

International Conference

Endangered Heritage in Rural and Mountainous Areas (19th-21st Centuries)

Directed by Viviane Delpech and Laurent Jalabert

Pau – Eaux-Bonnes, 2nd and 3rd April 2026

Call for Papers

The international conference *Endangered Heritage in Rural and Mountainous Areas (19th-21st Centuries)* is organised as part of the POPSU Eaux-Bonnes national research programme (2023-2026) led by the ITEM laboratory at the University of Pau and Pays de l'Adour and supported by the French Ministry of Ecological Transition and Territorial Cohesion (GIP Europe des Projets Architecturaux et Urbains), which follows on from the TCV-PYR (UE FEDER - 2017-2021), PatrimPublic and PATMOS (Euro-Region Nouvelle-Aquitaine/Aragon – 2021-2022 and 2023-2024) programmes dedicated to the heritage of spa and mountain resorts. Following in the footsteps of the pioneering analyses of Bruno Foucart, Maurice Culot, Dominique Jarrassé, Bernard Toulhier and Jean-Michel Leniaud between the 1970s and 1990s, recent work has largely demonstrated and partly explained the alarming state of an entire heritage typology - linked to history of spas - in territories that appear to have been forgotten or neglected by public action. This observation corroborates the better known but equally dramatic situation of religious architecture in these same geographical areas, which bears witness to the demographic, financial, administrative and political difficulties they face. Based on the well-known situation analysed at the Eaux-Bonnes spa resort over several years, this symposium therefore focuses on the more general issue of endangered heritage, a constant concern since the emergence of the modern concept of heritage more than two hundred years ago. The unique feature of this event is that it examines the processes of conservation, preservation and degradation of architectural and landscape heritage in rural and mountainous areas. This is because, on the one hand, these areas have been little studied in the context of this issue, which generally focuses on war zones, industrialising countries or monuments located in urban environments. At least, even though the actions carried out since the 19th century have largely focused on the countryside and mountains, the latter are still rarely analysed as a specific environment for heritage conservation, even though they contain a large part of it. On the other hand, reflection on these large natural areas is also particularly affected by societal changes and the current challenges of climate change, which further complicates the management and maintenance of the built and landscape heritage located there. In short, this scientific event aims to examine both the processes of heritage preservation (construction/deconstruction) and their link with territory and cultural identities, as well as the relationship between the physical conservation of heritage and an environment marked by significant environmental constraints.

On a global scale, the issue of endangered heritage has long underpinned the work of UNESCO, ICOM and ICOMOS, particularly in sensitive geopolitical and climatic areas, including the publication of Red Lists of cultural heritage in danger (most recently that of Ukraine) and regular reports aimed at alerting the international community to the vulnerability of cultural heritage and the damage it suffers. At the national level, certain actors such as Urgences Patrimoine, the Fondation du Patrimoine and Sites & Monuments regularly draw attention to the subject, across all types of environments, in order to preserve, through various degrees of action, the witnesses of memory, ancient know-how and the heritage value of natural and urban landscapes. The subject is also at the heart of media coverage during spectacular one-off events, such as the fire at Notre-Dame de Paris and its subsequent reopening, the devastating fires at Nantes Cathedral in 2020 and the Copenhagen Stock Exchange in 2024, or in the context of controversial projects threatening heritage integrity, such as the loan of the Bayeux Tapestry to the United Kingdom and the removal of Viollet-le-Duc's

stained glass windows from Notre-Dame. Rural and mountainous areas are hardly immune to these accidents or controversies that stir up collective emotion, the most recent of which occurred on 15 October 2025 in Vichy with the fire that devastated the Hôtel de la Paix and the Hôtel des Princes.

Interest in rural areas has emerged in France in recent years as part of initiatives linked to ministerial policies, including the national POPSU Territoires programme and the 'Petites villes de demain' (Small Towns of Tomorrow) programme, or as part of discussions led by heritage conservation stakeholders and local authorities, as illustrated by the 2025 edition of *Entretiens du patrimoine* (Heritage Talks) devoted to *Rural Heritage and Territories: Questions for the Future*, which focuses on the concepts of rurality, innovation and engineering in local authorities. This concern is, however, much older beyond France's borders, as in Spain, where research and development programmes dedicated to depopulated areas constitute major scientific and social challenges corresponding to a particular model of territorial organisation and a specific context of historical resilience. It is also within the context of these current reflections and previous work (notably that of Jean-Yves Andrieux in Brittany since the 1990s) that the POPSU Eaux-Bonnes programme addresses the issue, considering that, due to its material and symbolic value, heritage can be a driving force for attractiveness and revitalisation in rural and mountainous areas, especially when it is threatened with disappearance and paradoxically represents a resource to be exploited. Its deplorable state of conservation in these areas is the result of a combination of socio-economic, political and environmental factors inherited from the "Trente Glorieuses", or even from earlier periods, including economic and health crises, demographic decline, societal changes, the political situation and ecological transition. As elsewhere, damage, lack of maintenance, demolition and excessive tourism are leading to irreparable losses, as the collective memory is being stripped of physical artefacts and entire sections of its history, which are essential to the process of remembrance, as Abbé Grégoire pointed out as early as in 1794. These actions, leading to the disappearance of witnesses to memory, also represent significant socio-economic losses, since the buildings and sites under threat have real potential for reuse in contemporary contexts as well as for transmitting the history and identity of the places.

Added to this is the contextual pressure of climate change, where these areas are on the front line due to their intrinsic relationship with the natural environment, which has always played a major role in the physical conditions for creating and conserving built heritage, depending on the seasons, hydrography and geology, and their interactions with materials. Rural and mountainous areas are now the focus of attention not only because of the increased natural risks they entail but also, conversely, because they represent possible climatic and health refuges that bear witness to a necessary renewal of lifestyles. This symposium also aims to contribute to the debate on the reappropriation of mountains and the countryside in the context of climate change and profound changes in water resources, and to question the place of humans within nature based on their historical material productions that anchor them to a territory. These concerns have necessarily been taken into account by the scientific community in recent years, as illustrated, among other things, by work on the link between architecture and climate change, notably the VIES programme led by ENSA Paris-La Villette, ICOMOS and the École des Hautes Études du ministère de l'Intérieur, with, for example, an event dedicated to the risk and resilience of territories in the face of climate change held in October 2025, or the EAUTOUR programme – Water, Tourism and Climate Change – led by the UMR TREE at the University of Pau between 2019 and 2023.

Between architectural and heritage history, material conservation and environmental history, it is at the crossroads of all these cultural, environmental, socio-economic and political issues that this symposium will develop its unique perspective, which will be placed in an international and diachronic context by focusing on all architectural and landscape typologies found in rural and/or mountainous geographical settings. The event will bring together researchers (both young and

established), heritage conservation stakeholders, institutions and the socio-economic world, as well as general public, who is the primary recipients of historical transmission. The aim of this review of this precious and diverse heritage, covering both historical and material aspects as well as the projects and networks of actors involved, is to contribute to social and political awareness of the value of this heritage far from major urban centres and, as a decision-making tool, to instil a dynamic of preservation and enhancement in line with the human and natural specificities of these territories.

Geographical area: Europe

Chronological framework: 19th–21st century

Languages: French, Spanish, English

Areas for consideration (non-exhaustive list):

Contributions may take the form of monographs, case studies, comparative analyses or feedback, based on the following areas, for example:

- Materiality:
 - Monographs and case studies at the level of territories, buildings or sites in rural or mountainous contexts: inventories and assessments of heritage, their causes and consequences.
 - Threatened heritage types in rural and mountainous areas: agropastoral, religious, industrial and resort architecture; small rural settlements; landscape arts; collections, furniture, etc.
 - Resilience and heritage preservation actions (successful or unsuccessful)
- Environment:
 - Impact of environmental and climatic constraints on the maintenance and conservation of built and landscape heritage in rural and mountainous contexts.
 - Technical specificities of heritage conservation in rural and mountainous areas
- Economic dimension:
 - Impact of tourism on rural and mountainous built and landscape heritage: exploitation, overexploitation, economic and social constraints, visitor numbers
 - Link between sustainable tourism, green tourism and cultural tourism based on the built and landscape heritage of these areas
- Social and political dimension:
 - Stakeholders and actions involved in heritage conservation: elected officials, local authorities, associations, institutions, civil society, etc.
 - Policies for the protection and preservation of rural and mountain heritage
 - Shaping heritage awareness: memory processes, official and civil heritage preservation and historicization processes, giving rise to forgetting, loss of meaning, negative or distorted perceptions, or, conversely, spontaneous reactions and idealization, etc.
 - Specific features of heritage conservation in rural and mountainous areas in administrative, social and cultural terms, etc.

Proposals (1,500 characters) along with a short CV and an abbreviated list of publications, all compiled into a single PDF file, should be sent before 5 January 2026 to viviane.delpech@univ-pau.fr and laurent.jalabert@univ-pau.fr

Schedule:

Proposals will be reviewed and notifications sent in January 2026.

The proceedings of the symposium will be published.

Scientific Committee:

- **Esteban Castañer Muñoz**, professor of contemporary art history, Université de Perpignan-Via Domitia
- **Sylvie Clarimont**, professor of geography and regional planning, Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour
- **Anne-Marie Granet-Abisset**, professor emeritus of contemporary history, Université de Grenoble-Alpes
- **Ascensión Hernández Martínez**, professor of conservation and restoration of artistic heritage, Universidad de Zaragoza
- **Jean-Michel Leniaud**, professor emeritus of contemporary art history, École nationale des Chartes
- **Nicolas Meynen**, senior lecturer in contemporary art history (HDR), Université de Toulouse-Jean Jaurès
- **María Pilar Poblador Muga**, professor of contemporary art history, Universidad de Zaragoza

Organising committee:

- **Viviane Delpech**, senior lecturer in contemporary art history and heritage, Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour
- **Laurent Jalabert**, professor of contemporary history, Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour