**The New European Bauhaus.**

**Aesthetics of Sustainability.**

by Dr Sandra Piesik

**The need for transformative thinking.**

The pace of change can be overwhelming at times, irrespective of whether this change refers to technological innovation, politics, the world experiencing a pandemic, and last but not least to the adverse effects of climate change. A call for long – term resilience resonates throughout global and regional discourse. The European Green Deal too, is calling for ‘Designing a set of deeply transformative policies’[[1]](#footnote-1). Our relationship with nature requires the biggest transformation of all, it is in fact an existential transformation.

The post – COVID-19 Green Recovery offers a unique opportunity to shape the ‘new normal’ in a variety of ways. The Bauhaus movement emerged from World War I with a vision and an idea of a ‘New Man’. The 21st century ‘New Man’ needs to reconcile the relationship with nature at the scale of the individual, and as a part of society as a whole. It is a collective process, embracing a multitude of disciplines and actors. This is why the New European Bauhaus offers an unprecedented opportunity to redefine the ‘new normal’ in the context of sustainability, inclusivity, and aesthetics.

**Territorial and urban scale.**

The coronavirus pandemic amplified pre-existing conditions and enabled greater emergence of de-globalisation trends, leading to regional solutions. The European Union is perfectly positioned to foster and champion these regional solutions. The COVID-19 pandemic also brought disruption to the global food supply chain, which is why localisation and a greater integration of rural and urban areas are of great importance. Much work on this topic has been accomplished since Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development of 1992. Many UN agencies, including UN-HABITAT, continue to engage with rural and urban dynamics, including a diverse range of European Union programmes. The ambition of this discourse needs to continue, in addition to the policy recommendations in a **spatial dimension**. The **spatial dynamics** of rural and urban linkages need to be elaborated further, and the New European Bauhaus could be a perfect platform to re-define the spatial and aesthetic dimension of urban and rural dynamics.

**Aesthetics of sustainability.**

A discourse about sustainability and climate change has been taking place in the past three decades, and has manifested itself through various brilliant and in-depth documents such as: The Rio-Conventions, The Paris Agreement, and the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. It is a discourse eloquently presented as part of important Conventions, political treaties, and commitments, but not aesthetics.

The material culture and the world of the built environment did not have a chance to respond to the quest of the aesthetics of the ‘new normal’ and to define with clarity, conviction, and the vision of what the aesthetics of sustainability could be? In the words of Walter Gropius “Society needs a good image of itself. That is the job of the architect “.[[2]](#footnote-2)

We need to develop a deeper connection with the global climate change movement, and a representation of the EU Green Deal. This would allow us to gain a better understanding of the intrinsic relationship between architecture and nature, including understanding its distinctive and separate functions.

**Raising the ambition**

The role of ecosystems, biodiversity, and sustainable agriculture is different from the role of architecture providing shelter and social functions, as represented through 12,000 years of the history of the built environment. Questions on the aesthetics of the New European Bauhaus need to set our goals higher in defining spatial dimensions of sustainability, including, and not limited to, the representation of aesthetics in architecture, looking beyond planting trees on top of buildings and designing a world, where trees grow in the soil, improve biodiversity and architecture itself with its social function reflecting its unique and different role. The process of re-defining the aesthetics of sustainability is fascinating, with many new opportunities resulting from technological developments and innovations. The adaptation of a new vernacular architecture has its place too, particularly in the rural and peri-urban areas – calling for the emergence of new stylistic aesthetics linked to culture and ecology.

**Changing the concept of materiality**

The concept of materiality is changing too. The original Bauhaus workshops were inspired by the ideas of the cathedral guilds. At the time proposals were made for funding an association of architects that would ‘imitate the old masons’ lodges, but with changes appropriate to the times’.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Today, our understanding of materials embodied carbon, and the environmental impact of some materials pause the quest for re-thinking the concept of architectural materiality.

Concrete is the most widely used man-made material in existence. It is second only to water as the most-consumed resource on the planet. But, while cement - the key ingredient in concrete - has shaped much of our built environment, it also has a massive carbon footprint. Cement is the source of [about 8% of the world's carbon dioxide (CO2)](https://reader.chathamhouse.org/making-concrete-change-innovation-low-carbon-cement-and-concrete) [emissions.[[4]](#footnote-4)](https://reader.chathamhouse.org/making-concrete-change-innovation-low-carbon-cement-and-concrete) We have a duty to investigate, whenever possible, the innovative use of materials connected with our environmental footprint and in particular waste materials and bio-waste materials. This is a long-term journey, to ensure that society will like and embrace the result of this experimentation and journey into defining the new – sustainable - normal.

Inclusivity in the capacity to buy new products, means that the initial R&D developmental stage needs to be co-financed by governments, as it will take time to experiment and bring about transformative change in architecture and product design for the universal design of the new aesthetics.

**Art as a reflection of here and now.**

The world of fine arts is a perfect medium for testing the realm of the new aesthetics, echoing a discourse of finding out what this new language may mean. Whilst reconnecting us closer to nature and bringing about an optimism as well as opportunities that this dialogue offers. The European Green Deal recognises, that conventional approaches to regain our new relationship with nature will not be sufficient and encourages experimentation. This experimentation within the New Bauhaus Movement needs to take place on every level and scale of engagement, from territorial regional planning, urbanism, architecture, product design to the arts.

We need to define what this ‘New Brave World’ is going to look like with passion, commitment, and a vision of the original founders of the Bauhaus movement whilst ‘Making Peace with Nature’.[[5]](#footnote-5)

We are all collectively aware that without greater collaboration, we will not be able to address the global challenges that we collectively face.[[6]](#footnote-6) Doing this sustainably, and together will shape a new chapter of the New European Bauhaus.

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Written by Dr Sandra Piesik as part of the 3 ideas B.V. New European Bauhaus Design Lab.

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1. The European Green Deal, EU Commission, 11.12.2019 COM(2019) 640 final, 2.1, p.4 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bauhaus Movement @BauhausMovement [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bauhaus, Fiedler. J, Feierabend. P, HF Ullman (2006), The Bauhaus and the Ideas of the Cathedral Guilds. Mankartz, Frauke p.422 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. **Rodgers. L (2018) ‘**Climate change: The massive CO2 emitter you may not know about**’** https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-46455844 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. ‘Making Peace With Nature’ UNEP, (18.2.2021) https://www.unep.org/resources/making-peace-nature [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Schwab. C, Mallert T.COVID-19: The Great Reset’ (2020), p.217 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)