

SCHOOLS OF THE NEW EVERYDAY: FROM BAUHAUS TO A SOCIAL EUROPE



On the left: Rodchenko's Workers Club at Paris Exhibition, 1925; on the right: Tolyatti, photo by Michele Cera, 2020

1. WHO WE ARE

We are a group of scholars in architecture, historians, theorists, and educators, members of several professional associations, including the [Second World Urbanity](#) network launched in 2012. In our books, conferences, exhibitions, community projects, and in our pedagogy we have studied modern architecture as part of the social, technological, political, economic and environmental transformation of Europe and the wider world spanning former East and West during the 20th century. We have researched the Bauhaus pedagogy during the interwar period and its subsequent iterations, translations and appropriations across Europe, and on other continents. We have studied the ways in which Bauhaus ideas were taken up across the political divides during the Global Cold War and have contributed to shaping world-wide urbanization. Looking ahead, we are concerned with how the resulting buildings, cities, and landscapes can be sustained and advanced today, notably in post-socialist and post-colonial contexts. These topics have informed our research and our pedagogy in architectural schools in Europe and North America, but also our engagements with design and engineering professionals and the communities in the cities in which we live and work. In this sense, Bauhaus is for us both a complex subject of historical study and a legacy of a permanent revision of the architectural profession that is future-oriented, collaborative, technologically conscious, and committed to social and environmental justice. We understand it as an architectural movement with the aim to materialize a “Social Europe” that we can build on today.

We see the New European Bauhaus (NEB) initiative as a way to move beyond the hierarchical notions of centres and peripheries in Europe—a concept used to explain the continent's uneven social and spatial development. At the same time, NEB offers a chance to highlight the lively diversity of the built inheritance of its different areas. Much of the architecture produced in the second half of the twentieth century by socialist states and social housing policies elsewhere is still often stigmatised as “grey” and “monotonous”. And yet, these buildings and neighbourhoods still provide a living environment and home for millions of inhabitants, while some proved to be resilient and accommodating, especially through their continued social diversity. Programs for making these areas more convenient and hospitable should go hand in hand with research that maps the causes and circumstances of the past production and today's use of this architecture. We want to bring our knowledge from teaching and research of the Central and Eastern European material, and experience from engagement with its community groups, to bear on the current discussions on the NEB.

2. REREADING BAUHAUS

Any effort to reactivate Bauhaus values requires critical re-evaluation of the original institution and its entanglement with the architectural avant-garde and political movements across Europe and beyond. We call for a “re-stitching” of the collective history of the Bauhaus and its interlocutors, to see them not as passive receptors of wisdom generated at the centre, but as dynamic actors with their own histories of innovation that can make valuable contributions to the project of the New European Bauhaus. The Bauhaus did not emerge in isolation; it was a node in a wider network that reached to other important institutions, such as Moscow’s Vkhutemas and CIAM, to enable dynamic circulation of ideas and individuals across the continent. At the same time, the school’s architectural experimentation often embraced radical social intentions, a part of its legacy that was later ignored due to Cold War rivalries and continues to be misunderstood in favour of mere aesthetics. In contrast, the Bauhaus framed itself as an egalitarian project of creatively re-thinking our relationship to the built environment. Stripped of its social dimension, “Bauhaus” became a successful brand in post-war Western Europe. Yet, the kind of modernity it advocated often materialized more comprehensively in the urban spaces of the former East, as it was disseminated by many Bauhaus students. This raises the question of continuities between visions and realities of modernity and their afterlife in socialist Europe—which should be understood more broadly than the so-called Eastern bloc to include its other manifestations, such as “Red Vienna” or “Red London.”

3. FROM BAUHAUS TO A SOCIAL EUROPE

Rereading Bauhaus in this sense offers a key to rereading legacies of architecture striving for a Social Europe in many shades and shapes. The multiple crises that Europe faces today are comparable in scale and urgency to those from which the Bauhaus emerged more than a century ago. From the many strands of the Bauhaus legacy, we propose to build upon ideas and strategies of more equal, just, efficient, and pleasurable cities and landscapes. However, many of the useful starting points that the Bauhaus provides need to be redefined and updated. The early-twentieth century concerns with unhealthy industrial cities have to be expanded to a holistic environmental perspective based on maintenance, reuse and care. Social engineering should give way to community building, accounting for unprecedented diversity of Europe’s current social reality. Large-scale planning should be dissociated from top-down bureaucracies in favour of public authorities on regional, national, and European scale. The colonial-era hierarchies and the continued externalization of environmental and social costs of Europe’s privileged lifestyle and consumption habits need to give way to a focused regional and international collaboration, especially with the European Union’s closest neighbours in the former Soviet Union, Southeastern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa.

Such refocusing on social and environmental justice also means radically revising the inherited economic and spatial models. We propose investing into collaborative action-oriented research into new forms of settlements, housing and public infrastructures as well as into the trans-local arrangements of commodity production and resource consumption: from expanded cultural networks and digital commons, to new forms of cooperative land ownership, water access, and land use legislation with care ethics at its core. This is a project of deepening European integration, engaging with European neighbours, and pioneering new ways of trans-local cooperation through research, education and community-building.

4. COLLABORATION AS A METHOD: SCHOOLS FOR THE NEW EVERYDAY

To implement this project we propose to launch a new model for co-teaching: Schools for the New Everyday. Directed towards social and environmental justice, these schools would aim

co-designing the New European Bauhaus

to revolutionize everyday life and forge new modes of living. Unlike those who founded the Bauhaus a hundred years ago, today we need to think beyond the creation of a single institution for that purpose; instead, we need a network of locally anchored schools facilitating exchange between sectors, disciplines and communities. We propose to link the already existing organizations and programs to bring together instructors and students from across Europe and its neighbouring countries in the East and in the South in physical and virtual space. Schools for the New Everyday would aim to repair the separation between knowledge producers, associated with academic and cultural institutions, and activists and organizers, situated in local communities. Interdisciplinary research on new modes of life would thus grow in the interstices of the existing academic and cultural institutions to offer a nurturing environment for local communities. Whether nomadic or local, scholars and citizens would join forces to analyse contemporary social, technical, political, ecological and ethical challenges and to experiment with solutions for the future.

5. WHAT HAVE WE DONE?

We responded to the New European Bauhaus initiative by organising four conversations that we held online. In our discussions we identified four conceptual and methodological turns that inform our research and teaching in architecture and modern urbanity and help outline the agenda for Schools for the New Everyday:

1. March 29, 5 PM CET

BAUHAUS (RE)TURN: its legacies, uses and promises from post-socialist and post-colonial perspectives

2. April 26, 5 PM CET

CARE TURN: planning and architecture for a planet in crisis

3. May 31, 5 PM CET

EDUCATIONAL TURN: lessons for cultural and higher education institutions

4. June 13, 5 PM CET

SOCIAL TURN IN EUROPE: architects and social movements, past and present

These discussions resulted in co-writing a historically informed report. In sum, we propose to build upon the critical reading of legacies of Bauhaus and its interlocutors across Europe a program of collaborative education and research that puts care and repair centre stage in order to forge Social Europe.

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