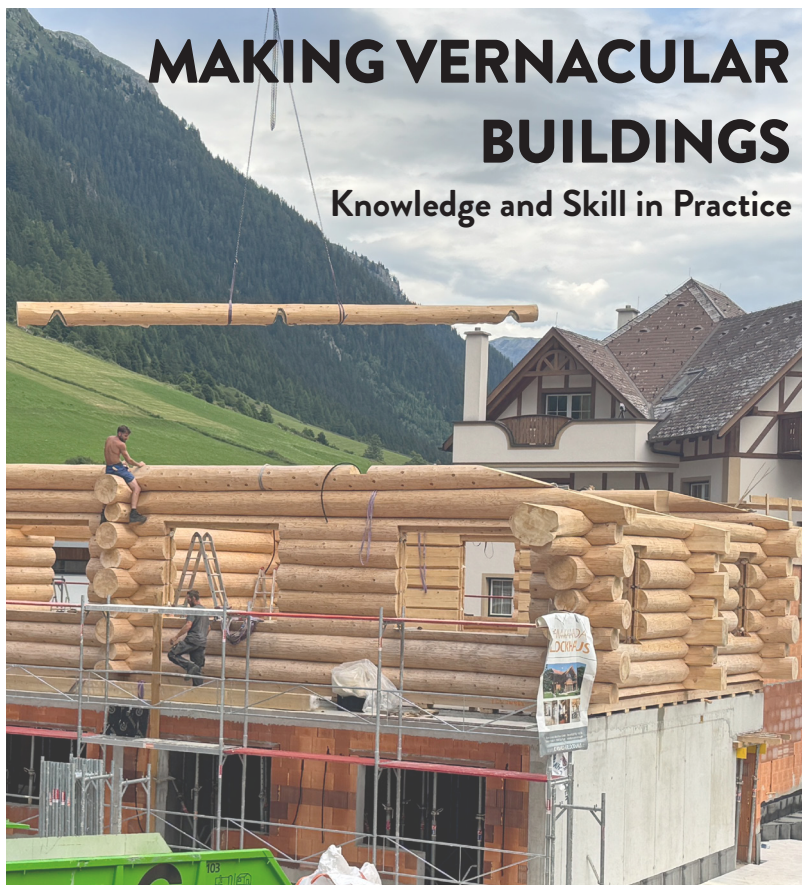


ÖAW

AUSTRIAN
ACADEMY OF
SCIENCES

CLIMATE-ARCH SYMPOSIUM 3
2ND – 5TH MARCH 2027
AUSTRIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
GEORG-COCH-PLATZ 2, 1010 WIEN



MAKING VERNACULAR BUILDINGS

Knowledge and Skill in Practice

Photo by: Hubert Feiglstorfer, 2025



Funded by
the European Union



European Research Council
Established by the European Commission



Institute for
Social Anthropology

This project has received funding from the European Research Council, titled „Climate and Contemporary Transformations of Vernacular Architecture – Interaction, Effects and Perspectives (CLIMATE-Arch)“, Consolidator grant 101088693.



OUTLINE

SYMPOSIUM 3: MAKING VERNACULAR BUILDINGS

Knowledge and Skill in Practice

Craft-centred processes of making are fundamental to the existence of all vernacular buildings, yet are paid scant attention in most studies of this form of architecture let alone in the wider academic literature. As a result, vast amounts of tacit knowledge, accumulated experience and practical skill involved in the construction and maintenance of such buildings remain poorly understood and significantly undervalued. This symposium seeks to fill this gap by examining precisely these kinds of knowledge and practice, as well as the broader historical processes and social dynamics with which they interact.

The primary aim is to explore the specificities of small-scale building craft, but the symposium will also highlight its parallels with other forms of craftwork and its overlaps with mainstream construction activities, opening space for both focused and comparative perspectives. Such perspectives, in turn, invite reflection upon wider issues in the anthropological study of knowledge and skill, cognition and learning, labour and production, technology and materiality. Insights generated around these topics also have practical implications in the context of climate change adaptation and resilience, given that the accumulated knowledge and ongoing availability of craftspeople is key to the continued use of existing vernacular buildings and thus crucial in efforts to reduce the carbon emissions and pollution associated with new building construction.

The symposium is envisaged as an inter-disciplinary event that brings architects, anthropologists, sociologists and historians together around the shared theme of “making by hand”. Contributions may include fine-grained accounts of specific craft techniques or production processes; reflections on knowledge transmission, training and apprenticeship; studies of the social and economic relations underpinning building craftwork, or theoretical considerations relating to these kinds of knowledge and action. By examining manual processes of making in “modern” contexts as well as in more “traditional” settings and by comparing artisanal building to other forms of craftwork, the symposium has the potential to yield fruitful insights drawn from various scholarly fields, geographical locations and social contexts.

BUILDING AND CRAFT TRADITIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

In many parts of the world, the construction and maintenance of vernacular buildings is carried out primarily by house owners and local craftspeople operating within variously-defined building craft traditions. This panel will examine the current status and future prospects of small-scale builders in different locations, looking at the conditions under which they work and the challenges they face in an era of considerable social, economic and environmental change. Among other things, contributions might focus on the roles that history, ethnicity, class, status and place play in the shaping of craftspeople's identities, on the social, economic and environmental dimensions of their work, on their interactions with mainstream construction industries, or on changing patterns of demand for their skills.

PROCESSES OF MAKING UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

As with all craftwork, small-scale building involves tacit and embodied knowledge and proceeds through complex interactions between heads, hands, tools, materials and environments. While it may involve repetition, each act of making is unique as it requires continuous adjustments by the practitioner to variations in the materials, the tools, the setting, and the evolution of the job at hand. This panel will zoom in on processes of making through fine-grained studies of specific techniques, or through theoretical reflections on these practices. Craftwork offers a strong basis for exploring relationships between knowing and doing, cognition and production, materiality and meaning-making, quality and value, as well as for the development of critical perspectives.

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL IN MOTION

Building craft traditions largely rely on uncodified forms of knowledge and the gradual development of proficiency through hands-on experience. Construction-related knowledge is passed on in various ways, ranging from transmission within families and long-term apprenticeships to formal college courses. This panel will explore the methods, processes and social dynamics involved in these modes of transmission, seeking comparison across a range of vernacular, hybrid and modern construction industry settings. Contributions may also consider the roles that external influences such as government policies and cultural heritage conservation activities play in assigning value to particular forms of knowledge and to shaping their transmission pathways.



THEMES

RITUALS AND CONSTRUCTION

Rituals of many kinds are involved in the making and use of buildings across much of the world. These include long-standing ritual activities practiced on small-scales by builders and residents in vernacular settings, larger-scale ritual events taking place within specific religious buildings, and also contemporary ritual forms emerging at different stages in the planning, construction, inauguration and use of buildings. This panel will explore the roles rituals play in landscapes and construction processes, dwelling practices and place-making projects, as well as in modern infrastructure development and contemporary urbanism, politics and power dynamics, nationalism and nation-building.

PREFABRICATION, INDUSTRIALISATION AND TECHNOLOGIES OF CONSTRUCTION

Most contemporary building craftspeople integrate new technologies and tools into their construction work to some degree, just as many of the buildings they make combine older and newer design elements as well as both naturally-sourced and industrially-produced raw materials. Furthermore, builders working in mainstream construction industries may acquire and pass on knowledge, practice specific techniques and hone their skills in ways that resonate with vernacular modes of learning and making. This panel will examine these fields of overlap, integration and hybridity, seeking parallels and contrasts that enable more sophisticated and inclusive understandings of construction to emerge.

FURTHER DETAILS AND NEXT STEPS

The above structure remains tentative and the program will evolve according to the responses and propositions received. If you are interested in participating or presenting a paper at symposia 2 or 3, please visit our project website <https://climate-arch.eu> for further information and online registration.

You are welcome to attend both events, but if this is not feasible, please select the one that resonates most with your research interests.

Note also that publication projects are linked to all CLIMATE-Arch symposia.

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Dates:

Symposium 1 | 10th – 13th February 2026

Symposium 2 | 17th – 20th November 2026

Symposium 3 | 2nd – 5th March 2027

Venue: Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna (Austria)

