

CHAIR'S REPORT: ARCHITECTURE INTO THE UNKNOWN

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INTRODUCTION

This report offers a short overview and reflection on the **Architecture into the Unknown** EAAE–ARCC Conference 2024. Its aim is to highlight the main ideas, discussions, and moments that shaped the event, to provide a sense of what unfolded over the days the participants spent together, and to acknowledge the collective work that made it possible.

The conference set out to open new conversations in architectural research by bringing together different cultures of inquiry and collaboration. As the biannual joint research conference of the EAAE and ARCC, it brought into dialogue two organisations with distinct yet complementary missions.

The European Association for Architectural Education (EAAE) is an international network of European schools of architecture committed to advancing the quality of architectural education and research across the continent. It provides a forum for shared discussion, exchange, and policy-building, promoting the interests of architecture schools as academic environments and fostering connections that

strengthen architectural education and scholarship in Europe.

The Architectural Research Centers Consortium (ARCC) is an international association of research centers, academies, and organisations dedicated to advancing architectural research. Through conferences, grants, workshops, and its journal **Enquiry**, ARCC promotes scholarship that contributes to improving the built environment. Its community includes architecture schools with established research programs, as well as industrial laboratories, government agencies, non-profits, and private practitioners, collectively supporting a broad research infrastructure for the discipline.

Through the ongoing collaboration between these two organisations, the conference brought researchers from Europe, North America, and many other regions into a shared space where contrasting methods, priorities, and perspectives could meet. Under the theme **Architecture into the Unknown**, the event encouraged participants to explore how architectural research can navigate—and respond meaningfully to—the rapidly shifting social, environmental, and technological challenges of our time.



Photo: Niels Rysz Olsen

CONFERENCE THEME

The conference title **Architecture into the Unknown** reflected an intention to examine how architectural research can respond to the profound transformations currently reshaping the discipline. Architecture today confronts a series of interlinked challenges such as the accelerating impacts of climate change, pressures on material and spatial resources, increasing demands for social responsibility and accountability, and the emergence of new digital and computational tools. These developments raise fundamental questions not only about disciplinary boundaries, design methods, creativity, and authorship, but also about how architectural education can prepare future practitioners to engage with rapidly changing societal, environmental, and technological conditions.

The call for papers addressed six topics, each corresponding to an area in which these contemporary challenges are particularly evident:

Sustainable Architecture. This topic invited contributions that engage with environmental pressures on architectural practice—potentially examining climate adaptation, resilient design strategies, circular economy principles, or ecological perspectives. The intention was to explore how environmental awareness might be integrated more systematically into design approaches and disciplinary thinking.

Innovative Materials and Construction. Here, the call sought research exploring new material practices and construction systems. Possible areas of inquiry included renewable or bio-based materials, retrofitting and reuse strategies, design for disassembly, or the implications of digital fabrication. The topic encouraged reflection on how technological, economic, and resource-related shifts are reshaping the material and technical foundations of architecture.

Ethics and Social Responsibility. This topic invited proposals addressing the expanding ethical dimensions of architectural work. Authors might explore issues of inclusivity, accessibility, social justice, environmental stewardship, or the ethical implications of AI and data-driven tools. The aim was to foster discussion on the social obligations and responsibilities embedded in architectural decision-making.

Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Approaches. The call encouraged contributions examining how architectural knowledge interacts with other fields, such as engineering, ecology, the humanities, or social sciences. Proposed work could address the opportunities and challenges of integrated or transdisciplinary approaches or investigate how disciplinary boundaries are shifting in response to complex contemporary problems.

Future Architectural Education. This topic focused on how architectural pedagogy is evolving in light of technological, environmental, and societal change.

Proposed contributions might explore new educational models, sustainability-oriented curricula, emerging technologies in teaching, or the skills and capacities future architects will require.

Open Category. This category provided space for proposals that did not fit neatly within the pre-defined topics but were relevant to the overall aims of the conference. It allowed contributors to introduce perspectives that expanded or challenged the thematic framework.

Applicants were invited to address the topics through several distinct contribution formats. **Papers** formed the central academic component, offering opportunities to present theoretical analyses, empirical studies, methodological developments, or examinations of educational practices. **Posters** provided a visual medium for communicating ongoing or recently completed research projects, enabling concepts and findings to be conveyed concisely through graphic and illustrative means. **Explorative Practices** was a new format introduced for this conference, designed



Photo: Naime Esra Akin

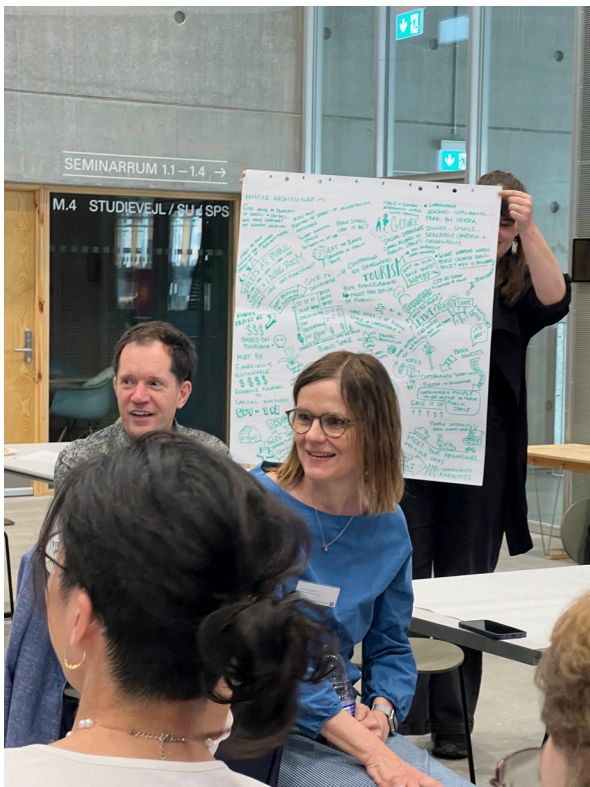


Photo: Claus Peder Pedersen

to accommodate alternative modes of inquiry. This format encompassed artistic, educational, participatory, and co-creative approaches that could take the form of artefacts, installations, performances, or workshop-based activities, offering perspectives not easily captured through conventional academic papers.

PEER-REVIEW PROCESS AND CONFERENCE PLANNING

The conference drew strong engagement from the wider architectural research community, with a total of 330 abstracts submitted: 290 papers, 15 posters, and 22 explorative practices. During the initial peer-review stage, each contribution was reviewed by two reviewers from EAAE and ARCC. This resulted in the acceptance of 179 abstracts—158 papers, 7 posters, and 12 explorative practices—which were invited for full submission. The full papers and explorative practice proposals were again reviewed by two reviewers, while posters did not undergo a second review. This process led to the final acceptance of 98 contributions, comprising 88 papers, 5 posters, and 5 explorative practices.

These figures correspond to an overall acceptance rate of 29.7%. Acceptance rates differed across formats, with papers accepted at 30.3%, posters at 33.3%, and explorative practices at 22.7%. Together, these patterns reflect both the breadth of interest in the conference themes and the selectivity of the review process.

The call proposed organising the conference sessions around three modes of inquiry: **Observatories**, focusing on broad societal or historical perspectives; **Laboratories**, centred on defined questions, tools, or experimental methods; and **Studios**, highlighting creative, practice-based, or pedagogical work. This model was intended to encourage encounters

across interdisciplinary boundaries by grouping presentations according to their conceptual orientation rather than their subject matter. However, as planning progressed, it became clear that combining this framework with the six topical categories and three contribution formats proved too complex. Many submissions spanned multiple themes and approaches, making it difficult to assign them coherently within a rigid three-perspective structure.

Consequently, sessions were organised according to the topics of the submissions, while the curatorial intent behind the original framework informed the grouping of contributions. Because many papers crossed thematic borders, the organisers took care to identify shared questions, methods, and concerns across the diverse proposals. This deliberate curation aimed to bring related perspectives into dialogue and to encourage participants to encounter work that complemented or challenged their own.

The final programme reflected a broad distribution of contributions across the six topics. Seven sessions addressed Sustainable Architecture, including one dedicated to explorative practice. Innovative Materials and Construction and Ethics and Social Responsibility were each represented by five sessions, while six sessions focused on Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Approaches. The theme of Future Architectural Education comprised seven sessions, again with one devoted to explorative practice. In addition, two sessions combined themes—one linking Innovative Materials and Construction with Ethics and Social Responsibility, and another bridging Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Approaches with Future Architectural Education. Finally, two sessions were organised under the Open Category, both dedicated to explorative practice.

THE CONFERENCE

The **Architecture into the Unknown** conference took place from 23 to 26 May 2024 at the Aarhus School of Architecture, which provided an environment characterised by artistic exploration, scientific inquiry, and practice-based learning. This atmosphere supported the conference's ambition to bring together diverse research cultures and to explore how architectural knowledge is produced, shared, and transformed across different contexts.

The conference programme was designed to reflect—and actively support—the multiplicity of approaches shaping contemporary architectural research. The large number and diversity of submissions illustrated the breadth of orientations, theoretical perspectives, and creative practices cur-



Photo: Stefan Darlan Boris

rently at work in the field. Participants represented a wide spectrum of academic, pedagogical, and practice-based engagements, offering a multifaceted view of how architectural knowledge is being articulated today. The richness of this material was further emphasised by the thematic overlaps between contributions, which revealed a discipline reassessing its ideals, methods, and responsibilities. Curated session groupings made these overlaps visible, enabling participants to navigate connections between environmental, social, technological, and educational concerns and to engage in conversations that extended beyond their immediate areas of expertise.

These ambitions were realised through an intensive four-day programme that brought together the conference's multiple components in mutually reinforcing ways. The programme featured **eighty-eight peer-reviewed papers and four explorative practice presentations**, distributed across **thirty-four thematic sessions as well as four poster presentations**. **Three keynote lectures, and three workshops**. This structure allowed participants to encounter a broad range of topics, formats, and modes of inquiry—from theoretical reflection and empirical analysis to creative experimentation, technical development, and pedagogical innovation.

Keynotes

The three keynote lectures provided shared framing points for the conference discussions. Conceived to

address the theme from different vantage points, they bridged academic research and professional practice and highlighted how future architectural approaches may evolve through material innovation, transdisciplinary collaboration, and sustained attention to environmental and social conditions.

Anders Lendager presented an approach to architectural practice centred on circularity and radical material reuse, demonstrating how new value chains



Photo: Claus Peder Pedersen

and technologies can emerge directly from design experimentation.

Alexandra Arènes showed how landscapes can be read and represented through transdisciplinary collaborations, inventive mapping techniques, and close attention to planetary processes.

Günther Vogt reflected on how landscapes can be interpreted and shaped through observation, material knowledge, and interdisciplinary cooperation, offering insights into future forms of urban coexistence.

Together, the keynotes expanded the conversation around architectural futures and underscored the value of connecting research, practice, and education when addressing contemporary challenges.

Workshops

Three workshops complemented the conference by offering hands-on spaces for discussion, experimentation, and methodological reflection. They explored how architectural research can support more equitable, inclusive, and future-oriented design practices.

- **Spatial Equity and Inclusiveness in the City Centre** examined the societal and spatial dimensions of accessibility and inclusion, fostering debate on how research, education, and practice can contribute to socially resilient urban environments.
- **Rethinking Architectural Research: Spatial Agency Towards a More Equitable Future** encouraged participants to reconsider spatial agency through everyday scenarios, challenging conventional hierarchies in design and authorship.
- **From Data to Discovery: AI Tools for the Next Generation of Architectural Scholars** introduced emerging researchers to AI-supported methods for structuring and advancing architectural inquiry.

Despite their differences, the workshops shared several overarching concerns. All engaged with societal challenges and emphasised the need for more equitable and inclusive architectural environments. Each explored ways of expanding architectural agency—whether through participatory processes, new representational techniques, or emerging digital tools. A commitment to methodological innovation connected them, as did an interest in strengthening links between research and practice. Collectively, they aimed to equip emerging scholars and practitioners with the perspectives and capacities needed to navigate shifting environmental, social, and technological conditions and to contribute meaningfully to future architectural worlds.

The **Explorative Practice** contributions within the main programme served a related function, offering experimental, creative, and participatory approaches that paralleled the workshops' interest in alternative research methods.

The explorative practice contributions collectively highlighted experimental approaches that broaden how architectural knowledge can be produced. Several presentations investigated the potential of emerging technologies—such as microsensors, real-time modelling interfaces, and AI-assisted qualitative analysis—to open new ways of understanding

design processes, user needs, and complex datasets. Others foregrounded embodied and situated methods, including an interdisciplinary exercise that combined biological and architectural perspectives through a short field trip to the surrounding landscape. This session invited participants to engage in shared, participatory observations that heightened sensitivity to site conditions and more-than-human environments. Another contribution emphasised aesthetic and interpretative techniques, using collage and visual translation to explore architectural practice within the shifting conditions of the Anthropocene.

Across these varied methods, the presentations shared a commitment to hands-on experimentation, cross-disciplinary collaboration, participatory engagement, and new forms of representation and analysis. Together, they demonstrated how alternative research practices can complement conventional scholarly formats and offer fresh insights into contemporary architectural challenges.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Several recurring concerns emerged throughout the conference. One was the growing attention to social and environmental challenges and to the responsibilities these places on architectural research and practice. Another was the recognition that new tools, whether technological, representational, or participatory, are reshaping how knowledge is produced and shared. The explorative practice sessions highlighted how experimental methods and embodied, collaborative forms of inquiry can extend the reach of traditional research formats. There was also a consistent interest in how architectural education might evolve in response to these shifting conditions, and how emerging researchers can be supported in developing the capacities needed for an increasingly complex professional and academic landscape.

The curated organisation of sessions and workshops helped to create points of contact between contributions that addressed similar questions from different perspectives. These exchanges underscored the value of sustained dialogue across areas of expertise and highlighted the importance of building connections between research, practice, and education. The discussions also pointed to several areas in which further work is needed, including the development of shared vocabularies across disciplines, the integration of emerging technologies with ethical and critical frameworks, and the cultivation of research cultures that are both rigorous and inclusive.

Overall, the conference demonstrated a strong collective commitment to expanding the scope and impact of architectural research. The conversations that unfolded across a community representing institutions from Europe, North America, and many other regions—reflected a shared willingness to engage with pressing issues and to explore new directions for investigation. As the field continues to respond to environmental uncertainties, technological change, and evolving social expectations, the conference affirmed the importance of collaborative, reflective, and critically engaged research practices. The insights generated during these days provide a foundation for ongoing dialogue and will continue to inform work within the community in the years ahead.



Photo: Naime Esra Akin