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SHARING KNOWLEDGE WITH A WIDE PUBLIC

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Vernacular architecture is the most accessible form of heritage for the public. It is less spectacular than monumental buildings or some ancient archaeological sites, but it has the advantage of speaking to everyone and being everywhere. We must take advantage of this anthropological dimension that makes this architecture familiar and accessible to disseminate the key lessons they convey. The *VerSus+* project partners are already carrying out a wide range of activities to popularise and disseminate the scientific knowledge they have accumulated over the years. Promotional activities contribute to the understanding and empowerment of the public, who in turn has an essential role to play in conservation. Conservation is everybody's business and we need to make this fact known through wide dissemination, using all the communication means available today. Below are some of the actions commonly used to sensitise the public, children and adults alike.

Festival

Festivals or summer schools such as *Full Immersion nella terra* in Sardinia, Italy, *Grains d'Isère* in Villefontaine, France, *Bellastock* in Paris, France, or the *Base-Habitat summer schools* in Austria are aimed at the public at large and are great places for interdisciplinary and intergenerational meetings. Their ambition is to share scientific knowledge and practical know-how with the general public. For the public, the advantage of these events is to be able to understand by experiencing, alongside real professionals. The experience is much more enriching and instructive than a computer screen search for information. It allows for exchanges and encounters and strengthens one's confidence in ecological building materials.

Ecomuseum

Ecomuseums, which are vernacular architecture that are museified and animated by various activities for all type of public, are very popular tourist attractions. They allow visitors to understand the anthropological dimension of this architecture. These interdisciplinary platforms are also more democratic forms of museums where inhabitants are strongly involved in the creation and the animation of the place. One discovers in such places the construction techniques, the lifestyles and customs of the people, and the traditions of the time. These visits often appeal to all the senses, with food -tastings or hands-on contact with building materials. Although the 'museificatio' of these buildings freezes them in

opposite page
16th century Bresse farm in the village of Courtes, France, now a museum and a place for public events
(credits: author)



↑
Day of information on conservation techniques for earthen structures open to the public, who can test and implement small conservation works, Four, France
(credits: author)

a specific period, blocking their contemporary evolution, it allows the preservation of knowledge and showcases authentic examples that serve as scientific references. The craftsmen working on the maintenance of these historic structures are often actors of contemporary eco-construction projects within the same geographical area.

Pathways and signage

We are familiar with tourist information panels placed on major historical monuments. It is also possible to create heritage routes dedicated to vernacular heritage and to all the intangible heritage linked to it (crafts, beliefs, traditional use of natural resources to eat, build or produce energy, for example). Heritage professionals can work with tourism and land-use planning professionals to create heritage trails equipped with information panels explaining how the territory has been transformed over generations into the landscape that is visible today.

Videos

Video is an essential medium for enhancing the intangible dimensions of vernacular architecture. It provides a means of receiving and transmitting interviews with craftsmen, material producers, construction site sequences and testimonies on the lifestyles of the inhabitants. Documentary series presenting the ways of life of humans around the globe are numerous and abundant in information. Vernacular architecture from all continents is well represented, and their occupants usually play a central role in the narrative. But these films often focus more on the lifestyles of the inhabitants than on the ecological dimension that *VerSus* seeks to promote. It is still difficult to find videos that address the environmental, socio-cultural and economic dimensions of construction over the entire life cycle. There is still a lot to be done to ensure that all the video material that researchers have at their disposal, such as interviews with craftsmen, are posted online and accessible to all audiences.



Social media

Social media have become the main vector for popular dissemination of knowledge. They are still little used for sharing knowledge on vernacular heritage, but they serve to promote events such as site visits, specialised training courses, festivals or exhibitions. Social media are also tools for mobilising citizens to defend the preservation of heritage categories endangered by major development projects. The Web is full of groups dedicated to specific heritage categories such as villages or historic city centres.

Exhibitions

Walking or cycling through the landscape is an excellent way of appreciating vernacular architecture, but it does not provide a full understanding of its complexity. The subject is so vast that it can give rise to different kinds of exhibitions: photographs or paintings exhibitions showing the aesthetic beauty of vernacular architecture, historical and anthropological exhibitions, but also technical exhibitions on the materials used and their properties. The exhibitions on earth as a building resource that have been touring the world for the past 10 years have proved very popular and have shown the public's interest in the architecture challenges. In its version presented at the Cité des Sciences in Paris, the exhibition titled *Ma terre première, pour construire demain* received 250,000 visitors.

Competitions and awards

We are familiar with international awards for great architects, but there are also more discreet competitions that reward lovers of vernacular heritage for their good deeds. In France, *Maisons Paysannes de France* for example organises competitions to reward remarkable restoration projects that respect local culture and know-how and use environmentally friendly materials. They also organise heritage

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Grains de bâtisseurs travelling exhibition on earth visited by thousands of visitors worldwide
 (credits: author)



Information signs dedicated to vernacular heritage in Saint Chef village (France)

(credits: author)



drawing competitions for children. The *Direction du patrimoine culturel* in Burkina Faso has also organised several competitions for the most beautiful conservation in order to encourage Kassena women to maintain their decorated earthen compounds. Such initiatives can create popular excitement for good practice.

In addition, labels such as the *Plus beaux villages de France* label can encourage municipalities to manage the evolution of their territories in the best possible way.

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