PhD

Riccardo Acquistapace, LAPIS, EDAR, EPFL

Jules Calage, LHST, EDAR, EPFL

Clément Cattin, LAST, EDAR, EPFL

Vasileios Chanis, LAPIS, EDAR, EPFL

Abdulrahman El-Taliawi, DAD, Politecnico di Torino

Capucine Foquin, ALICE, EDAR, EPFL

Foivos Geralis, Architecture, Princeton University

Theodora Giovanazzi, TPOD, EDAR, EPFL

Natalia Gómez Mateu, ALICE, EDAR, EPFL

Giorgia Greco, DAD, Politecnico di Torino

Menghe (Heloise) Guo, AHT, TU Eindhoven

Dimitris Hartonas, Architecture, Princeton University

Thiago Maso, AHT, TU Eindhoven

Yosuke Nakamoto, GTA, ETH Zürich

Ella Neumaier, HITAM, EDAR, EPFL

Leo Paulmichl, HTA, Uni Kassel

Tiffanie Paré, THEMA, EDAR, EPFL

Alexander Rusnak, DHLAB, Digital Humanities, EPFL

Stefan Sauter, HITAM, EADR, EPFL

Igor Vlasenko, LAB-U, EADR, EPFL

Margarida N. Waco, GTA, ETH Zürich

Jana von Wyl, GTA, ETH Zürich

Chenchen Yan, Architecture, Princeton University

