

City and Nature

Approaches from
an environmental-
history angle



Haus-Rucker-Cc: Palmtree Island, 1971

**4th International Conference of the Association of Architecture and Urban Planning Historians
24–25 October 2024. Real Colegio María Cristina, San Lorenzo de El Escorial**

Architecture manipulates form, matter, and energy to create environments with a certain cultural stamp, and this obvious but rarely voiced statement signals the potential of an environmental history of the discipline, the purpose of which would be to inform on the highly diverse ways by which human beings have met the challenge of making nature livable again.

Since the mid-19th century, architecture has been scrutinized in terms of concepts —styles, authors, societies, cultures, production modes— mostly taken from Art History and the Human Sciences. This has resulted in narratives of great taxonomic and hermeneutic power, but which in general have avoided getting trapped in the web of starting concepts. The historiography of architecture has traditionally been constructed ‘from the top down,’ but today we can and must also try to build it ‘from the bottom up,’ through themes like the environment, comfort, energy, landscape, material culture, and experience of the human body; themes not only included among contemporary concerns, but which are fundamental to an understanding of historical facts in their particular contexts.

The environmental approach encompasses everything from the smallest and most specific to the broadest and most generic, and in its ambition to embrace architecture at large, it also covers the city, which is as much a powerful economic, political, and social construct as it is a complex network of ecosystems: the quintessential environmental invention of humans. Hence the importance of making the city the theme of the first Conference of Environmental History of Architecture ever to be held in Spain and possibly in the world, the objective being less to provide set answers than to raise questions that open the door to revising, refining, or updating our knowledge of the past, and also some of our historiographic presuppositions.

How has climate influenced the shaping of cities? To what extent can we speak of climate determinism? How have urban schemes changed in accordance with different hygiene paradigms, and in accordance with the no less diverse paradigms of energy administration or agrarian, artisanal, and industrial production? In what ways has urban space expressed the grids and systems of energy supply? What has been the connection between the environmental infrastructure and the formal suprastructure of cities, and between cities and their immediate natural surroundings? How has the countryside/city dialectic evolved? How has the landscape become part of the urb? Has the city somehow been a laboratory of nature? Can we at all talk about cities as environmental utopias, or as dystopias or heterotopias? In what measure have different contexts and material cultures determined the configuration of European cities? And what about Ibero-American and all other cities in the world? Up to what point did typological connections and the technological exchanges between Europe, America, and other continents rupture climate determinism? And, to close, what meteorological challenges does the environmental history of architecture pose for the study of cities? To what degree does it resemble and differ from Environmental History of strictly ecological roots? Up to what level does it enrich and complete the conventional paradigms of the historiography?

MESAS TEMÁTICAS

PROPOSED THEME TABLES

1. Climate and city: beyond environmental determinism

That climate has over the course of history been among the factors determining where people settle and how cities shape up is a commonplace made explicit in a tradition: that of climate determinism. Nevertheless, and beyond clichés and simplifications, we can keep delving into the role that climate plays in urban construction through relevant questions: What types of climate determinism has history seen? In what ways have urban schemes addressed environmental problems, and to what extent have they also been independent of them? How have form and technology interacted in the effort to solve these problems? What has been the response to the need to reconcile the social and representational idea of the city —polis— with the energetic and environmental structure that sustains its form?

2. Hygiene and city: environmental infrastructures and suprastructures

Without becoming part of the long tradition of Hippocratism and its many variants, hygiene was a fundamentally modern demand which from the 19th century onward gave rise to the cities of the Industrial Revolution. From the beginning, hygiene —from territorial water catchment to the toilet valve— was treated as a matter of technical and administrative management tackled through the ‘infrastructure’ idea. Nevertheless, its effects on the city’s monumental space, on the ‘suprastructure,’ were explicit and determinant, also from the very start. How are we to understand the historical links between urban infrastructures and suprastructures? Outside technology, can we speak of a ‘symbolic expression’ of hygiene and comfort? How, in the final analysis, do the technical and the formal, the quantitative and the qualitative, overlap in the problem of urban hygiene?

3. Territory and city: scale, production, self-sufficiency

In its original conception, the city was the center of a productive territory, at once the administrative heart and the economic complement of a jurisdiction. The industrial city broke this arrangement, on one hand increasing cities’ economic and political scope to include much larger territories, and on the other hand detaching itself from agrarian and livestock production. The result was a rupture of great importance, the consequences of which we now associate with the debates being waged on the emptying of rural areas and the possible productive renaturation of cities; debates that have to be undertaken from broad angles of history. What models of territorial administration did traditional cities use? As for the loss of farmland, what ideological mechanisms and material compensations did it give rise to? What phases has the country/city gone through?

4. Landscape and city: environmental utopias, dystopias, or heterotopias?

Due to its scale, to hygiene and health demands, and to the influence of different ‘ideologies of Arcadia,’ the modern city has been as much a scene of power and economy as a scene of an environmental representation that, more often than not, has sustained ambitious, complex systems of plantation, gardens, and parks. What are the origins of city-naturalization processes, and under what paradigms have they been carried out? How have models of the natural-urban model evolved? Is it possible to speak of the city as an environmental landscape with laws of its own? Up to what point has the ‘green scene’ of the city also been a scene of ideologies, of representations of power? And finally: how much utopia, dystopia, or heterotopia has been present in environmental imageries of the city?

5. City and Nature in Ibero-America: contexts, societies, and cultures

The encounter of America and Europe was a fundamental milestone in history, including in the sphere of urban practices. In the transformation of American territory through different settlement patterns, it was from the start important to address the problem of building in climates and landscapes that were very different from Europe’s, and in contexts that, within the continent, took the form of climate islands, precisely because of the variety. The process led to a very rich urban picture and landscape. A true laboratory of the modern city, Ibero-America is so complex a territory that it deserves the fullest amount of historiographic attention, and this can be given through certain key questions: How were the imported types, technologies, and lifestyles hybridized with the material cultures of each place? What were the channels of exchange, in environmental matters, between both sides of the Atlantic? To what extent did climatic and environmental peculiarities have a bearing on Ibero-American cities? How far can we go in discussing an ‘Environmental History of the Ibero-American city’?

6. City and nature beyond the West: contexts, societies, and cultures

One way to define civilizations —the etymologically most adequate way— involves using the concept that gives substance to the actual term ‘civilization’: the city. Studying and comparing cities is understanding the different ways in which humans have settled in the world, and also the relations they have established with their surroundings over time. Thus, any journey into the historical connection between nature and the city —especially in times characterized by intensified globalization processes and by the subsequent emergence of global histories— ought to transcend the West and include urban models of other societies and cultural traditions.



SELECTION PROCESS AND INSTRUCTIONS FOR AUTHORS

The Association of Architecture and Urban Planning Historians (AhAU) invites all researchers interested in the Environmental History of architecture and the city to present their scientific works at the 4th AhAU International Conference. The event seeks to be interdisciplinary in nature, addressing issues and areas of knowledge related to the theme proposed. Rather than simply a large gathering of researchers, it endeavors to provide a platform for a series of open debates in which speakers and the audience can discuss the various topics tackled. Proposals submitted will therefore be assumed to come with the two-way commitment of attending the conference in person and presenting the work orally.

The selection of papers will be done in two phases, both by blind peer review. For phase 1, authors are requested to send in by email (congreso.ciudadynaturaleza@ahau.es) a summary of their research, no fewer than 800 and no more than 1000 words. Indicate the theme table your work falls under, and the text should come with a representative image as well as a bibliography prepared in accordance with the format provided on the conference's official website. Also attach a short CV (min. 200 words, max. 2 pages). To ensure anonymity, this resumé will of course be taken out during the blind peer review process. Both the abstract and CV files will be named as indicated in the template. Papers with more than two authors will not be admitted.

Acceptance of a summary amounts to an invitation to write a **full text** of approximately 4000 words (notes and bibliography included), which will undergo a similar blind review. The author of the approved summary will sign up for the event, then submit the full text for phase 2 of the selection process, ensuring it has the quality required for it to go into the Conference Minutes to be printed by a solid publishing house included in the SPI.

Depending on the number of texts received and the coherence of their theme lines, phase 2 will select the papers of greatest interest, quality- as well as content-wise. Their authors will then be invited to present them within the framework of a specific theme table, orally and in person, within a span of about 15 minutes. The conference organization reserves the right to assign each selected presentation to the theme table it deems most appropriate, and decide the definitive numbers and themes.

Papers not selected for oral presentation will be included in the Minutes book, granted they respond to the observations made by the selection committee at both review phases, and comply with the style manual furnished by the organizers at the time the proposals were accepted. Authors who do not pay the registration fee on time and in the form required, who in their papers fail to make the corrections suggested in successive reviews, who do not comply with deadlines for submitting revised texts, who do not abide by originality criteria and standards of scientific rigor, or who ignore established editorial norms will be excluded from the publication.

The official languages of the conference are Spanish and English, but all public sessions will be held in Spanish, except in the case where most contributions to a particular theme table are presented in English.

To communicate with the organization and to submit proposals and final papers, use this email: congreso.ciudadynaturaleza@ahau.es

CALENDAR

20 November 2023: Deadline for sending summaries.

8 January 2023: Notification of acceptance/approval of summaries.

1 April 2024: Deadline for sending full texts.

8 April 2024: Deadline for registration. Obligatory for authors.

31 May 2024: Notification of selection of oral presentations, with notes to guide the revisions of the complete texts.

24 June 2024: Deadline for submission of revised texts for publication in Minutes.

13 September 2024: Last day of pre-registration for attendees (reduced fee).

22 October 2024: Last day of registration for attendees (regular fee).

24–25 October 2024: 4th AhAU International Conference.

REGISTRATION FEES

For authors: 130 euros by 8 April 2024. Payment must be made before or on this date for papers to go on to the second revision phase and be included in the book of Minutes, whether or not they are selected for oral presentation.

For attendees. Reduced: 130 euros by 13 September 2024. **Regular:** 160 euros by 22 October 2024

For students: 40 euros up to 22 October 2024

Paying the registration fee (for authors and attendees) gives the right to a certificate and a copy of the proceedings book.

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