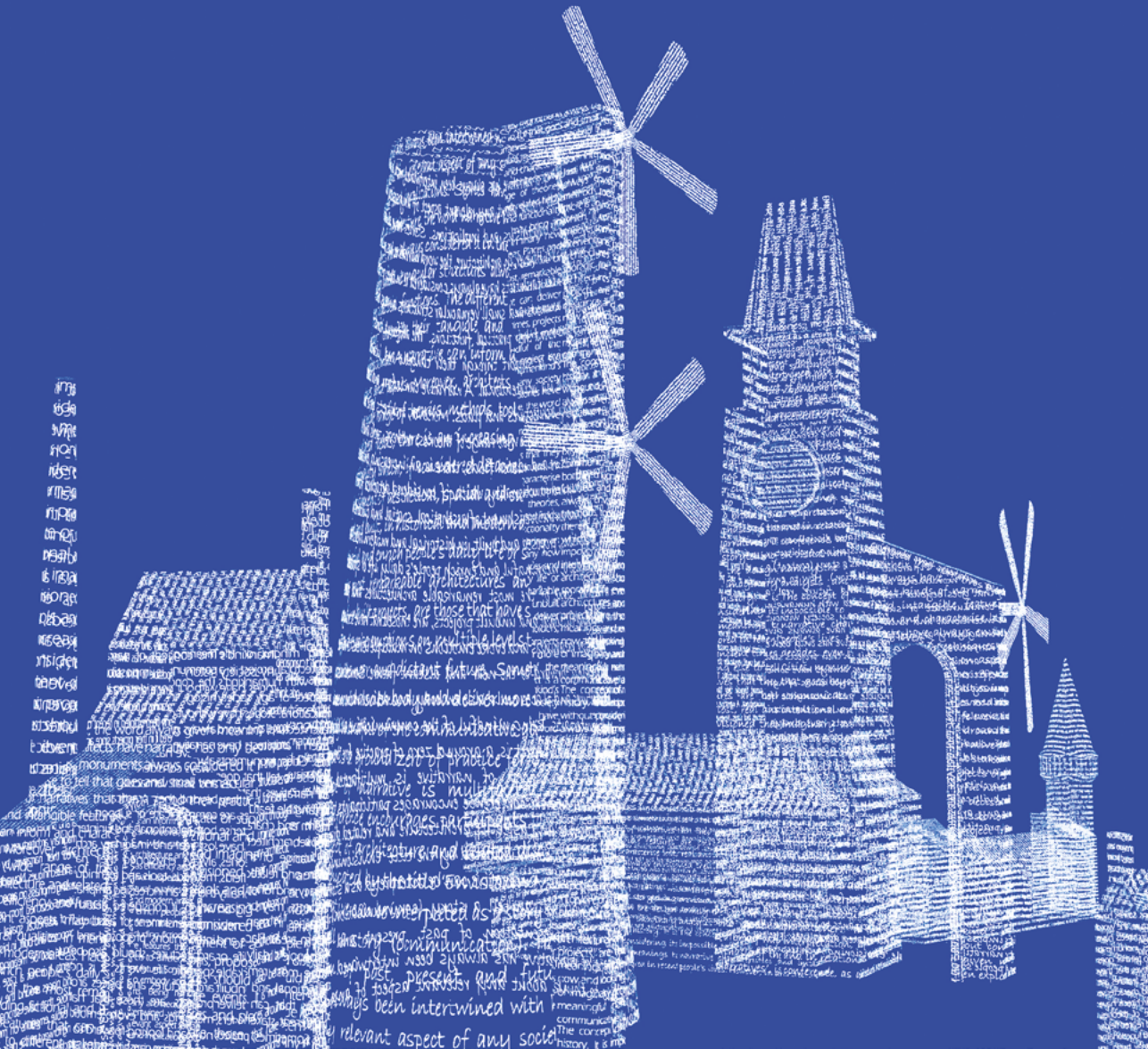


# Envisioning Architectural Narratives



Edited by  
Danilo Di Mascio

University of  
**HUDDERSFIELD**  
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# EAEA15

Monograph of the 15<sup>th</sup> Biennial International Conference of the European  
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# ENVISIONING ARCHITECTURAL NARRATIVES

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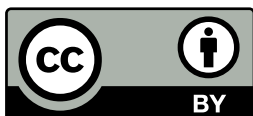
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# Engaging with Landscape through Architecture

## Introduction

This paper examines architecture's ability to adjust external and internal experiences of a landscape narrative transforming it from "location to place" (Norberg-Schulz/1996). The recently-built Cove Park Artists' Residency Centre in Argyll, by Cameron Webster is the vehicle for a critical reflection of its realised qualities and the soon-to-be-constructed Rossdhu Kennels remodelling in the Loch Lomond National Park, by Studio KAP is examined for its anticipated and intended qualities. Both case studies engage with a landscape of outstanding natural beauty in a valued cultural and geographic setting. Despite different briefs and scales, both are determined by domestic activities of living, cooking and dining. As the projects' co-authors we examine how our perception of landscape is modified by contemporary architecture, harnessing its power through acts of protection, social interaction and control of view. Through the respective design processes, themes of newness, material culture, artistic production, phenomenology and innovation through tradition are explored. An artist's recorded experience of CovePark adds further insight into the building in use. We consider the spatial configuration of each building's openings and their physical impact on the landscape and the influence of traditional and contemporary precedents. Can newness act as a benevolent rather than a malevolent force on our ancient landscapes? Within the contemporary context of the climate emergency, what role can architecture and landscape play in creating an environmentally-enlightened future rather than a carefully-protected past?

## Background

Our relationship with landscape relates to narratives of permanence and cultural and national identity. Robert MacFarlane writes, "Landscape was here long before we were even dreamed. It watched us arrive." (MacFarlane, 2007). We value landscape bereft of human presence, one that reinforces the idea of eternity. In reality few landscapes are without trace of some human interaction, even if it is in the most discreet manner as "...in the cairns, in the paths...in the stepping stones.." (Shepherd, 2014). As our world becomes increasingly urbanized, that experience of landscape as untouched wilderness is fading. As our awareness of global climate emergency accelerates, our understanding of landscape's fragility deepens. The idea of wilderness is thus increasingly precious to us perhaps because "...we need wild places because they remind us of a world beyond human..." (MacFarlane, 2007).



Fig. 01 The landscape and the manmade

*Source: StudioKAP*

Where visible in a landscape, the presence of manmade structures is softened by time. In a paradoxical way everything eventually becomes landscape, shifting from “memory to history” (Chipperfield, 2017). The illusion of a timeless landscape where humans are absent is altered to one where humans are insignificant. The European Landscape Convention defines landscape as “an area, as perceived by people, whose visual features and character are the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.” (Scottish Natural Heritage, 2020). Traditional rural structures are one such result of this action and interaction. Fashioned by non-professionals utilising meagre resources, the vernacular has made some of the most eloquent and enduring statements about the relationship between the man made and the natural world. In contrast to those early farmer/producers, our contemporary experience of landscape as 21st century consumers draws different meanings to and from it. The work of Luigi Snozzi in Ticino or Wright’s Fallingwater, Aalto’s Villa Mairea or McKay-Lyons Sweetapple in Nova Scotia all bear powerful witness to this.

## Cove Park



Fig. 02 The view from the site

*Source: Cameron Webster*

Cove Park was founded by Peter and Eileen Jacobs in 1999 as an arts centre, offering residencies to a wide range of national and international artists. It's unique programme of residencies, commissions and collaborative projects respond to and support the diversity of contemporary artistic practice. The landscape and particular context plays a supporting role in the narrative of Cove Park's ethos of creativity and collaboration. This narrative is instrumental in the way that the architecture responds to both the wider context and the individual artist's experience. The centre building offers a resource for research, collaboration and a place to cook and dine communally. The residential accommodation is distributed amongst the landscape, allowing individuals or smaller groups to retreat and live and work separately from the centre whilst using it as the heart of the experience. Through this case study, the experience of artist and musician Raydale Dower helps frame the relationship of the building to the landscape and his residency.

...to transform the Scottish landscape from a distant painting, bereft of human beings, into a living presence, one in which humanity and nature are necessarily conjoined...(Severin, 2008)

The site is located on a narrow plain at the top of 50 acres of steep hillside on the Rosneath Peninsula, high above the village of Cove and the residential strip along the eastern shore of Loch Long. It has a magnificent view of part of the Firth of Clyde and Loch Long to the south and west, with the hills of Argyll beyond. (It is possible to strike a line from the site all the way to Corunna in Spain, without crossing land). The changing weather can be seen from a distance, and this is a constant source of variety and drama. These views, with the movement of ships in the loch below and the changing weather are of prime importance to the experience of the site, while the intimate aspects of the rock, water, trees, ferns and lichens provide beauty and interest even when the weather is bleak.

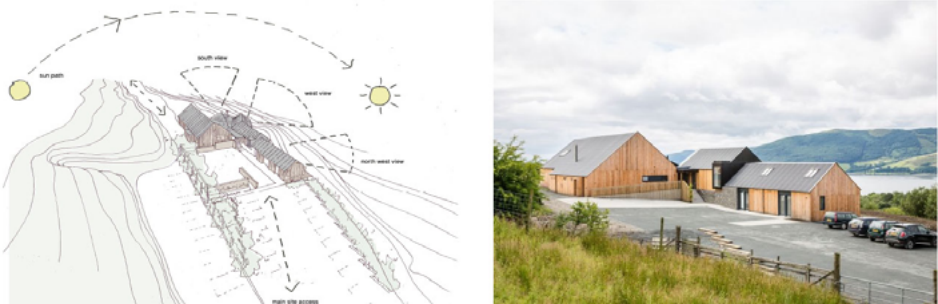


Fig. 03 The relationship between building and landscape

Source: Cameron Webster

Through the engagement with different artistic disciplines and collaboration, regular events were previously held, in an existing building inviting a diverse range of guests to marvellous dinners, providing opportunities to network and collaborate. The landscape is the setting for ,as well as the retreat from artistic production. In 2012 Cove Park commissioned Cameron Webster architects to carry out a feasibility study for a new centre. Evaluations and consultations took place with the local community, artists in residence and with Cove Park trustees to develop a brief with the following key criteria for the building:

- To provide more space for the Centre having out grown its facilities.
- To encourage maximum interaction between its occupants.
- To be sustainable, low maintenance, running costs and works well.
- To take full advantage of the spectacular site and views.
- To improve the landscape and entry experience to the site.
- To engage with the other facilities on the site.

The clients did not want a “signature” building with a formal visual style implying a single artistic approach and so the plan is arranged informally, taking the massing of vernacular farm buildings as a reference. In playing down the authorship and formal appearance of the building, the ethos of Cove Park’s inclusivity encourages many interpretations, voices and interactions which in turn support the overarching narrative of place. The architecture can be seen, as the interface between landscape and retreat with key moments / doorways/ terraces, that balance the individual and collective between the centre and the retreat in which the studios and accommodation are held.



Fig. 04 Blurred thresholds to the exterior

*Source: Cameron Webster*

The new design offered an opportunity to curate a narrative with the landscape both internally and externally at both a close scale and wider aspect. The narrative of retreat into the landscape allowed the centre to be considered as the heart

of the experience, balancing between the entry to retreat and the release into the landscape. The building reveals particular glimpses of the immediate grassy landscape and the distant view and approaching weather. The courtyard curates the intimate character of the entry sequence and where the wider landscape is cloaked in the “dynamic mystery of concealment”. Externally the pitched corrugated roofs echo Scottish barns and steadings, whilst also reflecting the undulating silhouette of the surrounding hills. The untreated Scottish larch cladding is a long lasting, familiar and natural rural material and is combined with rubble stone walls and gravel surfaces to create a familiar and sustainable countryside environment without rhetoric or pastiche.

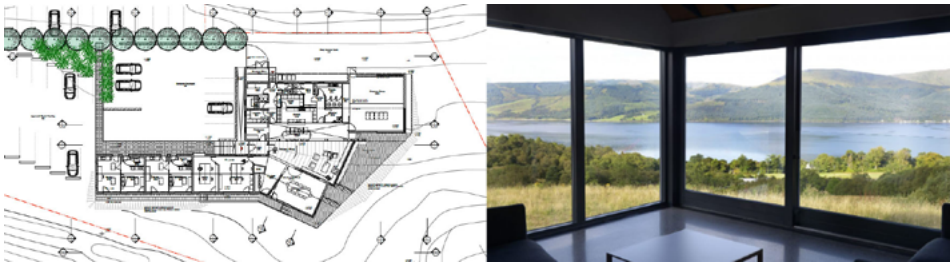


Fig. 05 The ground floor plan and arrival sequence

Source: Cameron Webster

The building first greets you and then locates you, providing a vantage point to place yourself in relation to the remote and beautiful landscape. The open plan design of the main space echoes the generosity of the residency programme itself, providing a space to reflect, contemplate and engage (Dower, 2020). The arrival sequence welcomes you in the warm spacious lobby. As a stepping stone towards the retreat into the landscape and a time of focussed practice, the lobby captures the space between the blackened timber roof trusses above and the shiny terrazzo floor which catches light and spills into the “snug” spaces, located between the two main wings, immediately alongside the kitchen and dining area.

I watched a number of new residents walk in and immediately drop their bags, to simply stand and take in the view (Ibid.).

The meeting room and a common room can be used independently from the dining area and the widening of the plan allows these spaces to be flexible as either closed or open to the central “heart”, ‘with the large framed window view providing a constantly evolving backdrop to our conversations (Ibid.). The main spaces fan out with views to the south and west, with generous glazing and terraces beyond, leading to the path through the landscape to the private studios and the more intimate and contained relationship with the landscape. The approach, entrance, arrival and the immediate choice of communal spaces all of which frame the landscape in different ways, give the visiting artists a variety of possible experiences to share with others.



Fig. 06 The communal and the landscape

*Source: Cameron Webster*

Across creative disciplines there was a shared experience; artists, writers, poets, film makers, musicians - all of us were essentially there on our own, responding to a unique environment and personal situation, but with lots of overlaps to share. Occasionally, someone might have a tough day and feel like they were wasting their time, it's such a rare and valuable opportunity to make the most of, and we would talk this through and end up laughing at our artistic concerns framed against the much larger timescale constantly present, in the hills and seascape surrounding us, the weather was always present and changing; the building housing all of this experience (Ibid.).

The entrance ramp and the “snug” align with the axis that reaches all the way to Corunna, and while Spain is naturally way beyond sight, the idea that the building and landscape are seen as part of a wider world is significant.

Those initial views, the visual experience of the landscape, the seascape and horizon, informed the work that I visualised and then undertook during my residency (Ibid.).

## Rossdhu Kennels



Fig. 07 Looking towards and from the site

*Source: StudioKAP*

Rossdhu Kennels comprises a low-lying freestanding stone and slate roofed structure previously used as a dog kennels enclosure for the local gamekeeper from nearby Rossdhu House. Built most likely in the early 19th century, it incorporates low stone walls which formed the original dog ‘runs’. It is situated on the brow of a hill facing almost due south towards Loch Lomond and backed by an abrupt drop in level to an existing stream adjacent a large backdrop of mature trees. It is the only visible structure in the immediate vicinity giving the site a serene but melancholic character. A modest-sized building of local rather than national historic interest, it required a substantial level of stabilization, renovation and intervention to provide it with a new lease of life. Given its dimensional and structural constraints, the majority of the new accommodation needed to be created beyond the existing footprint, raising a fundamental question about the architectural direction of the new additions. The promise of long views towards the loch and the dense vegetation coverage inspired our client with notions of magnificent sunsets and living underneath a canopy of trees. They recognized the opportunity of bringing the site’s phenomenological qualities into the experience of living in the building itself. This raised further questions about how these surroundings could be enhanced by the addition of contemporary architecture.

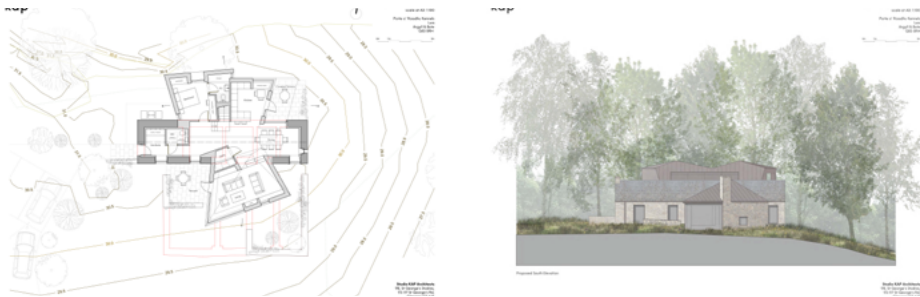


Fig. 8 Proposed plan and south elevation

Source: StudioKAP

Our design proposals addressed this latter issue by bringing the existing and the new together in a composition inspired by traditional vernacular groupings. The illusion of a small group of autonomous buildings huddled together forming a simple settlement underpinned our design intentions. This basic massing strategy was directly inspired by the traditional mixture of sizes, scales and materials which characterize nearby farmsteads, distilleries and vernacular groupings. This approach had several purposes:

- It reinforces the existing non-domestic character of the building in the landscape.
- It creates a varied silhouette alluding to the idea of settlement.
- It creates a hierarchy distinguishing the existing and the contemporary.

- It establishes the existing structure as the centre of gravity of the new composition, in plan, section and elevation.
- It creates a credible architectural strategy for extending freestanding rural buildings generally.

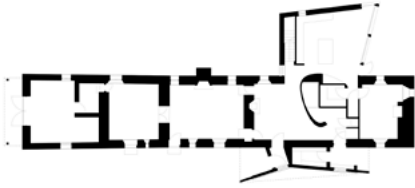


Fig. 9 Braefoot plan and view

Source: StudioKAP

A similar strategy had been employed by us in a previous project, ‘Braefoot’, Dumgoyne. There we also invested the new additions with a certain architectural autonomy from the constraints of the existing building. César Pelli’s unbuilt Long Gallery House is a good example of a similar idea in which an open, glazed spine contrasts with contained, semi-independent vessels of accommodation, suggesting a future of ever-increasing spatial variety. Alvar Aalto’s library designs juxtaposing orthogonal ‘bars’ of ancillary accommodation with more flamboyant fan-shaped reading rooms reveals a similar investigation.

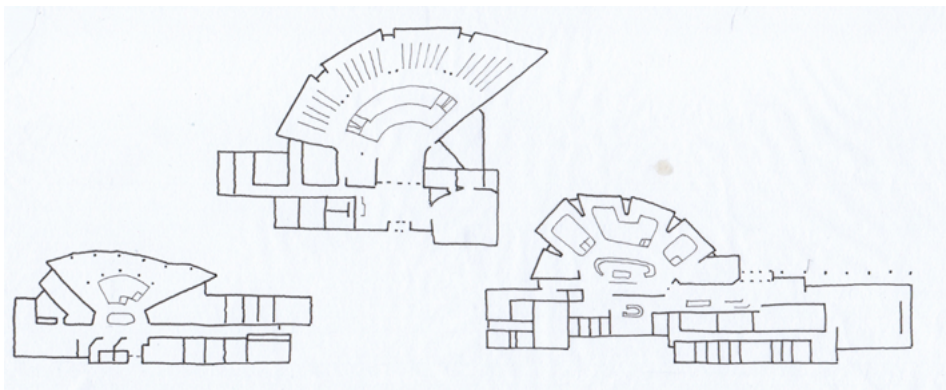


Fig. 10 Library plans by Alvar Aalto

Source: StudioKAP

Inspired by these traditional and modern precedents, our new additions to the Kennels structure fan out from an orthogonal spine. This arrangement creates opportunities to engage with the outside and provide complimentary additions to the existing massing. The new glazed openings refresh the views and are varied;

floor to ceiling panels, punctured holes in walls; slots integrated into the roof and sliding screens which allow access onto sheltered balcony spaces or covered terraces.

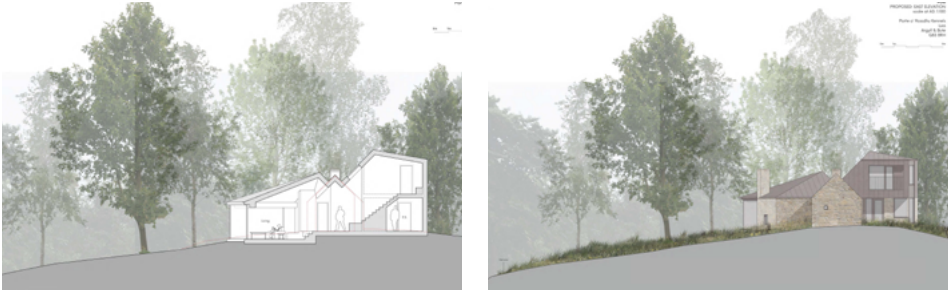


Fig. 11 Tented spaces and prismatic forms

Source: StudioKAP

The sectional arrangement of the building, completely devoid of flat ceilings comprises a series of prismatic, tent-like configurations which create a suite of interlocking pitched geometric spaces. These are designed to contrast with the original structure as well as celebrate new spatial opportunities. They allude to notions of tent-pitching, single space enclosures, settlements of colliding structures. This spatial juxtaposition of the orthogonal and the fragmented; one stable and secure, the other seemingly in flux and in motion, can also be seen as a metaphor for the relationship between a fixed notion of history and an ever-evolving contemporary scene. Our approach to material choices also played a role in this narrative of continuity and contrast. The new composition is unified by recycled stone from the dog runs, providing a datum of material continuity to the ground floor. Above, non-weathering copper sheeting clads the walls and roofs.

## Conclusion

The wild prefaced us and it will outlive us... (MacFarlane, 2007)

Norberg-Schulz writes, 'The existential purpose of a building (architecture) is therefore to make a site a place, that is to uncover the meanings potentially present in the given environment.' (Norberg-Schulz, 1996). Have we established a fresh relationship between the 'found' land and buildings; a bleak, windswept hillside and a piece of rural artefact? Our buildings are physical vessels establishing new introductions and thresholds to those places. They act as vantage points, framing episodic moments and adjusting the malleable narrative of a timeless scene. They search for new meanings in their respective landscapes and arguably transform their 'site' into 'place', a process far from unique. Drawing on traditional and contemporary sources of inspiration, we identify the complexities of occupying an ancient landscape with contemporary material, bringing the qualities of the

exterior into the interior. Gaston Bachelard states, “ Storm makes sense of shelter, and if shelter is sound, the shelter makes the storm good, enjoyable, recreational.” (Bachelard, 1958). CovePark’s architecture animates a social as well as individual landscape experience while Rossdhu, requires lived-in experience and inhabitation to reveal its full impact. Architecture heightens our awareness of nature’s grandeur and ever-changing beauty, but also its fragility and indifference to human life, inviting us to become protectors and custodians, rather than consumers. Raydale Dower’s commentary reveals how Covepark’s architecture facilitates the merging of creative work and inspiration with the qualities of an ever-changing landscape. In both projects the landscape emerges as the guiding factor in the design process, curating key moments using containment, openness, light, structure and materiality. Key vantage points are described through specific openings, spatial sequences and places of gathering. Both projects act as catalysts adjusting the scene, referencing the past, and looking towards a fresh episode in the narrative of each landscape.

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## Envisioning Architectural Narratives

This monograph documents the 15th European Architectural Envisioning Association Conference, entitled 'Envisioning Architectural Narratives', hosted (virtually) by the Department of Architecture and 3D Design, School of Art Design and Architecture, The University of Huddersfield, United Kingdom, from the 1st to the 3rd of September 2021. The event has continued the mission of the European Architectural Envisioning Association, namely, to create a valuable opportunity for communication and exchange of ideas and experiences in teaching, research and practice, with a particular focus, for this 15th edition, on envisioning the multiple and multifaceted relationships and applications between architecture and narrative. By considering the importance of narrative in humankind's history, the theme has invited participants to reflect upon three main topics: narrative and analysis, narrative and design, and narrative and representation.

This publication presents the papers accepted after two double-blind peer review processes. Each submission was assessed by three reviewers from the EAEA15 International Scientific Review committee, which is constituted by scholars from 12 countries. The authors of the accepted papers are from 20 different countries worldwide.

Dr Danilo Di Mascio is a Senior Lecturer in Architecture at the University of Huddersfield, and is a researcher, registered architect (ARB) and Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA). As author and speaker, he participated at various international conferences in Europe, the Middle East, and the Far East.

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