



INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

Artificial Waterways :

Governance, uses and environmental issues
of canals from yesterday to tomorrow

Toulouse

UNIVERSITÉ TOULOUSE - JEAN JAURÈS

november **24-26**
2026

Pour en savoir plus
canal-du-midi.com/colloque



1996 - 2026
30 ans
patrimoine
mondial
Unesco



1996 - 2026: 30 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE FOR A HERITAGE GEM



Built in the 17th century to link the Atlantic Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea, the Canal du Midi is a historic structure that remains in operation to this day. It has been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 1996 in recognition of its universal and exceptional value.

Regarded as one of the most extraordinary civil engineering achievements of the modern era, the Canal du Midi bears witness to the technological advances that paved the way for the Industrial Revolution. Its inscription covers the 240 km of the Canal du Midi from Toulouse to the Étang de Thau (Marseillan), its 80 km water supply system in the Montagne Noire, as well as its 18th-century extensions (the Canal de Brienne, the Canaux de Jonction and the Canal de la Robine) – totalling 360 km of canals and watercourses spread across no fewer than 90 municipalities.

The organising committee

Emmanuelle Charpentier,
maîtresse de conférences en histoire moderne,
université Toulouse - Jean Jaurès, FRAMESPA UMR5136

Philippe Dugot,
professeur de géographie,
université Toulouse - Jean Jaurès, LISST UMR 5193

Nicolas Marqué,
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Evelyne Sanchis,
cheffe du service politiques contractuelles,
patrimoine, culture à Voies navigables de France Sud-Ouest

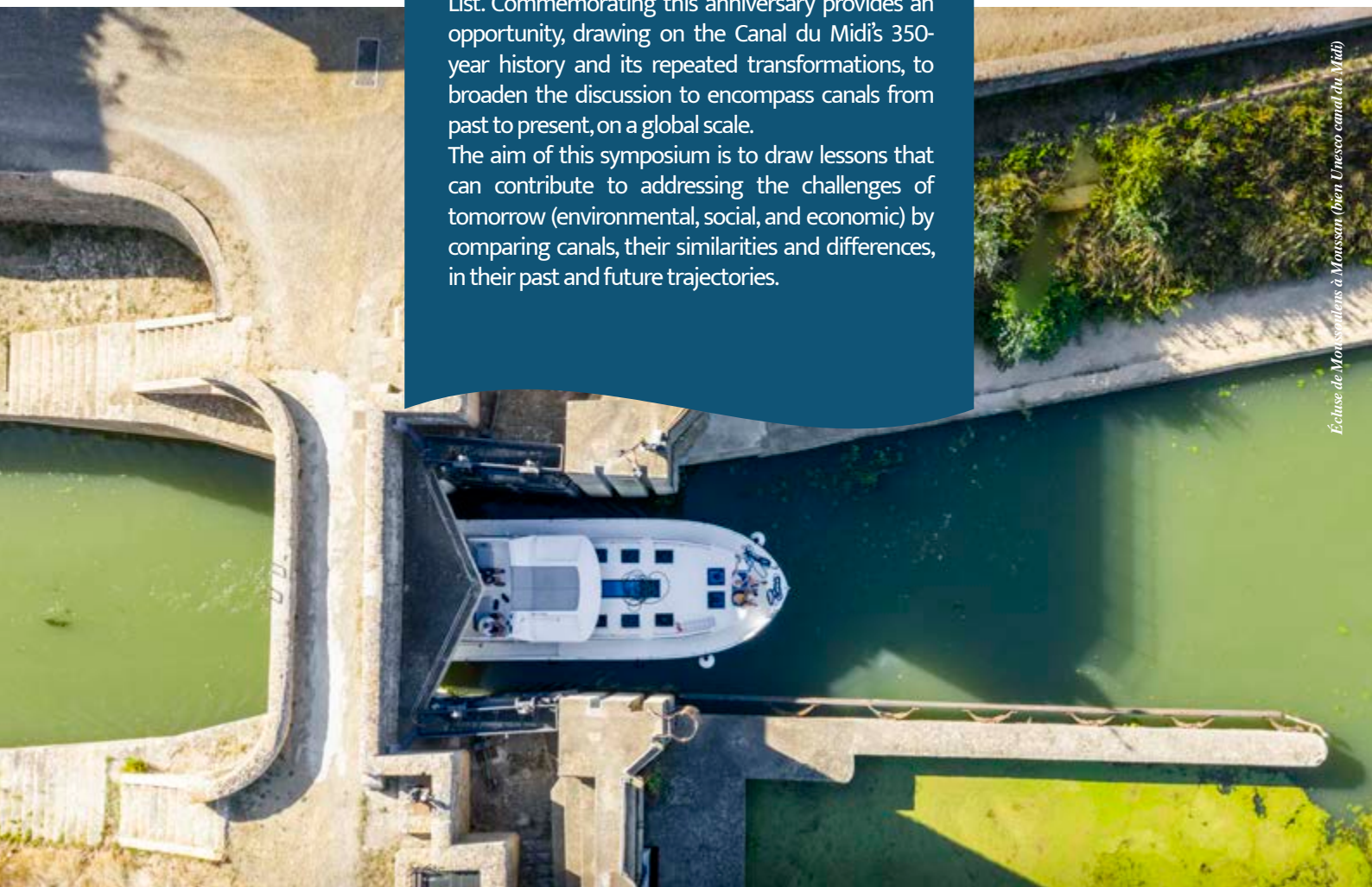
Philippe Valette,
professeur en géographie de l'environnement,
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Samuel Vannier,
chef de l'unité Patrimoine, culture, archives à Voies navigables
de France Sud-Ouest

In conjunction with the members of the Entente pour le Canal du Midi
(Regional Prefecture, Voies navigables de France,
Occitanie Region,
Departments of Aude, Haute-Garonne,
Hérault and Tarn)

In 2026, the Canal du Midi will celebrate 30 years since its inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Commemorating this anniversary provides an opportunity, drawing on the Canal du Midi's 350-year history and its repeated transformations, to broaden the discussion to encompass canals from past to present, on a global scale.

The aim of this symposium is to draw lessons that can contribute to addressing the challenges of tomorrow (environmental, social, and economic) by comparing canals, their similarities and differences, in their past and future trajectories.



Écluse de Moussoulens à Marseillan (bien Unesco canal du Midi)

Tuesday
November 24, 2026

UNIVERSITÉ TOULOUSE - JEAN JAURÈS
Maison de la Recherche – amphi F417

8:30 AM: Participant registration

9:00 AM: Opening of the symposium

9:30 AM: Introduction to the symposium

Emmanuelle Charpentier, Senior Lecturer in Modern History, Toulouse - Jean Jaurès - FRAMESPA University; **Philippe Dugot**, Professor of Geography, Toulouse - Jean Jaurès - LISST University; **Nicolas Marqué**, Senior Lecturer in Modern History, Toulouse - Jean Jaurès - FRAMESPA University; and **Philippe Valette**, Professor of Environmental Geography, Toulouse - Jean Jaurès - GEODE University

Tracing the history of the canals

9:50 AM: Building a canal by correspondence. Scholarly networks and technical transfers in the 17th Century

Anne-Marie Cheny, lecturer in modern history, University of Rouen Normandy-GRhis and **Aline Peyronnet**, independent researcher, Association for the Preservation, Study and Research of the natural and cultural heritage of the Centre-Var

10:10 AM: The Canal du Midi as heritage: tax system and property issues (1684-1793)

Anne Conchon, Professor of Modern History, University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne - IDHE.S

10:30 AM: Discussion

10:50 AM: Break

11:10 AM: Defending the Languedoc Canal's lordship during the Age of Enlightenment: feudal diplomacy along the waterways

Josselin Hénaff, holder of a Master's degree in History, Civilizations, and Heritage, specializing in history, University of Toulouse-Jean Jaurès-FRAMESPA

11:30 AM: The School of Canal Engineering (1759-1763): an ephemeral but pioneering institution

Catherine Isaac, independent researcher, HISTARA

11:50 AM: Four canals in one. The stages of the Rhône to Sète canal's construction (c. 1700 - c. 1830)

Stéphane Durand, Professor of Modern History, Avignon University, Norbert Elias Centre

12:10 PM: «The canal with the river, despite the river, within the river.» Inland navigation in the Loire basin put to the test by an unfinished canal network (17th century – early 20th century)

Yves Lecoœur, Associate Researcher, HLLI-CRHAEL

12:30 PM: Discussion

Valorize the canals

2:20 PM: A «very regional, one-way canal»? Study of goods flows that used the Royal Canal of Languedoc under the Ancien Régime

Nicolas Marqué, lecturer in modern history, Toulouse - Jean Jaurès - FRAMESPA University

2:40 PM: Between dreams and usefulness. When canal projects combine with commercial products (France, 1820-1840)

Yvon Mullier-Plouzenec, Senior Lecturer in Architectural History and Cultures, ENSA Paris-Belleville-IPRAUS and **Solenn Guével,** Senior Lecturer in Theories and Practices of Architectural and Urban Design, ENSA Paris-Belleville-IPRAUS

3:00 PM: Tourism dynamics of the Canal du Midi in a context of landscape transition and strong attractiveness

Patrice Ballester, lecturer-researcher to l'IEFT - School of Tourism HEP Lyon

3:20 PM: Reinvesting in the buildings along the Canal du Midi: strategies and use of heritage designation

Adrien Privat, doctoral student, ENSA Toulouse-LRA

3:40 PM: The riverbank. "A garden" to share? Living together, appropriation and belonging on the Canal du Midi

Lola Bourgeois, holder of a Master's degree in Ethnological Expertise of Intangible Heritage, University of Toulouse - Jean Jaurès, filmmaker

4:00 PM: Discussion

4:20 PM: break

4:40 PM: Safeguarding elements of intangible cultural heritage related to the Grand Canal of China

Ma Qianli, French teacher and vice-dean, Faculty of International Studies, Yangzhou University, China

5:00 PM: The National Archives and the history of canals in France: presentation of the collections of major producers and sources relating to the Canal du Midi

Béatrice Crépon, documentary research officer at the Ministry of Culture, head of the canals, rivers, roads and meteorology collections at the National Archives, in the Environment, Land Use Planning and Agriculture department

5:20 PM: Innovating and undertaking: canals through the lens of the archives of the Princes of the Blood (18th century): state of the sources preserved at the National Archives

Maïa Pirat, documentary research officer, head of heritage collections at the National Archives, Department of the Middle Ages and the Ancien Régime

5:40 PM: Discussion

6:00 PM: End of the first day



Pont canal de l'Orb à Béziers (bien Unesco canal du Midi)

Wednesday
November 25, 2026
UNIVERSITÉ TOULOUSE - JEAN JAURÈS
Maison de la Recherche – amphi F417

Managing a UNESCO World Heritage canal

9:00 AM: Territory-building around a canal – the example of the Canal du Midi

Evelyne Sanchis, Head of the Contractual Policies, Heritage and Culture Department at the South-West Regional Directorate of Waterways of France, and **Laurent Cyrot**, Project Director for the Canal du Midi and the Sustainable Toulouse-Blagnac Airport at the Prefecture of the Occitanie Region

9:20 AM: The Canal du Centre: a hydraulic engineering at the heart of World Heritage

Vincent Despiegeleer, Director, Waterways Department of Mons, Walloon Public Service, Mobility and Infrastructure; **Didier Dehon**, Art Historian, Western Zone Department, Walloon Heritage Agency, Walloon Public Service, Territory, Housing, Heritage and Energy; and **Guillaume Hellemans**, Art Historian, Strategic Development Department, Walloon Heritage Agency, Walloon Public Service, Territory, Housing, Heritage and Energy, Belgium

9:40 AM: The Augsburg Water Management System, a UNESCO World Heritage site since 2019

Barbara Buehler-Karpati, Head of the World Heritage Office, Department for Education, Science, Culture and World Heritage, City of Augsburg, Bavaria, Germany

Discussion - break

10:40 AM: Governance, Contemporary Use, and Climate Resilience : Lessons from Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal World Heritage Site

Sara Perera-Hammond, Regeneration Project Manager, Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal World Heritage Site, Wales, United Kingdom

11 :00 AM: Rideau Canal World Heritage Site: Effectively administering a 19th century canal in the 21st century

John Festarini, Acting Director, Ontario Waterways, Parks Canada

11:20 AM: Strengthening Collaborative Management: conservation practices of the Dujiangyan, a World Heritage Site

Sun Yan, Institute of Archaeology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences et **Lei Xian**, Beijing Qing Yuan Cultural Heritage Conservation Center Co., Ltd, China

Discussion

Integrating canals into their environment

2:00 PM: The Mae Kha Canal (Chiang Mai, Thailand), revealing the interconnections between heritage-making and urban development

Armelle Ninnin, architect-urban planner, PhD in Spatial Planning and Urbanism, IPRAUS

2:20 PM: From industrial wasteland to coveted space for an Olympic and Paralympic hub. What changes and coexistence of uses along the Saint-Denis canal?

Marianne Hérard, associate researcher, LAVUE Altérité et Territoires, and research engineer, University of Paris 8-MSH Paris Nord

2:40 PM: From waterways to contemporary urban forms in Ho Chi Minh City: spatial continuities, cultural heritage and environmental challenges

Phuoc Van Anh Nguyen, PhD in Architecture, Urban Planning, Landscape and Heritage, EVCAU-ENSA Paris-Val de Seine

3:00 PM: Shaping the landscapes of the Royal Canal of Languedoc from 1666 to the present day: between urban and rural worlds

Manon Clavel, holder of a Master's degree in History, Civilizations, and Heritage, specializing in history, University of Toulouse - Jean Jaurès - FRAMESPA

3:20 PM: How the Canal du Midi supplied water to the canals to combat phylloxera. Sharing water between navigation, flooding, and irrigation under the Third Republic

Alice Ingold, Director of Studies, EHESS-Centre for Historical Research

Discussion – break

4:20 PM: From the Craonne canal to the Crau aquifer: sharing water and managing scarcity

Marielle Montginoul, Research Director, INRAE-G-EAU, **François Molle**, Research Director, IRD-G-EAU, and **Tristan Guérin**, PhD student, INRAE-IRD-G-EAU, thesis funded by the European Horizon GOVAQUA project

4:40 PM: Financing the Neste Canal (1846-2026): Towards full recognition of the diversity of services provided

Maxime Roussel, CIFRE PhD student in economics, Rives & Eaux du Sud-Ouest and INRAE-G-EAU, and **Solène Laloux**, mission director, general management of Rives & Eaux du Sud-Ouest

5:00 PM: The Canal du Midi: a structuring tool of the Territorial Project for Water Management in the Aude basin

Philippe Cluzel, Director of Strategy and Water Resources and Project Manager for Water Resources and Low Water Support, SMMAR EPTB Aude

5:20 PM: Water management of the Canal du Midi: past and present challenges and new challenges linked to climate change

Émilie Collet, head of the Water and Environment unit, and **Samuel Vannier**, head of the Heritage, Culture, and Archives unit at the South-West regional office of Voies navigables de France.

Discussion

6:00 PM: End of the second day

7:30 PM: Cocktail reception at City Hall (**Salle des Illustres, Place du Capitole, Toulouse**)





And in conjunction with the symposium

Thursday November 26, 2026

Day spent as part of the Canal du Midi committee
(Castelnaudary and Seuil de Naurouze)

The **Canal du Midi Committee** is a governance body bringing together all stakeholders involved in the management of the Canal du Midi (the State, Voies navigables de France, local authorities, and socio-professional representatives). A true Canal Parliament, it serves as a forum for the co-construction of the Canal du Midi's major policies. It is co-chaired by the Prefect of the Occitanie Region, the President of the Occitanie Region, and the Director General of Voies navigables de France.

8:00 AM: Meeting point for the bus departure from Toulouse (place d'Arménie, Toulouse)

9:15 AM: Canal du Midi Committee Presentations by local stakeholders regarding the Canal du Midi facing the challenges of tomorrow and a roundtable discussion on the - **Théâtre municipal - Scènes des trois ponts de Castelnaudary**

9:40 AM: Presentations by local stakeholders and a round table on the management of canals inscribed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites - **Théâtre municipal - Scènes des trois Ponts de Castelnaudary**

1:00 PM: Lunch - **Halles de Castelnaudary**

2:30 PM: Guided tour of the **grand bassin of Castelnaudary**

4:00 PM: Guided tour of the **seuil de Naurouze**

6:00 PM: Arrival in Toulouse

8:00 PM: Fantasy concert «**Jean-François Zygel** sets the Canal du Midi to music» - **Halle aux Grains (Toulouse)**

To mark the 30th anniversary of the Canal du Midi's inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List, a memorable evening combining history, nature, and music is in store with pianist and composer Jean-François Zygel accompanied by musicians from the Orchestre national du Capitole de Toulouse.

Monday November 23, 2026

6:00–7:00 p.m.: Guided tour of the exhibition «The Canal du Midi: A Heritage to Reinvent» – **CAUE 31 – galerie - 24, rue Croix Baragnon à Toulouse**

The Toulouse National School of Architecture, in partnership with the Haute-Garonne Council for Architecture, Urban Planning and Environment, presents an exhibition dedicated to this exceptional heritage, offering a fresh perspective that blends memory and future prospects. Through the work of architecture students, the exhibition explores new avenues for revitalising and reinventing sites along the Canal du Midi.

Friday November 27, 2026

9:30-10:30 and 11:00-12:00: Guided tour of the **Canal du Midi archives – 20, port Saint-Etienne à Toulouse**

Voies navigables de France, responsible for managing the Canal du Midi, houses the archives of the Canal du Midi since its inception in the building constructed for this purpose in 1830. This unique collection comprises 700 linear meters of documents: engineers' reports, watercolor plans of the canal's structures, correspondence, accounting records, posters, map rolls, and more. The archives pavilion, listed as a historical monument, is an integral part of the Canal du Midi UNESCO World Heritage Site.

9:30-10:30 and 11:00-12:00: Guided tour of the dry docks - **cales de radoub – 65, allée des Demoiselles à Toulouse**

The dry docks were created along the Canal du Midi starting in 1830 for the construction and repair of boats. Still in operation today, they also house the technical services of Voies navigables de France (the French Waterways Authority), responsible for the maintenance of the Canal du Midi. This unique site, home to the only covered dry dock on the Canal du Midi, is protected as a historic monument.

Practical information

Registration is required to attend each activity in this program.

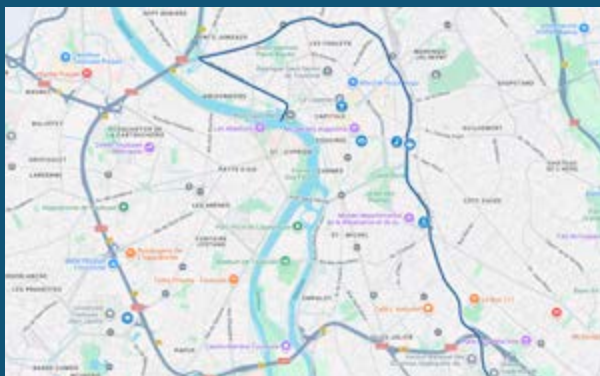
Registration and prices here:

<https://www.canal-du-midi.com/colloque>



The presentations at this symposium will be delivered in French and English with simultaneous translation of the contributions.

The venues of the symposium



TOULOUSE

Maison de la recherche
Amphi F417 au 4^e étage
Université Toulouse - Jean Jaurès
5 allée Antonio Machado à Toulouse
Accès métro ligne A – arrêt Mirail Université

Salons du Capitole
Hôtel de ville
Place du Capitole à Toulouse

Meeting Point
Place d'Arménie à Toulouse

Halle aux Grains
1 place Dupuy à Toulouse

CAUE 31 – galerie
24, rue Croix Baragnon à Toulouse

Archives des canaux du Midi
Voies navigables de France
20, port Saint-Etienne à Toulouse

Cales de radoub
Voies navigables de France
65, allée des Demoiselles à Toulouse

CASTELNAUDARY

Théâtre municipal
Scènes des 3 Ponts
Rue du Général Dejean à Castelnaudary

Halle aux Grains
2 place de la République à Castelnaudary

