AURA

2026

oct. **13.14** pt. I

pt. II dec. **1**

MACHINES

International conference
and research workshop
on architectural atmospheres

Organized by Elisabetta Canepa
and Riccardo Rapparini

Dept. of Architecture and Design
University of Genoa

Funded by
the European Union
NextGenerationEU

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Scientific committee

Luca Andrighetto (DISFOR, UniGe)

Laura Avanzino (DIMES, UniGe)

Elisabetta Canepa (DAD, UniGe)

Bob Condia (APDesign, KState)

Anna Fassio (DIMES, UniGe)

Andrea Jelić (KU Leuven)

Martina Putzolu (DINOGMI, UniGe)

Riccardo Rapparini (DAD, UniGe)

Valter Scelsi (DAD, UniGe)

www.aura.unige.it

Co-design and co-creation activities

The event is developed within AURA — “Affective Unities: A Site-Specific Research on Architectural Atmospheres,” a research project funded by the European Union as part of the NextGenerationEU program, through the Italian Ministry of University and Research under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, Mission 4 “Education and research,” Component 2 “From research to business,” Investment 1.2 “Funding projects presented by young researchers,” ID project MSCA2024_0000009, CUP D33C25000500006.

concept and format

As we enter a room, walk along a street, or look out of a window, we immediately grasp the atmospheric quality of a building, a city, or a landscape. Atmospheres play a central role in shaping the affective dimension of our spatial experience but their relational, subjective, and elusive character makes them difficult to discern, communicate, and analyze.

Under certain conditions, the atmosphere of a place gains intensity, clarity, and charge. This is where aura emerges: a threshold in experience, as what usually remains in the background comes forward and becomes perceptually alive.

Aura belongs to the here-and-now: only partially captured by words, it can be sensed, traced, interpreted, and translated into architectural thinking.

Reflecting Rem Koolhaas's late-1990s description of MoMA as an "aura machine" — a device capable of producing a singular, vivid, and memorable identity — the conference follows the generative force of this image. It asks how places can act as aura machines: spatial configurations whose heightened atmospheric resonance offers privileged insight into atmospheric dynamics and the ways architecture shapes our emotions.

AURA MACHINES invites scholars and practitioners from different disciplines to work on one shared case study in Genoa and to test methods of observation, representation, and design that are sensitive to embodied experience. Our aim is to understand how atmosphere can operate as a design tool for architectural composition: a lived, affective, and site-specific condition for reading and transforming our surroundings.

Part I
On-site conference and workshop
October 13–14, 2026 ▪ Genoa
Dept. Architecture and Design

The program includes:
- keynote lectures
- a panel on imaging atmospheres
- a panel on designing atmospheres
- a collective visit to the research area
- and field-based workshop sessions

Part II
Online presentation and discussion
December 1, 2026 ▪ online

Participants reconvene online to share and review the work developed after the site visit, in formats including:
- essays
- drawings
- maps
- audiovisual materials
- and other experimental representations

Invited speakers
We are delighted to announce that the following speakers, among others, will be joining us: Viktorija Bogdanova (Aalto University), Camilla de Camilli (Università della Svizzera italiana), Zakaria Djebbara (Aalborg University), Amanzio Farris (Politecnico di Milano), Ana Mombiedro (University of Alicante), Gaia Leandri (Università di Genova), Alberto Pérez-Gómez (McGill University, Montreal), Sarah Robinson (Aalborg University).

call for contributions

AURA MACHINES is an international conference and research workshop on atmosphere in architecture, organized within the EU-funded AURA PROJECT ("Affective Unities: A Site-Specific Research on Architectural Atmospheres"). It investigates how the aura of a particular place can be sensed, described, mapped, interpreted, and integrated into architectural design.

Unfolding around a shared site in Genoa, the event brings together scholars, architects, artists, and researchers from different fields. This place will serve as a common ground for fieldwork, reflection, and exchange, allowing diverse methods to engage with the same atmospheric conditions.

Rooted in the case study explored during the October event in Genoa, each proposal should draw on the author's scientific, artistic, or design background. Selected authors will present their contributions during the online conference session in December 2026. In this sense, the conference adopts a comparative and interdisciplinary approach: multiple methods, languages, and sensibilities will engage with the same site and its distinctive aura.

As part of the conference outcomes, selected presentations will be invited for further development into a peer-reviewed, open-access publication. Presentation formats and timing will be defined, after the selection process.

Suggested themes

We welcome contributions from PhD candidates, scholars, architects, and artists exploring aura through a wide range of theoretical, design-based, creative, and experimental approaches:

- site-specific methods for documenting and studying architectural atmospheres
- sensory, affective, and embodied approaches to design
- thresholds, transitional spaces, and in-between conditions
- drawing, mapping, and diagramming atmospheric qualities
- artistic practices for sensing space
- first-person accounts of lived spatial experience, including phenomenological and phenomenographic approaches
- third-person investigations of spatial experience, including environmental, experimental, and neuroscience-inspired approaches

Submission guidelines

Applicants are invited to submit the following materials:

- proposal title
- abstract: up to 300 words
- short bio: up to 150 words
- disciplinary field
- institutional affiliation

Submissions should be sent to:
aura.project@unige.it

Submission deadline: July 15, 2026
Notification of acceptance: July 31, 2026

Submissions and presentations will be in English.

No registration fee is required.