

Thematic sessions

The pursuit of comfort by design.

Material history of building services in 19th- and 20th-centuries architecture

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Whether concealed, embedded, or literally exposed, comfort equipment – heating, mechanical ventilation, air conditioning, etc. –, occupy a dominant place in the architectural project and play a prominent part in modern and contemporary construction.

Paradoxically “bulky” yet “invisible”, these services, introduced in the 19th century and then improved and installed extensively in the 20th century, deserve further consideration. In this logic, the session proposes to restore the centrality of building systems to the history of 19th- and 20th-architecture, considering the services as truly structuring constructional elements, not – and quite erroneously – as mere secondary components, added to the architecture, hence accessories.

This involves, firstly, documenting the building services with contributions tracing the history of the systems, from their origins to their progressive development, resting on remarkable applications. At the same time, it entails examining the real interdependence established between the building services and the constructional or structural elements in certain specific cases. Hence the authors of the papers will address the theme of the history of the building services in relation to the crucial question of their integration into buildings, explaining both the material – constructional, spatial and expressive – implications of the artificial control in the architectural project and its cultural impact.