

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

National School of Architecture and Urbanism of Tunis

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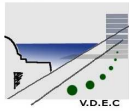
courtyards & patios

in the Mediterranean

Affiche : Najes Ben Abdelghani



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Villes historiques de la Tunisie et de la méditerranée



Call for Papers

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE - 1st Edition

« COURTYARDS AND PATIOS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN »

February 12, 13, and 14, 2026, Dar Lasram, ASM, La Médina, Tunis, Tunisia

The National School of Architecture and Urban Planning (ENAU) is organizing, in collaboration with the Laboratory of Maghreb Archaeology and Architecture (LAAM) – University of Manouba (UMA), the Sustainable City and Built Environment Laboratory (VDEC) – University of Carthage (UCAR), and the Heritage and Architecturology Research Laboratory (LarPA) – University of Carthage (UCAR), in partnership with the Association for the Preservation of the Medina of Tunis (ASM) and the Association of Historic Cities of Tunisia and the Mediterranean (AVHTM), the first edition of the international symposium “**Courtyards and Patios in the Mediterranean.**”

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ABSTRACT

The courtyard or patio house, based on the intimate appropriation of a fragment of sky at the heart of the domestic space, is a major archetype of human habitation. Deeply rooted in Mediterranean traditions, it surprises with its longevity and its ability to generate unique expressions, shaped by the diversity of physical and cultural contexts. This archetype, which has spanned the centuries, from the ancient world to contemporary projects, continues to inspire architects, thinkers, and creators, and has regained particular relevance in light of the challenges of the 21st century, as contemporary issues invite us to rethink modes of dwelling.

To explore these dimensions, the conference adopts a multidisciplinary approach structured around four cross-cutting themes. It is aimed at a diverse range of profiles—architects, historians, anthropologists, sociologists, archaeologists, artists, writers, climatologists, etc.—drawing on scientific contributions, feedback from architects, and artistic expressions.

ARGUMENT

Dwelling, one of whose primary functions is to provide shelter, has always expressed an essential relationship between interior and exterior, modulated according to cultures, places, and eras. In the courtyard or patio house, which stands out as one of the major archetypes of human habitation, this relationship is based on the intimate appropriation of a fragment of sky at the heart of the domestic space.

We find this archetype in a wide variety of cultural, historical, and geographical contexts: from the ancient cities of the Greco-Roman world to Pharaonic Egypt, from imperial China to the great capitals of the Arab-Islamic world, and even to the cities of Latin America, where it spread from Andalusia (Ammar, 1899/2010) (Abdulac, 2011).

Beyond its universal appeal, the courtyard/patio house remains deeply rooted in Mediterranean traditions, to the point of becoming an emblematic figure. It has shown exceptional longevity and surprises with its ability to adapt to the cultural and physical contexts in which it takes root.

In the 20th century, it was rediscovered by modern architects, who embraced it as a vehicle for formal and programmatic renewal in a context of resemantization of housing in the machine age. It then reappeared with force in the works of critical regionalist architects, who were keen to ground architecture in specific cultural and climatic realities. The second half of the 20th century was therefore naturally marked by a reflexive return to vernacular architecture to fuel contextual architectural thinking (Lucan, 2023).

During this particularly fertile period of exchange of ideas and experiences between architects on both shores of the Mediterranean, the reinterpretation of the courtyard house significantly contributed to the renewal of scholarly residential architecture. Numerous courtyard housing clusters then emerged, spreading from the Maghreb to Northern Europe (Pinson, 2010) (Ben Abdelghani & Ammar, 2018) (Demerdash & Gharbi, 2025).

The investigation of the forms, typologies, and spatial and social configurations of the courtyard or patio house in the Mediterranean—whether individual or collective, vernacular or scholarly—could continue for a long time, as it reveals so much about the lives of the inhabitants and their ways of living, the satisfactions and failures in housing and home that form the very basis of our relationship to the world.

The **wast ed-dar** (وسط الدار) of a dar in the Maghreb medina, pulsating to the rhythm of a wedding band; that of a **riad**, punctuated by the murmur of fountains and the song of birds nesting in lush vegetation; the atrium of a patrician **domus**, languishing in the shade of a **velum**; the opulent cortile of a **palazzo**; the **sahn** (صحن) of a fondouk (فندق), a khan (خان), or even the **cortile** of a **fondaco**, crossed by footsteps that meet or part; the silent **chiostro** of a monastic cloister—all atmospheres that uniquely embody the richness of this shared archetype.

The study of these configurations, shaped according to the norms of the domestic group and for this group, provides an opportunity to examine social structures, linguistic geographies, collective imaginaries, community dynamics, and modes of appropriation of domestic space within Mediterranean societies (Rapoport, 1972) (Thyssen, 1983).

At the beginning of this 21st century, shaped by profound political, economic, environmental, and social upheavals, the courtyard/patio house is acquiring renewed attention.

In a context characterized by climate emergency and the imminent depletion of fossil resources, the sustainability and climatic performance of vernacular architecture, as well as its interpretation by 20th-century architects, are attracting renewed interest. Both northern and southern regions are now concerned with issues of global warming and ecological transition, which are driving the development of resilient, passive architecture that regulates temperature (Frini & Rahm, 2025).

Hence, there is still much to learn from the know-how accumulated over centuries in the Mediterranean, combining patio or courtyard architecture with complementary features (iwans, galleries, fountains, velums, climbing plants, etc.), materials (ceramics, marble, etc.) and domestic rituals such as sprinkling the floor with water or shifting the locations of daily activities according to the time of day (Fathy, 1970/1999) (Abdulac, 2011) (Landoulsi, 2021).

If the climate issue is intrinsically linked to the cultural dimension, it cannot be separated from concerns related to the quality of living spaces. Modulating environmental conditions—managing temperature and humidity, sunlight and ventilation—is essential to creating a pleasant living environment. But this quest for well-being, which reflects the aspirations of each era, has taken on new meanings today.

In a hyperconnected world marked by rising individualism, well-being is now inevitably linked to mental health and invites us to reflect deeply on our relationships with ourselves, others, and nature. Can we, therefore, consider inhabited space as a potential place for reconnection with the world?

It is through this questioning that the ontological dimension of dwelling, often overlooked, is reemerging, as philosophers such as Heidegger contemplated it in the mid-20th century. “Man dwells in the world,” he wrote, “the world is his space,” and “this in-between is the assigned measure of man's dwelling” Revisited in light of contemporary issues, this perspective allows us to glimpse, in the patio, the manifest expression of an in-between that connects being to transcendental instances such as nature, the sky, and the cosmos (Heidegger, 1951) (Bonicco-Donato, 2019) (Paquot, 2020).

Indeed, with its view of the sky – (*wejh rabbi*) – the patio embodies the spirit of the house. Designed as the culmination of a journey composed of visual, light, air, and sound filtering devices, it creates an ambient gradation that takes on the appearance of a protective bubble at the heart of the house, a bubble open to the infinity of the sky.

This carries a metaphysical significance, giving rise to a feeling of serenity, or “*raha*,” expressed by inhabitants who attest to both climatic well-being and a supra-sensory experience that subsumes the sensory realm, thereby unfolding a sacred, spiritual, or even sublime dimension (Landoulsi, 2019).

This vernacular architecture corresponds to a unified vision of the subject and the world, found both in the Arabic language and in Islamic thought, particularly that of Ibn Arabi (Sellami, 2021). This thought intersects with the atmospheric alternative, which involves considering the viewpoint of a man who moves, from the outset, in a state of complete resonance with the world (Rosa, 2018).

Approaching the patio through the prism of the sensible, or even the supersensible, should open up avenues for reflection on the conditions for transposing this device into a contemporary project that gives primacy to dwelling.

From this perspective, it is also relevant to question how art appropriates this space, which has the potential to generate sensory and unique experiences, as evidenced by the art installations created, for example, during the Dream City festival in Tunis or the Architectures vives festival in Montpellier (Catalogue l'Art Rue, 2025) (Morain, 2023).

OBJECTIVES

This conference aims to examine this architectural archetype through a multidisciplinary approach, combining architectural, anthropological, philosophical, ethnographic, bioclimatic, and other perspectives. It will be approached as a universal and recurring form, revealing an intelligence and an ontology of dwelling, deeply rooted in the long history of Mediterranean civilizations and serving as a continual source of renewal for both thought and architectural practice.

It is within this framework that we propose to reflect upon, reveal through analysis, and materialize—through iconographic, textual and narrative, audiovisual, or scenographic productions—the tangible or intangible realities of these individual or collective, scholarly or popular, modest or affluent types of buildings, which constitute the archetypes of dwelling and housing in the Mediterranean, spanning from antiquity to the contemporary world.

As part of a pluralistic reflection that brings together researchers from different disciplines and several Mediterranean cities, as well as practicing architects who have had the opportunity to revive the patio in their projects in one form or another, and artists inspired by the patio, the conference proposes to explore four complementary and transversal themes.

THEMATIC AXES

AXIS 1. The courtyard and patio as structuring elements of Mediterranean housing: Forms, socio-spatial practices, and cultural identities

This theme places courtyards and patios at the center of the social and cultural dynamics of Mediterranean housing. As catalysts for practices rooted in diverse cultural and physical contexts, these spaces serve as receptacles for scenes of life that reveal the norms, values, and collective imaginaries of the groups that inhabit them. The aim is to observe these spaces as places of social regulation where the boundaries between private and public, individual and collective, community belonging and individual appropriation, everyday life and events are constantly being negotiated.

AXIS 2. Courtyards and patios, bioclimatic history and environmental devices

This axis addresses the bioclimatic and environmental dimensions of courtyards and patios, which act as thermal regulators between the outside and inside, adapted to the nuances of the Mediterranean climate.

An In-depth study of these systems, which combine mastery of physical phenomena such as convection, conduction, evaporation, and radiation with behavioral codes and the use of local natural resources, paves the way for a renewal of contemporary architectural practice, anchoring it in specific physical and cultural contexts to produce resilient habitats adapted to current challenges.

Axis 3. Courtyards and patios, phenomenological experimentation

This axis approaches the patio as a place that allows the subject to resonate with the world, a place for individual and/or shared experiences, a place for multisensory and aesthetic experiences (in the sense of *aestheisis*), and a place that establishes a common ground for these shared experiences.

From this perspective, the aim is to evaluate the ambient tones that give rise to this resonance, the link between spatial configurations, social representations, and sensory and transcendental dimensions.

This axis therefore seeks to explore the aesthetic, symbolic, and suprasensory dimensions of the patio. It also addresses the potential of this spatial device to generate inspiration, expression, and artistic experience.

Axis 4. Reinvented courtyards and patios: 20th-century architectural experiments and contemporary resonance

This theme focuses on the patio/courtyard house as a central figure of reflection and design. Although it has been the subject of abundant literature, the prolific legacy of a century of experimentation, mainly by modern and regionalist architects, around patio and courtyard devices remains to be documented and studied.

The aim is to use these various experiences to question the universality of this archetype, which, far from encapsulating housing in a rigid and normative model, is based on what both unites cultures and magnifies their precious singularities.

At the same time, we will examine the relevance of this figure today, through the issues associated with it and the approaches through which it continues to fuel contemporary architectural practice, at the crossroads of contemporary issues and challenges.

In addition to scientific contributions, feedback from practicing architects is expected, as well as works, performances, or artistic installations.

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FORMAT

The conference will be held in person only.

LOCATION

Palais Dar Lasram, Association de Sauvegarde de la Médina (ASM), 24 rue du Tribunal, La Médina, Tunis, Tunisia.

DATES: February 12, 13, and 14, 2026

SCHEDULE

- Deadline for abstract submission: September 1, 2025
- Notification to authors of accepted abstracts: October 15, 2025
- Registration deadline: November 15, 2025
- Deadline for receipt of articles: January 15, 2026
- Conference: February 12, 13, and 14, 2026
- Notifications to authors for publication: April 15, 2026

SUBMISSION PROCEDURES

Abstracts, articles, and posters (displayed communications) will be evaluated by members of the conference scientific committee using a double-blind review process. Submissions must be original and unpublished. The official languages of the conference are Arabic, English, and French.

• **Abstracts:** Abstract proposals must be in Arabic, French, or English. They must be sent to the following email address: cpmedtunisie@gmail.com and via the conference website: <https://cpmed.sciencesconf.org>. They must be formatted according to the “abstract” template in Word and PDF formats attached to the call for papers, and include the following elements:

- A title, 5 keywords, a 500-word abstract, an indicative bibliography (5 references) and the thematic focus.
- A short biography (4 lines) of the author(s) (first and last name, status, affiliation, institution, postal address, email address, and telephone number).
- The file to be sent must be named as follows: CPM26_Author name1

Authors who have submitted abstracts will be notified from October 15, 2025, of the acceptance of their submissions for oral presentation with article or poster. Only articles accepted following double-blind evaluation will be published in the conference proceedings. Articles not selected by the scientific committee will not be published.

• **Articles:** Articles to be submitted that correspond to abstracts accepted in the category of oral presentations with articles must be between 25,000 and 30,000 characters (including spaces) and comply with the Word format “article” template sent to the selected authors. If articles are accepted, authors will be notified from April 15, 2026, in order to respond to the reviewers' comments and make the requested corrections to their texts (if necessary).

• **Oral presentations:** Abstracts accepted in the category of oral presentations with articles will receive the ppt template for oral presentations from January 15, 2026.

• **Posters:** The poster template will be sent by email to the authors concerned when they are notified of the acceptance of their abstracts in the poster category. The deadline for sending posters in PDF format will also be indicated in the email.

• **Photos and illustrations** : Photos and illustrations must be submitted with a title and brief description of between 50 and 150 words. They should be provided in JPEG and PDF formats, with a minimum resolution of 300 dpi.

• **Photos and illustrations** : Videos must be accompanied by presentation text of between 300 and 500 words, submitted in Word and PDF formats.

This text should provide a clear and concise overview of the video's content.

Video files must be in MP4 format, with a minimum resolution of 1920x1080 (Full HD) and a maximum size of 500 MB.

Submissions should be made via a Drive or Vimeo link.

• **Registration fees:** The registration fee for the conference is 450 TND (for Tunisians and North Africans) / 150 euros (for non-Maghrebians). These fees include registration for the conference, the conference materials pack, lunches and coffee breaks, the "Patios of the Medina of Tunis" tour, and other conference activities (to be specified later in the final program). Registration fees are to be paid in TND or Euros by bank transfer to the account of the Association of Historic Cities of Tunisia and the Mediterranean (AHTVM). The association's bank details will be sent to selected authors at a later date.

PUBLICATION

Following peer review, selected articles will be published in the conference proceedings (details to be confirmed).

ACTIVITIES

A guided tour of the iconic patios of the Medina of Tunis will be organized on the last day of the conference, led by renowned scientific experts. Other activities related to the conference will also take place. Details of these activities will be provided in the final conference program.

PARTNERS

- The National School of Architecture and Urban Planning of Tunis, ENAU
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- The University of Manouba, UMA
- The Laboratory of Maghreb Archaeology and Architecture, LAAM – UMA
- The Sustainable City and Built Environment Laboratory, VDEC – UCAR
- The Heritage and Architecturology Research Laboratory, LarPA – UCAR
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SPECIAL MENTIONS

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