

NEB COFFEE MORNING IN SARAJEVO

Online Workshop, 24 May 2021

SUMMARY FINDINGS

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Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with other Western Balkans countries, was identified as a potential candidate for EU membership during the Thessaloniki European Council summit in June 2003 and has since applied in February 2016.¹ The Commission has adopted its Opinion (Avis) on the membership application in May 2019, citing some 14 key priorities that the country needs to fulfil in view to opening the EU accession negotiations. Bosnia and Herzegovina receives financial assistance from the EU under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) with a total allocation of EUR 530 million in 2014-2020, implemented under direct management by the EU Delegation in Sarajevo.² The country Report 2020, among other, assessed the progress in the area of culture, citing “the implementing measures under the UNESCO Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expression” and calling for recognition of cultural industries “as a sector with potentials for economic development and connectivity, and creat[ion of] a conducive legal and business environment for their rapid development”. Recognizing the valuable work of the Commission to Preserve National Monuments, the Report affirmed that the implementation of the Commission’s decisions “rests on the entities and there is room for improvement”, calling for the increase of “the budget allocation for culture on all levels of government,” “with longer term, multi-annual funding decisions to provide stability for cultural creation and operation”.³

Within this pretext and with support by the Architects Council of Europe (www.ace-cae.ceu)⁴, a free online workshop “NEB Coffee Morning in Sarajevo” was organized with a group of professionals from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ireland and Sweden, who are all representing professional networks of architects, designers, landscape architects, art historians, and educators. The workshop was conceived as a structured dialogue held via the ZOOM platform and interactive tools, expanding and mirroring a pre-circulated questionnaire. The introductory presentation gave an overview of wider EU policy context in which culture is seen as a driver of sustainable renovation, with illustration of good practice examples from five European countries, culminating with the case study of Selma Lagerlöf Cultural Centre in Gothenburg, Sweden, completed with the 92% recycled materials.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/bosnia-herzegovina_e

² https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/default/files/bosnia_and_herzegovina_report_2020.pdf

³ Ibid.p.99

⁴ The Architects Council of Europe is one of the official partners in the New European Bauhaus initiative launched by the EU COM in 2020.

The workshop participants from two largest Bosnian cities, Sarajevo and Banja Luka, were asked to share their views on urban experiences, sustainable architecture and built environment, as a contribution to the development of the New European Bauhaus initiative from the perspective of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as supplemented in the Appendix II.

They described Sarajevo as place of encounter between East and West, with a unique built heritage and vicinity of natural amenities, but impacted by the war destruction and post-war demographic changes and political and economic restructuring. Similarly, Banja Luka is perceived as a place of natural beauty dominated by the river Vrbas, leafy promenades and green hills, but impacted by the internal systemic destruction, forced demographic changes, as well as changes in governance and administration of the city. For most of them, the perception of a European city is synonymous with the openness, freedom, sense of security and belonging, civic rights to employment, housing, health and wellbeing, and, multiculturalism.

As coined in the New European Bauhaus slogan, the definitions of the concepts of beauty, sustainability and inclusivity were teased out in further discussion. Most of the architects agreed that they are uneasy talking about beauty, which has for long been shunned away from the professional jargon. They offered a definition for beauty as a contextualised story which resonates with people, culture and intensity of urban life. It was also described as a citizenship pride in local governance, own built heritage, with openness to innovation and sustainable design. Beauty is found in a multi-sensory experience of space.

Sustainability is seen as ability to adapt and absorb changes; a balanced planning which is respectful to existing environment when new proposals are introduced; a process in which citizens' needs are met. It is interpreted as the return to common sense, local needs and traditional construction methods; as building community, prioritizing quality over quantity; smart over expensive; continuity over new.

Inclusiveness is discussed as an aspiration and often a lacking ingredient in society. Accessibility is contemplated from the perspective of participation in the decision making process, and, prioritizing [public] space over buildings is described as a goal.

Continuing to discuss the visions for beautiful, sustainable and inclusive places, the participants strongly emphasised the need for the participatory strategic planning where multiple actors and citizens contribute and share the knowledge, breaking barriers between educational, cultural, agricultural and other sectors, with a common purpose.

Asked about the balance between the natural and built environment, the participants observed the lack of vision and holistic approaches within the governing systems, dominance of private interests over public and short-term profit driven development

mentality. They listed a number of positive initiatives, mainly within the education and not-for-profit sector which demonstrate the critical thinking and creative response to public spaces, community engagement, cross-sectoral collaboration and climate-driven sustainable solutions, methods and materials.

End

NOTE: The following good practice examples identified by the workshop participants are separately submitted to the NEB portal:

1. Banja Luka Pier
2. STUDENT BIO-PAVILION | nZEB | Sarajevo
3. KRAK Centre Bihać
4. LEARNING FROM SARAJEVO'S VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE