Athens

Modern vernaculars from the city to the hinterland



Detail from D. Pikionis's landscaping at Filopappou Hill, Athens (1954–57). Photo: I. Sklavounos.

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ETH D-ARCH
Spring semester 2026

Travel: Departure from Zurich
March 15, return March 21

Estimated Total Cost: CHF 750
(Category C)

Participation Fee includes:
Accommodation in Athens and Varnavas area (shared rooms)
Local transportation
Two dinners
Workshop materials and tools
Guidance from Boulouki craftspeople and specialists

Participants: 15–24

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Seminar week FS 26 16–20 March 2026

This integrated Seminar Week takes students to Athens and the Varnavas area of Attica, Greece (March 16–20), to explore a terrain where metropolitan expansion meets the scarred landscapes of recent wildfires, and where established representations of both the modern and the traditional give way to hybrid architectures of everyday life.
Athens is rarely associated with vernacular architecture, yet much of the city was built through successive waves of improvisation and resourcefulness—from the informal refugee settlements of the 1920s, to the collective housing experiments of the interwar period, to the polykatoikia that came to define postwar urban Greece. The work of architects like Dimitris Pikionis and, later, Atelier 66 represents parallel investigations: deliberate, scholarly engagements with folk building traditions that aimed to offer alternatives to imported modernism.

In Varnavas—a settlement some forty kilometers northeast of Athens—we will encounter the other side of Athenian expansion: the peri-urban landscapes where the city meets its hinterland, and where the climate crisis has left visible scars. In August 2024, devastating wildfires swept through this region, destroying approximately 5,000 hectares of land—a stark reminder of how climate change threatens cities and their peripheries alike. Here, where a small building serving the local theater group was lost to the flames, students will engage hands-on with earthen construction as part of Boulouki's ongoing project to rebuild using natural materials and participatory methods.

Through site visits, conversations with architects and craftspeople, and direct material engagement, students will investigate what a contemporary vernacular can mean—an architecture attentive to place, climate, and community, built not from idealized pasts but from the resourceful practices of everyday construction.

Participation in the Integrated Seminar Week for the Boulouki studio students is entirely optional.