

Programme

- 9h00 Welcome
- 9h15 Keynote: Nigel Isaacs (Victoria University of Wellington)
From prescriptive to performance — the development of New Zealand building controls from the 1840s to 2010s
- 9h45 Simon De Nys-Ketels (Université Libre de Bruxelles)
Legal expertise in professional building periodicals: the Belgian construction sector shaping and shaped by processes of juridification, 1918-1940
- 10h15 Lara Reyniers (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)
Regulating demolition. From local ordinances to European directives
- 10h45 Louis Debersaques (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)
Between ignorance and negligence — or how article 1384 of the Belgian Civil Code challenges legal awareness of builders (c. 1900)
- 11h15 Matthijs Degraeve (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)
Water closet management. Regulations of private sanitary installations in Paris, London and Brussels (1850-1914)
- 11h45 Stephanie Van de Voorde (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)
Retracing the culture of construction through building codes and regulations in the early 20th century
- 12h15 General discussion
- 12h30 Lunch at Bar Pilar (VUB)



The construction sector, despite being a vast and fragmented industry that is typically difficult to control, became an increasingly important object of regulation over the past two centuries. Because of its major impact on people's health and safety, on the use of resources and materials, as well as on the shape and layout of the urban fabric—to name only a few—governments have had a major stake in the regulation of construction activities. Especially since the 19th and 20th centuries, local, national and supranational governments therefore increasingly attempted to interfere in and regulate the ways in which the built environment came about. In this process, although increasing global and colonial interactions produced internationally similar legislation, adaptations to locally different building cultures and socio-environmental conditions remained necessary. By looking into the different nature of local building and plumbing codes, the regulation of demolition works, and interactions with courts and legal experts, this research seminar provides a varied perspective on how building policies, laws and regulations took shape across the globe. The underlying goal is to probe and compare who were the actors involved in the drafting of these rules, what their goals and motives were, and how these rules were issued and enforced.

Location: VUB Main Campus in Etterbeek, Building K, first floor, ARCH meeting room (see [campus map](#)).

If you would like to attend, please register by June 12 via matthijs.degraeve@vub.be.

Organisation: Vrije Universiteit Brussel—interdisciplinary research programme 'Re-building Brussels (1695-2025). The construction sector as an engine for social inclusion and circularity' and EOS research project 'Construction History, Above and Beyond. What History Can Do for Construction History'. With the support of FWO Research Foundation—Flanders.

Research seminar

Building policies, laws and regulations in construction history

Brussels, Friday 14 June 2024

Construction of brewery "Le Cornet de Poste" in Molenbeek (Brussels) in 1916-17 (La Fonderie—Collection Jenny Decoster)