

AR-694

Environmental histories of architecture

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Cursus	Sem.	Type
Architecture and Sciences of the City		Opt.

Language of teaching	English
Credits	2
Session	
Exam	Oral presentation
Workload	60h
Hours	40
Courses	16
Exercises	24
Number of positions	

Frequency

Only this year

Summary

The course explores the emerging dialogue between environmental and architectural history, examining how architecture related with climate, energy, non-human agency and pollution in the past. The programme consists of lectures by guest professors and discussions based on shared bibliography.

Content

INVITED LECTURERS: Daniel Barber (Eindhoven University of Technology); Alexandre Elsig (Université de Neuchâtel), Sofia Nannini (Politecnico di Torino)

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. The event is also the occasion to create a collaboration with the doctoral program in Storia e Progetto at Politecnico di Torino, where a group is developing research in environmental history.

The seminar will include two keynotes given by Daniel Barber (Tu Eindhoven) and Filippo de Pieri (Politecnico di Torino) and five thematic sessions, with contributions of: Alexandre Elsig (Université de Neuchâtel), Sofia Nannini (Politecnico di Torino) and Sarah Nichols (EPFL).

The presentations and discussions will address the complex relationships between history of architecture and the environment around five themes:

- Architecture, climate control and climate change
- Material approach to architecture: extraction sites, energy systems and resource exploitation
- Architecture, pollution, waste and natural risks
- Non-human agency in architecture
- Architecture and environmental awareness

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.

Doctoral candidates are asked to participate actively in the entire two-day seminar by preparing a presentation for one of the thematic sessions and engaging actively in the discussions.

These presentations will summarise an article or chapter from a shared bibliography, highlighting theses, methods,

problems and questions relevant to a given session. If applicable, participants are also welcome to enrich their presentations by including elements of their own research that relate to, echo or contradict aspects of the discussed text. The readings for the presentation and programme will be shared with participants three weeks before the seminar (mid-May).

Note

To help organise the presentations and thematic readings, participants should submit a concise abstract of their dissertation project to caterina.franco@epfl.ch by **April 30, 2026**.

Keywords

environmental history, architectural history, energy, climate, pollutions, infrastructure, non-human agency

Learning Prerequisites

Required courses

A basic knowledge of history and architectural history of the 20th century is welcomed, but not compulsory.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, the student must be able to:

- Learn about a recent scientific literature on environmental histories
- Increase awareness of the methodological and epistemological aspects of historical research

Resources

Moodle Link

- <https://go.epfl.ch/AR-694>