

NEW EUROPEAN BAUHAUS DISCUSSION RESULTS: WORKSHOP SERIES



The Lithuanian Ministry of Environment together with the Ministry of Culture organized the New European Bauhaus National (NEB) Discussion on the 25th of March. The discussion was centered around urbanism and architecture, Soviet built blocks renovation, Design and Culture, as well as Public participation and Civil Society Role in Planning. The event was the first cornerstone in starting the conversation about NEB in Lithuania and together with various organizations we launched the series of workshops to further analyse and understand the key problems in Lithuania and how NEB could potentially help solving those problems.

First workshop 27th of April: Culture and sustainable living environment

Moderator Eugenijus Kaminiskis and Eglė Vitkute / Xwhy Agency of Understanding

In the first workshop, the actors from culture sector, policy actors, decision-makers and scientist was trying to grasp the relationship between the NEB initiative and culture sector in the Lithuanian context. Which culture sector can add most value towards NEB goals and how to achieve that most effectively? An interactive discussion helped to identify the areas of intervention, the challenges, obstacles and risks in the culture sector. The existing good practice was shared, which may already represent NEB values and aims.

Specific areas of intervention were identified:

Cultural education; Territorial context analyses; Social inclusion and decision making; Art in public spaces; Placemaking, urban gardening; The mobility of cultural services and products; Conversion of industrial urban territories; Touristic routes; Cultural heritage and its enablement through communities; Science and art; Smart rural development; Place identity and communities role in it.

We recognize that NEB can help solve the local cultural challenges:

Financing, culture accessibility, the sustainability of initiatives, cultural heritage protection, culture sector recovery post-pandemic, culture-oriented business, outreach.

Main obstacles:

Bureaucratic mechanisms, culture fragmentation into sectors, lack of understanding for inclusion, isolated initiatives, lack of arts oriented specialists who are willing and able to work with communities, lack of science-art connection; lack of concern or focus for “green” in arts community.

Solutions to achieve greater inclusivity:

Target audience analyses, understanding the key issues and communication, bottom-up initiatives, interdisciplinary communication, arts community attention to dialogue, pilot projects.

Second workshop 29th of April: Sustainable design in public sector

Moderators Jonas Liugaila and Ieva Ščervianinaitė / Lithuanian Design Association

The aim of this workshop was to create a dialogue and understand the public procurement processes in Lithuania. What practices are there at the moment, how these practices could be improved, what is missing and what the ambition for the green procurement in Lithuania is? What is the role of design in this whole problematic area?

Third workshop 30th of April: Soviet built housing and territorial transformation

Moderator Rūta Leitanaite / Lithuanian Architecture Association

The aim of this workshop was to discuss a large circle of specialist about various themes that concern quality Soviet housing renovation and territorial transformation. The participants were grouped in various groups to enable discussion about the key topics of concern.

I SESSION: Urbanism and architecture

Key questions:

1. What challenges are the most obvious speaking of the Soviet built blocks renovation and transformation?
2. What are the new ideas and existing analyses, initiatives and practices that add to the quality of blocks renovation?
3. What are the key obstacles (institutional, technological, and organizational)?
4. What instruments we lack to enable the change?

Problems and challenges:

- There is lack of complexity perspective in current renovation practices. There is no vision.
- In the Soviet built neighbourhoods we do not understand the boundaries. What is private, public?
- Soviet built dwellings and blocks lack identity.
- These neighbourhoods often feel pale and only seem to fit certain social status citizens.

Key obstacles:

- Vision is not programmed;
- Weak communities and lack of engagement;
- Lack of cooperation between institutions, individuals and communities;
- The renovation is only concerned with energy efficiency, but that is not adding to quality of life.

Ideas:

- Identify what is relevant and has value in these neighbourhoods;
- The systemic change has to happen – social and psychological transformation;
- We have to think not Renovation, but Re-INOvation;
- Seek not only for physical change, but also for boost of life and energy in the neighbourhoods;
- We need some good simple and complex methodologies how to deal with these issues;
- Avoid “one fit for all” mentality and seek the integration for communities;
- Try to find and bring individuality, expression and uniqueness;

- Find appropriate financial instruments to assist this change;

II SESSION: Communities and civic participation, culture, social justice

During this session the challenges of public participation and empowerment were analysed.

Key challenges:

- When trying to involve public to participate (with regards to the Renovation) first we have to shift the focus from the technically oriented task (energy efficiency and CO2), to communities and their needs;
- Planners lack the knowledge about the needs of the communities;
- Public participation is often limited to the formal procedures and more often than not stays within the legal framework boundaries and does not create a more inclusive process;
- There are sometimes too big expectations from the communities, who often lack education and don't understand processes.

Key ideas to problem solving:

- Start from the bottom-up, facilitate the communities to become more active and indulging;
- Analyse local morphology and socio-economic context, put extra attention to local identity and understand what it is;
- Enable communities to make their own decision through participatory planning instruments;
- Put emphasis on long-term benefits and values (health, sustainability, community health);
- Bring decisions that are based on evidence;
- Destigmatize social (soviet) modernism;
- Use indulging and creative education instruments, teach youth about their environment;

What we need to achieve this:

- Housekeepers should be more involved in the community activities;
- Design-thinking principles should be adapted;
- Territorial, urban and spatial analysis and research;
- "Traveling architecture" workshops;
- Urban gardening initiatives, urban gardens for social participation and community engagement;
- Informal education;
- Small scale initiatives.

III SESSION: Design and art

The key topic in this session was the role of design in NEB.

Key problems:

- Design often viewed as the process, but not the product;
- Communities are often neglected in the processes of transformation, this particularly forms an idea that a member of a household is more of a product user, than product owner;

- We often look at renovation success from the point of economic benefits, energy efficiency ratings and etc. That is perhaps due to bureaucracy mechanism and the need to present clear objective results. However, there should be other indexes which could be used to understand the social dimension and the benefits to people;
- Often we expect too much from people and their willingness to participate and become an active process member.

Some key suggestions:

- Participatory design principle is important. The idea is to involve as many members as possible to the whole process chain of Renovation.
- Important to take the process inclusive to reach consensus;
- The public places that are often in the basements or halls of the houses could be used for common purposes to facilitate community engagement;
- The basements of other common places could be used for crafts for example;
- Social ads in renovation context. Various content about peoples relationships in houses, blocks and surroundings. This is very important to the identity of these neighbourhoods;
- It is important to make the process more playful and more approachable and exciting. The motivation is highly dependent on the simple thing – enjoyment. Motivation system through a playful approach can enable people to participate in various activities and help them to create a meaningful impact.

IV SESSION: Inclusivity in planning (in Renovation)

Block's renovation is an instrument to reach a better quality of life. It should be understood through the lens of a person and not through the achievement of a certain task. It is important to shift our attention and focus on communities and that shall help to re-inspire and re-think the planning processes for blocks renovation. If we want successful renovation in terms of public involvement it is important to help public understand the processes better. Facilitator is a very important person who should be directly involved in helping communities to stay engaged throughout the whole process. A facilitator is necessary to help communities and individuals to build trust and help the cooperation process to unfold.

Initiatives must be sustainable, but to achieve this we have to focus on information distributions and encouragement. You have to be eager to facilitate the information flow via various channels, communicating about the values, culture, identity and meaning. Encouragement has to start with social network building and investments in different communities and specific groups. However, we have to match the visions and expectations of different individuals and groups.

We have to focus on plurality in Renovation: we have to mix social activities with commerce, apartments with local business opportunities and etc (business and community symbiosis). This mix is also not static, it is also about mixing between the social groups, age groups, generations and socio-economic background.

The other two workshop sessions was organized the following week and focused on green procurement and continued renovation discussion and the key problems in Lithuania.