

Juulia Kauste
New European Bauhaus
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Reviewed short version of the conversation

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The idea of the New European Bauhaus really resonates with me; I really think that it is a very good idea and it brought me thinking back to the old Bauhaus and to the idea on how we can make use of the current technologies to create something that can be valuable and useful and create a better framework for the life of everybody; make use of technologies in such a way that we can provide quality for everybody. This idea is just as relevant today. We now have a whole entire set of completely new technologies and the new opportunities that they open up are different.

I started teaching in 1997 and in my first years of teaching I had this course called “designers’ cultural interface”. The idea was to explore everybody's backgrounds and ways of looking at the world and then think about how one’s vision of the world shapes one’s ideas about design and things that one knows. In those discussions it became very apparent that technology and industrial production makes it possible to provide highly customized and individualized solutions which in the early Bauhaus was not the case. In the early Bauhaus you could create variation by making different combinations, but you were not able to go deeper than that in terms of variability. Now, with the current technologies the level of variability is huge.

With that kind of like lens, I chose my object which relates to the early Bauhaus and to this whole ideology of how you can make use of technology and industrial production in ways that serve the idea of providing a better quality of life for everyone. This chair, stool 60, designed by Artek and the Aaltos in 1933, was first used in the Viipuri library with the idea of a serial production with no joinery because of the use of the bending solid wood system to create the L shaped leg. The stools only have three legs in order to make it stackable and it has been constantly in production since then. The stool is the result of intense testing, exploring and experimenting to achieve the bent leg which becomes super practical. It is also an experiment that has certain imperfect aspects, proving that we need to have an open mind to try out and explore and sometimes even things that are not 100% practical might persist and serve people in ways that make them love them and have them for a long time.



Another aspect about this chair, this particular one, is that it used to be a library chair, used by the public for decades. In the 90s, the library decided to get new chairs, so those working there were able to acquire some of the old furniture. A friend of mine used to work there and when I moved to the US in 1990, I took this chair with me so that I had something that I could take when moving to my new life on a different continent. It shows how practical it is because you can take the legs apart, pack it and take it in your suitcase. It became the first piece of furniture that I have taken everywhere I have gone and as it doesn't have a backrest you can sit in any direction and adapt it to any use with freedom. It might not be the most practical thing in every aspect, but it says something about the fact that something can last for a very long time and it can stay with you and acquire these levels of experience and history.

All these things relate to the idea of what the New European Bauhaus could be with the new technologies, the possibilities with combination, visionary thinking, exploring to create something new and the idea that we can reuse what we already have, that we don't need to create everything from scratch. All these aspects are in this stool.

For a very long time I've been fascinated by what Walter Benjamin wrote about how modern times changed the ways in which we see the world: photography, film, serial production and we can add the new materials in architecture that completely changed the way in which we design, build and the way in which we perceive space. I feel that now, without the pandemic but particularly with the pandemic, we are in a moment of something new emerging, acknowledging the ways in which we see and the potential embedded in new ways of looking, also a heritage of modernity that we can now revisit and draw from it. The ability to see is not much unless we act and architecture is all about being able to see and to insightfully understand what things could be like, act and create, turn them into something concrete, reflecting a way of seeing defined by the materials and the technology. This is what creates the space or framework within which we live and that is why I am super fascinated by architecture and its capacity to turn the

perspective of seeing into tangible frameworks that actually give us the opportunity to be in the world.

The next thing that also unfolds from this story is the fact that the modern times following the Bauhaus, made our world way bigger. It expanded our understanding and knowledge of the world beyond a world that we can experience into one that is mediated and globally intertwined. Instead of sharing a homogeneous thinking framework, today's reality is about a multiplicity of different views and ways of seeing the world. As an urban sociologist I am highly fascinated by the capacity of urban space as a framework where people with different visions and different ways of seeing the world come together and make things happen, create them. The pandemic and the need to isolate ourselves from social interaction has made us more aware of the potential, richness and the need for this type of situation where we can come together in a more spontaneous way, interact and turn this into something. Now that we haven't had those spaces, we've had to be even more creative and imaginative in figuring out ways in which we could support each other. This potential also reveals different problems with the multicultural build-up of our cities and perceiving social spaces differently is more important than ever. An example would be what Gehl Architects did in New York. In a matter of a few months and using very light weight scale interventions they were able to transform the crossing between 5th Avenue and Broadway – a chaotic traffic jam area, a place that nobody wanted to be in – into a space where traffic was reorganised and limited and space for pedestrians was opened up, becoming a place that people all of a sudden became aware of and came together in.

The last thing that relates the new and old Bauhaus is the idea that we need this type of hope, to believe that we can shape the future and make it better. Together with the awareness of the climate problems, we need to be hopeful and embrace that as a starting point rather than to feel overwhelmed and unable to act. This brings me to thinking how in architecture, spaces and cities can have a connection to the use of a material such as wood. It is very traditional and available in Finland and it carries sensibilities which are quite different from a certain modern materiality. I believe that together with today's new technologies and architects' visions turned into tangible projects, wood can be developed into something new that leads us to the aims of the 2050 Green Deal.

To achieve this, research and exploring is necessary, like in the case of the chair. This is also related to the question of policies, rules and regulations which are always very slow to change. The housing situation in Europe is key here because current regulations in place have the intention to make sure that we have the best possible housing quality, but the way we live changes and the current system cannot provide for the needs that people have. It continues to provide for something that might have worked very well in the 60s or 70s but it might not be what we need today. This relates to what living in an apartment building today means and what one wants to get out of that experience

related to sharing facilities, comfort, mobility and therefore it is necessary to make alterations with what we already have but also to think how to build anew. There is a gap between the needs that people have and what we actually are able to produce and although there is the intention to go in this direction it's surprisingly difficult to achieve these objectives in reality. Today everything needs to be very efficient and sometimes this bump into the idea of facilitating the fact that people actually do need spaces for spontaneous interaction, places that are not completely programmed. OOEPA architects have developed an urban toolbox which they would want to provide to planners and other people involved in shaping cities. It is not a recipe but it brings together a variety of considerations in order to create a more socially sustainable urban environment whether it has to do with building new neighbourhoods or renovating old ones or bringing these two together. Cities keep growing and expanding and this means more housing production and it is necessary to do it in an ecologically and socially sustainable way. Architects keep struggling with these objectives and this is connected to the issue of rules and the regulations that should be more agile in order to adapt faster to changing realities. In these days of digital communication, it should be easier to learn from each other and create something together that isn't going to be like a straitjacket that everyone has to be forced into. Projects such as the transformation of three housing blocks in Bordeaux by Lacaton, Vassal, Druot and Hutin and the task of the EU Mies Award in spreading this kind of awareness and bringing together all the different local perspectives in order to have a proper dialogue and see what's being done around Europe and with a global perspective is a big step in this direction.