

Manifesto on the New European Bauhaus

January 2024

In September 2020, the President of the European Commission announced the launch of the New European Bauhaus (NEB) in her State of the Union address¹. The initiative was subsequently embedded in the Renovation Wave strategy, where it is presented as “an interdisciplinary project that will create experimental spaces where art, culture, science and technology can mingle, imagine, test and demonstrate new solutions.”² On multiple occasions the NEB was presented as the “soul” of the Green Deal and a way to bring its aspirations closer to citizens.

Elevating the complexity of our natural and built habitat to an unprecedented political level, the NEB has invited us, collectively, to reimagine our living spaces in order to make them more sustainable, inclusive and beautiful. It also brought a challenge for the architectural profession, effectively to alert, convince and potentially empower civil society to engage in the design of their living spaces. The ACE has embraced the initiative from the beginning, helping to shape and promote the NEB by engaging with the European Commission's services³, the European Parliament⁴ and with the NEB community across Europe⁵. As part of the EU-funded NEBULA project, the ACE has contributed to the development of a Handbook⁶ that explains the concepts underlying the NEB initiative, (NEB Labs, NEB Dashboard, NEB Compass, etc.) and provides a number of project examples, conceived in response to the three NEB core values.

This manifesto highlights the key issues that the NEB brings to the fore explaining the role of architecture therein and calls on architects to take their place in the NEB movement.

¹ [State of the Union Address of 16 September 2020 by President von der Leyen at the European Parliament Plenary](#): “I want NextGenerationEU to kickstart a European renovation wave and make our Union a leader in the circular economy. But this is not just an environmental or economic project: it needs to be a new cultural project for Europe. Every movement has its own look and feel. And we need to give our systemic change its own distinct aesthetic – to match style with sustainability. This is why we will set up a new European Bauhaus – a co-creation space where architects, artists, students, engineers, designers work together to make that happen”.

² [Communication from the Commission “A renovation wave for Europe - Greening our buildings, creating jobs, improving lives”](#)

³ [Among other things:](#)

[Organisation of a Conference in April 2021 to contribute to the ideation phase of the initiative](#).

[Member of the Steering Committees of the NEB Lab “Regulatory Analysis & Experimentation” and NEB Lab “Actions for Ukraine.”](#)

[NEBC statement on public procurement, produced during the ideation phase of the initiative](#)

⁴ [Contribution to the European Parliament resolution of 14 September 2022 on the new European Bauhaus](#)

⁵ [Among other things:](#)

[Setting up of the New European Bauhaus Collective \(NEBC\)](#)

[Disseminating and participating in CPD training with national partners](#)

[Initiating regional NEB groupings like NEBINAR \(University of Wrocław\) and NEB Forum BiH](#)

⁶ [NEBULA handbook](#)

1. NEB and quality-oriented procedures for a human- and nature-centred built environment

Quality in architecture and construction is a matter of public interest. This has been underlined on many occasions by different EU and national authorities at various governance levels, including in the ruling of the European Court of Justice (2019)⁷, in the Conclusions of the Council of the EU (2021)⁸ and more recently in the Spanish Law on the Quality of Architecture (2022)⁹. It is vital to put the public interest, people and nature back at the centre of policies and decision-making processes that affect our living environment. A fundamental debate must take place on achieving an integrated and responsible vision of the relationships between people, nature and what we build.

The design and management of space and its physical structures have considerable impacts on society and individuals. They are undoubtedly key drivers of the cohesion and well-being of communities and economic prosperity. The recent floods, with the collapse of infrastructure and devastation of households and business premises, as painfully experienced and witnessed across the world, remind us of the centrality of a well-designed, well-built and well-maintained built environment to successfully address, mitigate and adapt to climate change, and to prevent and alleviate natural as well as man-made disasters.

Achieving the sustainable quality of our habitat requires a vision that goes beyond the boundaries of a building and its immediate location. It requires placing both in a wider context and in relation to the socio-economic and cultural reality of the district, the city and its construction tradition and practices. It is necessary to envisage the act of building as an evolutionary process which leads to coherent and durable solutions, and harmonious balance between what is built and what remains un-built. This can only be achieved if the master planning is adopted as a necessary pre-requisite process undertaken prior to committing to any spatial intervention. Such an approach must be widely encouraged, whenever possible.

In order to meet the challenges of our time, in the public interest and for the common good, we believe that prioritising quality in public as well as private procurement, through quality in planning, design and construction processes will ensure architectural quality. This has never been more urgent than now.

⁷[Judgment of the EU Court of Justice of 4 July 2019 in the case opposing the EU Commission to the Federal Republic of Germany regarding the German fixed tariffs for the planning of architects services and engineers services \(HOAI\)](#)

⁸[Conclusions of the Council of 30 November 2021 on Culture, high-quality architecture and built environment as key elements of the New European Bauhaus initiative](#)

⁹[Spanish Law 9/2022 of 14 June on the Quality of Architecture](#)

Taking into account political, economic and social concerns, a change is needed in the way we commission, design, build, renovate, manage and regulate our built environment – a change for a people and nature-centred approach that favours quality over short-term economic gains. The well-being of current and future generations is at stake.

2. Supporting synergies and collaboration across disciplines throughout the construction value-chain

In light of the upheavals and profound changes that society is experiencing, we are mindful of the need to re-think fundamentally the function of architecture and the role of the architect. We need to re-examine and re-appraise received ideas, pre-conceptions, 'tried-and-tested' past solutions and 'one-size-fits-all' methodologies. This implies a real change of approach in the design of the urban environment, with a fresh interpretation of cities and habitat, which in turn will reshape and reformat the profile of spatial design professionals. An essential ingredient of such a change must be sought in an inter-professional cooperation which could overcome fragmented and overly-specialised interests. A key to success lies in a preference for shared values and public good.

While the construction sector made significant progress in recent years in some countries to effectively address current challenges¹⁰, the desired holistic approach seems to be still far from reality.

3. Creating new synergies and collaborations across disciplines and between public and private sectors engaged in the construction value-chain

This calls for a paradigm shift in public and private governance. It also implies the questioning of received ideas and an effective adoption of holistic approaches, at a macro level (in terms of global policies, such as the UN SDG's¹¹), but also at a micro-level in daily practices, protocols and habits (at local authority level). It requires a change of mentality and new ways of collaboration at all levels of governance, among professionals, users and citizens.

The *Baukultur*¹² concept provides good guidelines for integrative practices as it considers the entire designed living environment as a coherent whole: from existing buildings to contemporary design, from small hand-crafted details to buildings, from open spaces to large-scale infrastructures; and, from the planning process to construction, operation, re-use and deconstruction.

¹⁰For example, in Belgium with the [Belgian Alliance for Sustainable Construction \(BA4SC\)](#), which brings together partners throughout the value chain of the Belgian construction sector, in order to accelerate the transition to sustainable, forward-looking, climate-proof construction

¹¹[United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#)

¹²[The Davos Declaration, Towards a high-quality Baukultur for Europe, January 2018](#)

There is a growing recognition and application among various players in the construction sector of the high potential of this new approach. The new EU Taxonomy is of particular significance for the construction sector as it helps to ensure the uptake of the circular economy principles and embeds these in the whole construction process.

The ACE recognises the vital role of local public authorities which are faced with tangible challenges to balance services, interactions and collaborations among stakeholders and citizens. Local authorities have key responsibilities for the implementation of urban and architectural policies, as well as a key role in advancing the implementation of the initiatives such as the New European Bauhaus. The NEB can serve as one of the vehicles to achieve a transversal and cross-sectoral collaboration on the implementation of quality-oriented public procurement.

4. Training and upskilling professionals to deliver NEB ambitions

A high-quality built environment is the result of the work of many skilled professionals in the construction sector but also contingent on the quality of administrative, policy and decision-making processes. Europe needs highly competent professionals to support the transition to a sustainable, inclusive and beautiful built environment. We need to create new generations of professionals, civil servants and decision-makers that adhere to the core values articulated in the NEB as a clear template, with tools and a common language for a successful collaboration.

The necessary level of qualifications depends on the quality and content of the educational system, as well as on continued learning: in other words, maintaining, refreshing and improving the level of knowledge throughout professional life. Therefore, it is essential to enhance cooperation between the world of education and professionals, recognising also the value of the skills acquired through practical experience, characterised by constant confrontation and mastery of various challenges¹⁴.

¹⁴[Architects' Council of Europe \(ACE\), European Association for Architectural Education \(EAAE\), April 2023, Statement Upskilling to deliver high-quality architecture for a beautiful, sustainable and inclusive environment](#)

5. Promoting the role of architects

Typically, clients, including public authorities who commission and manage interventions in the built environment, do not have, a priori, all of the necessary skills to understand all of the aspects at stake (technical, social, health, aesthetic, durability, etc.). They might not be equipped to assess the criteria, and their weighting, with a view to making the decision and choice regarding a project prior to and during the process of intervention and development (building, demolition, renovation, extension, protection, maintenance).

The participation and assistance of a qualified and competent professional such as an architect is, therefore, an imperative before, during and after the completion of a project. For Architects, this means positioning themselves as key advisors as early as possible in decision-making processes (during the preparation of urban master plans, local area plans, feasibility studies for private investors), in order to influence and competently advise on what is built and where.

Along with other professionals (urban planners, landscape architects), Architects are equipped for an innovative holistic, forward-looking and integrated approach in terms of local context, space and building, taking into account the interaction between buildings in the broad sense (urban or rural, public or private), humans (in their individual development, in their relationship to others, and as users) and natural environment.

Beyond the skills for synthesis and global expertise, architects also have a credible know-how as coordinators, navigating through complex and specialist information from other disciplines and can bring solutions to the constraints of buildings and their setting, as well as to the rational use of resources. Architects are negotiators, who can bring unity consensus among the project stakeholders, translating, managing and balancing aspirations, needs, requirements and interactions in the process. Thus, guided by the necessary standards of professional ethics, the Architects' role, as independent experts and guardians of common public interest, is fundamental.

6. Addressing the housing crisis: putting an end to the search for short-term economic gains and the downward spiral of standardisation

Currently, many European countries are experiencing a housing crisis, characterised by a shortage of affordable homes, a loss in quality of new construction as well as a material deterioration or a sub-standard condition of a significant number of existing dwellings. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought into sharper focus the importance of the place in which we live. It has revealed glaring inequalities in our society with regard to housing and deep inequalities among population, between neighborhoods and regions.

The current housing crisis, combined with challenges amplified by climate change, natural disasters, the pandemic and increased migration (due to conflicts or economic deprivation), all highlight the fact that affordable and high-quality housing must be considered urgently as a matter of general interest and has to become a priority for public authorities. Addressing this crisis requires us to stop the search for short-term economic gains and reverse the downward spiral of cheap standardisation. We urgently need to adopt an attitude that favours the common good and quality of life, putting people and nature at the core of housing and urban developments¹⁵.

7. Mainstreaming tools to assess quality in the built environment

There is a need to develop and apply new tools to measure and effectively assess, in an objective manner, the overall quality and sustainability of what we design and construct. Several helpful tools have already been developed to improve accuracy in assessing the quality of interventions and processes in the built environment, from inception to implementation. Among these are:

- The *Davos Baukultur Quality System*¹⁶, which has articulated eight key elements that have to be achieved in a project: governance, functionality, environment, economy, diversity, context, sense of place and beauty.
- The EU Commission has developed the *New European Bauhaus Compass*, envisaged as a self-assessment tool and a guiding reference framework for decision and project-makers wishing to apply the NEB principles and criteria to their activities¹⁷.

The EU Commission has also developed the Level(s) scheme, which allows for an accurate reporting of the environmental performance of buildings¹⁸.

The ACE calls for a development of greater synergies among these tools and initiatives.

¹⁵ [For Affordable and Quality Housing, Statement of the Architects' Council of Europe \(ACE\), May 2022](#)

¹⁶ [Davos Baukultur Quality System](#)

¹⁷ [NEB Compass](#)

¹⁸ [Level\(s\)](#)

Conclusion

[I] Architects embrace the NEB concept which calls for the embedding of a cultural dimension, vision and processes in the development of policies and practices that affect our living environment, promoting cross-sectoral collaboration, engagement and implementation by all stakeholders (public authorities, professionals, investors). Achieving the ambitions of the New European Bauhaus requires a cross-fertilisation among all disciplines in the construction value-chain. It requires a quality of interaction between the built environment sectors and the political and administrative decision-makers.

[II] Within and beyond the construction and buildings sector, the choices made at the design stage affect the entire life of a building, from its construction to the operation, possible re-use and deconstruction (from cradle to grave). Therefore, the timely, appropriate and synchronised engagement of urban planners, architects, engineers and designers allows for the testing of the feasibility, sustainability and impact of the spatial solutions prior to committing to large investments. Hence, this ensures a rational use of human, technical and natural resources in line with the concept of circular economy, which can help reestablish a balance between human needs, aspirations and ambition, whilst taking measures to preserve biodiversity, respond to climatic changes and maintain harmonious growth. Ahead of the design processes, collaboration with and inputs from other disciplines and stakeholders are key (economists, sociologists, scientists, public and private investors, the civil society, to name but a few).

[III] The NEB resonates with global commitments to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the pan-European quality concepts like Baukultur and the Davos Quality System. It provides a guideline for necessary collaboration pathways across disciplines and sectors responsible for the built environment. Architects, with their three-dimensional skills and cross-disciplinary training, are well positioned to lead and facilitate the integrative and holistic approaches at the outset and throughout the entire process. Equally, their experience of engagement with local authorities demonstrates a potential to initiate and enable new synergies and bridge the gap between public and private sectors working in the construction value-chain.

[IV] To deliver on the NEB ambition, it is necessary to develop an innovative education and training models for architects and other built environment professionals, also fostering greater synergies between arts, architecture, landscape and interior architecture, spatial planning, design and craftsmanship. The universities play a key role in shaping the future generation of professionals.

[V] Architects need to work towards positioning the profession as a source of key advisory expertise to be engaged as early as possible in decision-making processes (during the preparation of feasibility studies, urban master plans, local area plans, design briefs and feasibility studies for private and public investors), in order to influence and competently advise what is built and where.

[VI] Architects need to take a pro-active role in addressing the current housing crisis, amplified by the impacts of climate change, natural disasters, the pandemic and the unprecedented migration of refugees. Highlighting the fact that affordable and high-quality housing has to be considered urgently as a matter of general interest and a priority for public authorities, architects need to employ their coordinating and cross-disciplinary skills to help envisage and implement good quality solutions for regional and urban residential areas and enhance public procurement processes.

[VII] Architects and their professional associations, together with the ACE, need to work on establishing a common language, clear and coherent protocols for the application of existing, helpful tools that point the way to more accurately assessing the quality of the process of intervention in the built environment, from inception to implementation, calling for greater synergies among them.

MANIFESTO OF THE ARCHITECTS' COUNCIL OF EUROPE ON THE NEW EUROPEAN BAUHAUS

Annex: Key References

New European Bauhaus (NEB)

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