



**Design Practices and Citizen Mobilizations:
Dwelling, Resisting, Experimenting**

Conference – February 12 & 13, 2026

ENSA Versailles & ENSA Paris-La Villette

Organized by

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Call for Papers

As climate disruption and ecological crises increasingly reshape planning policies, the design disciplines—architecture, urbanism, and landscape—are being called upon to reinvent themselves (Younès, 1999; Bognon, 2022; Rode, 2023). Yet the contours of this “ecologization” remain vague, provoking critique, controversy, and mobilization. As the notion of transforming the ways we inhabit, govern, and produce the city becomes more widespread, so-called sustainable or ecological projects have themselves become sites of conflict.

These oppositions are not merely acts of rejection: they reveal fundamentally different visions of how to conceive the city, space, and public action. In many contexts, collectives, associations, or residents draw on their own understandings of ecology—often shaped by theoretical, scientific, or activist knowledge—to challenge proposed projects. They appropriate environmental knowledge (from the social sciences, the IPCC, critical theory, or the life sciences) and turn it into tools for analysis, legitimacy, and action. These actors do not remain on the sidelines of expert debate; they actively participate while questioning its underlying assumptions.

These dynamics raise a fundamental question: what is an ecological project? What are its aims, its intended audiences, its forms, materials, timelines, and modes of decision-making? They highlight a tension between an institutional ecology—structured by systems of expertise, governance, and electoral cycles—and a critical ecology, rooted in everyday practices and a long-term capacity for projection (Bouilhol, 2023; Culea-Hong, 2022). On one side, public action operates through procedures, operations, and institutional compromise. On the other, mobilizations draw on lived environments, incorporating gestures, uses, care practices, and forms of resistance (Bulle & Tarragoni, 2021) that can disrupt project trajectories.

This tug-of-war between competing ecological visions unfolds in a post-political context (Swyngedouw, 2009), where conflicts are often smoothed over in favor of a manufactured consensus built by allegedly neutral technocracies. In response to this “post-political city,” the challenge is to restore a strong political dimension in which differences and pluralism can be asserted (Mouffe, 2016). The goal is to make visible the diversity of territorial conflicts and social practices striving for institutional recognition and the realization of concrete alternatives (Gualini, 2015). Far from a deceptive consensus, the plurality of interpretations of the ecological crisis instead reveals enduring, competing visions of territory and dwelling. The design project—often seen as a means of bringing together—becomes a controversial object, one that crystallizes tensions, opposing values, and divergent imaginaries of the future.

This conference proposes to explore these tensions through the lens of design practices—architecture, urbanism, and landscape—and their tools. It aims to bring together theoretical analysis, field narratives, experiential feedback, and alternative approaches to spatial production.

The ambition is to open the discussion to a wide range of contexts and scales, in France and beyond: contested eco-neighborhoods, transforming brownfields, zones à défendre (ZAD), rural or metropolitan struggles, and reappropriated inhabited spaces.

What spatial forms do these conflicts around ecological projects take? How is architecture implicated—as a solution, a problem, or a site of experimentation? What competing narratives of ecology, dwelling, and territory are at play? What is the role of designers? And what might architects, educators, institutions, researchers, or practitioners engaged in the field learn from them?

Key Themes and Questions

1. Legacies and Transformations of Ecological Mobilizations

Critiques of urban policy and social mobilizations have long shaped how cities are built. Today's environmental mobilizations extend and transform those of past decades. Whether in urban or rural contexts, they draw on a wide variety of registers: care, mutual aid, spirituality, social critique, the right to the city. They go beyond denunciation, experimenting with new ways of living, dwelling, and organizing. In doing so, they propose new interpretations of the links between ecology and democracy, often at odds with institutional logics. What forms do these mobilizations take today? How do ecological struggles intersect with social, gender, or class struggles? On which territories do they rely? What arguments, alliances, supports, and practices do they mobilize—and to what effect?

2. Reconfiguring Professional Roles and Forms of Expertise

In the face of these critiques, the fields of architecture and urban planning are being challenged. The ecological paradigm is reshaping practices and shifting ethical expectations around the role of designers. Between commitment and compromise, how are architects, urbanists, and landscape designers redefining their positions? Where do they stand? What compromises are they willing to accept? Do they work alongside opponents? And what becomes of the boundaries between professional and citizen knowledge? How can we rethink their roles within a field marked by conflicts of legitimacy?

3. The Project and Its Publics: Tools, Narratives, Imaginaries

The disagreements and alternatives that form around projects hold transformative and democratic potential. They are expressed through conflictual practices where mobilizations become spaces for problematization, public engagement, inquiry, and experimentation (Dewey, 1927). Some practices aim to broaden the scope of the project, to open up narratives, to include the non-human or conflict as essential dimensions. These approaches give rise to forms of spatial production that are slower, more open, more fragile. Can we still speak of "a project" in such cases? Can these practices transform the design disciplines from within? Planning conflicts also challenge the tools of the project: narratives, plans, representations, diagnostics, calculation methods, timelines, participation formats, and more. What are these tools, what resources do they require, and what purposes do they serve? How do they circulate among stakeholders and spaces of debate? What material resources are mobilized? What technical and aesthetic gestures are produced and disseminated? Are repertoires of collective action evolving under the pressure of ecological issues? And how are these tools being taken up by designers and public actors?

Participation Guidelines

The event will consist of two half-days of presentations and discussions, designed to foster dynamic exchanges between speakers and participants, along with a half-day field visit. This visit will take place on a site in the Île-de-France region currently affected by contestation or transformation processes, in the presence of actors directly involved. It will serve as a concrete anchor for the discussions and allow reflections to be grounded in a real spatial situation, open to both analysis and critical projection.

We welcome contributions grounded in research, teaching, design practice, or field engagement, from:

- Researchers in architecture, urban planning, philosophy, sociology, geography, political science, etc.
- Architects, urban planners, landscape designers, hydrologists, ecologists, or designers involved in contested projects
- Artists, filmmakers, or authors working on critical representations of territory
- Members of collectives, associations, or territorial and ecological struggles
- Educators and students who have experimented with pedagogical formats in conflictual contexts
- Public officials, elected representatives, and developers interested in engaging with these critical practices

Timeline

Deadline for proposal submissions: **October 31, 2025.**

Notification of selected contributions: **November 30, 2025.**

Conference dates: **February 12–13, 2026** at ENSA Paris-La Villette and ENSA Versailles.

Submission Guidelines

Proposals (including a title, an abstract of up to 2,500 characters, a short bio, and institutional affiliation) should be sent to: **ppmc2026@gmail.com**

Scientific committee

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