

CALL FOR PAPERS

International Journal of Islamic Architecture (IJIA)

Special Issue: Climate Change and the Built Environment in the Islamic World

Thematic volume planned for **May 2024 (IJIA 13.2)**

Proposal submission deadline: **April 30, 2022**

This special issue of *IJIA* focuses on the impact of the current climate crisis on the built environments of the Islamic world. Environmentalist scholar and eco-theologist Seyyed Hossein Nasr once said that the natural environment occupies a type of ‘sacred’ space in the world, an elevated position that exists only because nature is ‘always in danger of desecration’.¹ In fact, many scientists are now seeing our current global predicament as evidence of the emergence of a ‘fifth nature’ or ‘post nature’,² referring to a world ‘after’ nature or potentially beyond or in addition to it, which expands the central definition of the ‘natural’ to include man-made waste, environmental pollution, and importantly climate change as part and parcel of a lived and living ecosystem. To this end, this special issue takes up the challenge of unpacking this complex topic by utilizing architecture as a space of discourse for thinking about how one might craft a theory of ‘critical environmentalism’ across the Islamic world. Currently accounting for 40 percent of the world’s total energy usage per year, the built environment provides a fitting platform for a consideration of climate change and attendant environmental themes such as sustainability – broadly defined as ‘the endurance of systems and processes’ – towards examining how such realities are made manifest through the lens of diverse spatial templates within Muslim societies around the globe.

To this point, many architectural approaches being explored in the contemporary period as potential solutions to building in an increasingly unstable climatic future are rooted in historical practices, many of which emerged in proto-Islamic lands. Archaeological evidence from North Africa and the Middle East, for example, not only suggest that early civilizations used thermodynamically efficient materials like earth to build in desert environments, but also developed an understanding of how to generate liveable microclimates through infrastructural design and engineering. Some of these early approaches have also served as the basis for some of the first modern attempts at crafting climate-appropriate design, spearheaded by architects such as Hassan Fathy (Egypt) and his utilisation of AT (Appropriate Technology),³ and even certain contemporary structural counterparts like Dubai’s new eco-mosque in Hatta, which opened in 2021 and uses both solar panels to reduce its energy usage and water treatment units to reuse water for

¹ David Chidester and Edward Linenthal, introduction to *American Sacred Space*, ed. David Chidester and Edward Linenthal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 21.

² Michelle Apotsos and Anita Venter, ‘Post-Natural Building and Eco-Vernacular Architecture in South Africa’, in *The Sustainability Handbook*, Vol. 13, *South Africa*, ed. Llewelyn van Wyk, vol. 13 (Johannesburg: Alive2Green, 2020).

³ ‘Appropriate Technology’ is intended to define – in this case – building technology ranging from materials to design to processes of assemblage that are environmentally appropriate, culturally responsive, and promote the self-sufficiency and agency of the inhabitant.

irrigation and cleaning due to the lack of potable water sources in the region. Importantly as well, such building projects and approaches also gesture towards shifting conditions and modes of being in the world, realities informed by numerous different perspectives ranging from social, cultural, economic, and even religious modes of existence. In 2021, the Saudi Arabian government issued a *fatwa* on the topic of water reuse, requiring mosques in both Mecca and Medina to recycle wastewater or ‘grey water’ due to the limited area water sources and the extreme drain on regional water resources that events like the annual Hajj provoke. Some see this as evidence of the emergence of a ‘Green Deen’, or an approach to sustainability that positions environmental stewardship as a faith-based ordinance.

Contemporary considerations of the effects of climate change on built environments throughout the Islamic world also compel a reconsideration of the continuing fallacy imposed by western Enlightenment thought that the relationship between architecture and the environment is one of mutual exclusion. Although advancements in green technology, the growth of design fields oriented around biomimetic applications, and the development of sustainable building materials such as ‘cradle to cradle’⁴ products are shifting the relationship between built form and the environment in a more cooperative direction, the fact remains that architectural practice continues to position the natural environment as a separate, distinct realm to be studied and above all controlled, a largely non-collaborative system that rarely overlaps with the built environment unless forced and often actively opposes it.

To this end, this special issue encourages contributions that explore the role of architecture and the built environment in shaping the contours of current climate change and environmentalist discourse in the context of diverse socio-political, cultural, and economic spheres throughout the Islamic world. Contributions might consider past and present events, circumstances, and spaces that offer different or nonconventional interpretations of environmentalism and even the idea of ‘nature’ itself as a space of multiple perspectives, definitions, and concerns, as well as how communities individually encounter and define environmental concerns and incorporate natural design elements into structural responses and solutions specific to the context. Papers might additionally address how architecture as an analytical mechanism challenges established approaches and tendencies that position the built environment in opposition to environmentalist concerns by recognizing its capacity to act as a type of text composed of multiple narratives and registers of knowledge that reflects the value system and frameworks operating within a society at a particular moment with regards to the environment.

Papers should adhere to the *IJIA*’s remit, which is defined broadly as ‘the historic Islamic world, encompassing the Middle East and parts of Africa and Asia, but also the more recent geographies of Islam in its global dimensions’. Further, contributors should fully exploit the self-reflexive

⁴ ‘Cradle to cradle’ materials are construction materials that are naturally biodegradable and can thus be reincorporated into ecological systems without human intervention.

potential of this remit towards addressing a spectrum of critical approaches to the built environment in the Islamic world that not only position architecture as a theatre of environmental performance, but also a platform from which to consider additional conditions revolving around issues of race, gender, ethnicity, culture, and politics as they relate to environmental challenges and concerns. To this end, this special issue not only aims to be strongly interdisciplinary, drawing from fields ranging from urban design, history, architecture, archaeology, sociology, and anthropology, but also accommodate a diversity of discourses that focus on regions, communities, and built environments not widely addressed in scholarship on Islamic space. Such case studies are particularly important toward generating a comparative interrogative approach to effectively consider the ongoing encounter/relationship between humanity and the natural world over time and space.

Examples of themes contributors might wish to explore include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Imagining sustainable futures/architecture as an environmentalist frontier
- Global warming, climate change, and its social/cultural impacts
- Natural aesthetics as design inspiration
- Green architecture in desert environments
- Environmentalism, heritage, and its discontents
- Eco-Islam and the ‘Green Deen’
- Armed conflict and its environmental impacts/implications
- Petropolitics and sustainable space
- Architecture and ecological conservation/preservation
- Non-traditional/emerging designs, materials, and spaces
- Colonial/postcolonial frameworks in environmental discourse
- AT (appropriate technology)

Articles offering historical and theoretical analysis (DiT papers) should be between 6000 and 8000 words, and those on design and practice (DiP papers) between 3000 and 4000 words. Practitioners are welcome to contribute insofar as they address the critical framework of the journal. Please send a title and a 400-word abstract to the guest editor, Michelle Apotsos, Williams College (IJIASustainability@gmail.com), by April 30, 2022. Authors of accepted proposals will be contacted soon thereafter and will be requested to submit full papers by **January 30, 2023**. All papers will be subject to blind peer review. For author instructions, please consult: www.intellectbooks.com/ijia