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SUSTAINABILITY AND EARTHEN ARCHITECTURE, VALENCIA, SPAIN, 11–13 SEPTEMBER 2014

# Earthen Architecture: Past, Present and Future

*Editors*

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*Cover photo: Vernacular dwellings at Rincón de Ademuz (Valencia). Picture by Vegas & Mileto*

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## Preface

Sustainability is a word that has monopolised a large number of the scientific debates in a broad range of spheres connected not only with architecture, urban planning and construction, but also with the product market, tourism, culture, etc. Organising a conference on such a broad concept as sustainability, which has unfortunately lost part of its meaning because of repeated, banal use, could look like an attempt to follow the latest fashion and keep up with the times. However, the sustainability proposed as the focal point of the conference is indissolubly linked to vernacular architecture made out of earth or other materials and the lessons this architecture of the past can teach us for the future. The concept of sustainability as it is presented is wide-reaching and covers not only environmental issues but sociocultural and socio-economic questions also. The lessons we can learn from studying vernacular architecture in these three broad spheres are manifold, and can help us not only to further the conservation and retrieval of this architecture already in existence but to rethink new architecture in the light of what we have learned.

In this line of reflection the congress VerSus 2014 | 2nd Mediterra | 2nd ResTapia – International Conference on Vernacular Heritage, Sustainability and Earthen Architecture—was held at the Universitat Politècnica de València on 11th, 12th and 13th September 2014. The main aim of the conference was to discuss and debate the lessons that can be learnt from vernacular architecture to create sustainable architecture today, both for the restoration of traditional buildings and the design and construction of new ones. The conference comprises three important events in a single venue.

The first event is VerSus 2014, which addressed the study of vernacular architecture and the lessons in sustainability it teaches for the future, organised within the frame of the European project: “VerSus: Lessons from Vernacular Heritage to Sustainable Architecture (2012–14)”, approved for funding under the European Programme 2000, led by the Escola Superior Gallaecia (Portugal) with the cooperation of the Universitat Politècnica de València (Spain), CRAterre-ENSAG (France), the University of Cagliari (Italy) and the University of Florence (Italy). The congress VerSus 2014 constitutes the closure of this project that represented an important moment of reflection on the themes proposed for discussion with other experts from all over the world. The second event was the second edition of the conference Mediterra – Mediterranean Conference on Earthen Architecture, organised for the first time in 2009 in Cagliari (Italy) by three of the partners of the UNESCO Chair – Earthen Architecture, Building Cultures & Sustainable Development: CRAterre-ENSAG (France), the University of Cagliari (Italy) and the Escola Superior Gallaecia (Portugal). The third event was the conference ResTapia – International Conference on Rammed Earth Conservation, organised for the first time at the Universitat Politècnica de València (Spain) in 2012 with a view to increasing specific knowledge about the restoration of earthen architecture in general and rammed earth architecture in particular.

Given the large number of themes related with these three events, which were satisfactorily brought together under the umbrella of the conference VerSus 2014 | 2nd Mediterra | 2nd ResTapia – International Conference on Vernacular Heritage, Sustainability and Earthen Architecture, on this occasion the international debate addressed five major issues: sustainability concepts in vernacular and contemporary architecture; conservation of urban and rural settlements; documentation and conservation of vernacular architecture; lessons from vernacular heritage for sustainable contemporary architecture; documentation of earthen architecture and proposals for a new architecture in the Mediterranean context (2nd Mediterra Conference); documentation, conservation and proposals of rammed earth and earthen architecture (2nd ResTapia Conference).

The scientific committee was made up of 58 outstanding researchers from 25 different countries from the five continents, specialists in the subjects proposed. All the contributions to the congress, both the abstracts and the final texts, were subjected to a strict peer-review evaluation system by the members of the scientific committee. About 200 papers by 366 authors from 32 countries from the five continents were published, chosen by this process from the over 430 proposals submitted. Apart from the papers, lectures were delivered by two important guest speakers, researchers in the realm of vernacular architecture, José

María Ballester (Director of the Area of Rural Development of the Fundación Botín, Spain) and Marcel Vellinga (Oxford Brookes University, United Kingdom). This constituted an important contribution both to knowledge about vernacular architecture on our planet and the lessons it teaches us and the proposals for the future of architecture at a moment of necessary reflection. All the articles were published in two books. The first of these, *Vernacular Architecture: Towards a Sustainable Future*, contains the texts about the study of vernacular architecture and the lessons it teaches for sustainable architecture, while the second book, *Earthen Architecture: Past, Present and Future*, specifically contains the papers addressing the study of vernacular and historic earthen architecture as a contribution to the sustainable architecture of the future.

The international conference VerSus 2014 received the aegis of: ICOMOS-ISCEAH (International Council on Monuments and Sites – International Scientific Committee on Earthen Architectural Heritage); UNESCO Chair – Earthen Architecture, Building Cultures & Sustainable Development; ICOMOS-CIAV (International Scientific Committee for Vernacular Architecture); PROTERRA – Iberian-American Network on Earthen Architecture and Construction. It also received the institutional support of: IPCE – Instituto del Patrimonio Cultural de España, of the Ministry of Education, Culture & Sport of the Government of Spain; INTBAU-España (International Network for Traditional Building, Architecture & Urbanism – Spain).

The organisation, publication and implementation of the conference were possible thanks to the aid received from the European Union Culture Programme regarding the European Project VerSus (grant n° 2012-2792/001-001 CU7 COOP7), Universitat Politècnica de València, Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura and Instituto de Restauración del Patrimonio of the same university, Conselleria de Infraestructures, Territori i Medi Ambient of the Generalitat Valenciana; companies like ARESPA – Asociación Española de Empresas de Restauración del Patrimonio Histórico, Tarma – Restauración & Patrimonio, Grupo Tragsa, Revista EcoHabitar, IEB-Instituto Español de Baubiologie, KIMIA – Productos y Tecnología para la Rehabilitación; AT Studio; Associazione Nazionale Città della Terra Cruda.

Finally we would like to thank all the authors who contributed to the quality, range, diversity and richness of these publications with their articles. We give special thanks to all the partners of the European project “VerSus: Lessons from Vernacular Heritage to Sustainable Architecture” for participating in the conference and their help in spreading the word about it all over the world. We are grateful to the aid of all the members of the advisory committee and the scientific committee for their work throughout the long process of revising the abstracts and papers. And, above all, we thank the organising committee for the complex setting up of the whole conference, the style and language reviewers for their corrections and all the collaborators for their invaluable work in the management and organisation of all the stages of the process

Camilla Mileto, Fernando Vegas, Lidia García Soriano & Valentina Cristini  
*June 2014*

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