

Sustainable
Construction

TALKS

BY SAINT-GOBAIN
VENICE
MAY 7, 2025

Future-Ready Architecture: Reconciling Creativity & Sustainability

TAKEAWAYS

Architecture today is being called upon not only to create beautiful and functional spaces, but also to help address some of the most pressing challenges of our time: rapid urbanization, climate change, resource scarcity, and social fragmentation. On the sidelines of the 2025 Venice Architecture Biennale, Saint-Gobain hosted an international Sustainable Construction Talk in Venice on May 7, focusing on the theme:

**Future-ready architecture:
How to reconcile creativity and sustainability.**

The event brought together innovators, builders, and changemakers—from architects and engineers to hands-on educators and applied researchers—to exchange ideas on designing with purpose, from caring spaces to regenerative cities, and to emphasize the need for bold shifts in mindset, education, and material practice.

Here are the main insights and tangible solutions shared during this international gathering.



STRIKING FACTS

Only **22% of professionals** familiar with the concept of sustainable construction consider themselves to **have received full training** in sustainable construction¹.

Students are the group that consider themselves **least informed about sustainable construction**, with only 21% feeling sufficiently informed about the subject¹.

Architects and building engineers come on **top of the list as the most legitimate players** to accelerate sustainable construction (with 56% responses)¹.

¹ Source: 2025 Sustainable Construction Barometer.



The Sustainable
Construction
Observatory
BY SAINT-GOBAIN

The art and science of **SUSTAINABLE** **ARCHITECTURE** with Benedetta Tagliabue

Architect Principal and Director at EMBT Architects, Benedetta Tagliabue opened the event with a deeply personal reflection on care in architecture and the importance to make an architecture which is caring for the person proposing a radical yet profoundly human vision of sustainability.



Drawing from her own experience

designing a Maggie's Centre in Spain designed to create comfortable, hospitable spaces for cancer patients,

Benedetta Tagliabue underscored the healing power of architecture that is attentive not only to environmental performance, but to emotional and psychological well-being.

For her, sustainability is not just a technical matter, but a **human and spiritual concern**, rooted in how spaces and buildings make people feel, support health, dignity, and belonging. This ethos extends beyond hospitals. Whether designing a church or a waterfront promenade in Rimini (Italy), Tagliabue argued that true sustainability must embrace nature, memory, and local materials—not as nostalgic gestures, but as vital frameworks for building spaces that are alive, inclusive, and meaningful.

Regeneration emerged as a central theme in her work. Whether revitalizing a Barcelona neighborhood or reintroducing nature into dense coastal cities like Rimini, Tagliabue argues for a **design culture that heals**, embraces nature, memory, heritage and local materials—not as nostalgic gestures, but as vital frameworks for building spaces that are alive, inclusive, and meaningful.

Water, especially in Venice, was also positioned as both **material and metaphor**—a vital resource whose scarcity and symbolic power must inform future design. Her pavilion for the Venice Biennale, built entirely of lightweight paper, invited visitors to consider the invisible impact of digital infrastructure—particularly the water footprint of AI technologies. In her words, sustainability today requires both aesthetic ambition and ethical awareness. And it must awaken a renewed sense of wonder.



“A caring architecture makes people feel at home, at peace, even in moments of vulnerability. That is sustainability too.”

Benedetta Tagliabue


Architect Principal and Director,
EMBT Architects



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Designing for PEOPLE and PLANET: the skills architects need today

The first panel highlighted a fundamental paradox: although awareness around sustainable construction is growing, most professionals—and even students—still lack the tools, training, and mindset needed to design for a rapidly changing world. The discussion called for a radical overhaul of architectural education and practice, centered around systems thinking, cultural inclusivity, and circular design.

 **Professor Ashraf M. Salama**, Co-director UNESCO/UIA Architectural Education Commission; Head of Architecture and the Built Environment, University of Northumbria, advocated for curricula that place people and place at the center.

Sustainability, he reminded the audience, is not just about carbon metrics or green labels, but about relationships—social, cultural, ecological. For this to become a reality, Professor Ashraf M. Salama encourages a broadening of the architectural role—moving beyond traditional frameworks that often emphasize speed, recognition, and profitability. He proposes a more inclusive approach, where architects complement their creative authorship with roles as collaborators and facilitators, helping communities actively shape solutions to the challenges they face.

For Tosin Oshinowo, who practices in Nigeria as Principal Architect at Oshinowo Studio, far from limiting creativity, working within material and economic constraints and scarcity are an opportunity to unleash creativity for better and more sustainable

architecture. These limitations push designers to rethink spatial strategies and rediscover the value of local know-how. Reconnecting with vernacular wisdom—adobe, cross-ventilation, courtyards—can offer powerful, low-impact responses to contemporary urban needs.

Claudio Martani, Senior Researcher and Deputy Manager at ETH Zürich, added the lens of circularity. He emphasized that designing with what already exists—whether reused materials or built structures—demands a different kind of creativity: one that starts with constraints and builds beauty from them. Technology, including digital modeling and AI, can play a key role in enabling this shift, but only if architects are trained to use it with intention and purpose.

Together, the panelists painted a picture of architecture that is less about signature forms and more about durable impact. To prepare the next generation, they insisted, we must reframe sustainability as an ethical, aesthetic, and civic responsibility.



[Play video](#)





“Sustainability is not just about reducing carbon footprint or energy conservation. It’s relational. We need to consider people at the heart of the process.”

Prof. Ashraf Salama

Co-director UNESCO/UIA Architectural Education Commission; Head of Architecture and the Built Environment, University of Northumbria

“A very important quality that architects everywhere need to have is working within constraints. One of the biggest challenges we’ve had in my education as an architect was we never thought about where the materials came from. Now that’s not realistic today in the modern world.”

Tosin Oshinowo

Principal Architect, Oshinowo Studio



“Circularity is not a limit to creativity. It’s an invitation to rethink form starting from what’s already there.”

Dr. Claudio Martani

Senior Researcher and Deputy Manager at the Chair of Circular Engineering for Architecture (CEA), ETH Zürich



SUSTAINABLE by DESIGN: Form, Function, and Future

The second panel examined how the values of sustainability translate into built form—and what it means in practice to design spaces that are both functional and forward-looking. The conversation revolved around the need to integrate environmental performance with community engagement and social equity at every stage of the design process.



[Play video](#)



Claire Weisz, Principal-in-Charge of WXY Studio, an American multi-disciplinary agency focused on creating equitable, vibrant, and healthy buildings, places, neighborhoods, and systems, shared examples of participatory urban projects where residents shaped the design brief. One such project—the reconstruction of the Rockaway Boardwalk in New York—demonstrated that communities often demand not just safe or green infrastructure, but beautiful, expressive, and meaningful places. Beauty, she argued, is not a luxury; it is a condition of dignity, echoing the view shared by Luca De Franceschi, Director of Architecture and Sustainable Development at Immobilière 3F, for whom sustainability must rhyme with beauty. For this expert, firmly committed to social and affordable housing, social housing can be aesthetically pleasing while addressing the challenge of climate change. Thus, design quality and energy performance should not be negotiable, even in constrained contexts.

Through a program R&D, called the 3FClimate, to insight, actually finding solutions, like offsite construction, his team explores how to introduce biodiversity and mobility solutions without compromising affordability. Both speakers agreed on one essential point: sustainability is not an afterthought or a checklist. It must be embedded from the outset, in the project's governance, design philosophy, and construction method. From material traceability to modular systems and community ownership, form must follow ethics as much as function.



“Asking the three P’s—people, place and process—are essential if we want to evolve the way we conceive urban projects today: People to ask why, and for whom, but also who is not at the table and who should be there—places to define constraints and opportunities—and finally process to reflect on how we build, how we design, how we educate.”

Claire Weisz
Principal-in-Charge of WXY Studio

“Social housing can actually be very beautiful and address some of today’s challenges, including climate change.”

Luca De Franceschi
Director of Architecture and Sustainable Development, Immobilière 3F



FINAL words from **Thierry Fournier**, **Senior Vice President and CEO** **South Europe, Middle East and Africa,** **SAINT-GOBAIN**

“The notion of an architecture of care is simple, powerful, and universal—building for everyone, from social housing to public buildings, while valuing local knowledge and heritage. It’s a call to design resilient, sustainable, and circular buildings, adapted to climate realities. As architects, industry players, and investors, we must never lose sight of the fact that we build for people—for their well-being. Together, let’s face these challenges with hope and a shared sense of responsibility.”

To find out more and to read the 2025 edition of our Barometer,
visit the Sustainable Construction Observatory page at:
www.saint-gobain.com/en/sustainable-construction-observatory

For a more in-depth look at sustainable construction and its acceleration levers,
please visit our online media, *Constructing a Sustainable Future*:
www.constructing-sustainable-future.com/en/home/



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please contact us at the following address:
sustainable-construction-observatory@saint-gobain.com