**New European Bauhaus**

**Positions to Launch a Dialogue in Germany**

May/June 2021



What is the New European Bauhaus (NEB)?

In September 2020 the European Commission launched an ambitious and wide-ranging process, the New European Bauhaus. The initiative is intended to be an environmental, economic and cultural project which aims to combine design, sustainability, participation and investment to kickstart a renovation wave which helps deliver the European Green Deal. The core values of the New European Bauhaus, which European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen addressed at the launch, are sustainability, aesthetics and inclusiveness. The New European Bauhaus was a creative initiative, she said, breaking down boundaries between science and technology, art, culture and social inclusion and enabling interdisciplinary action to find new solutions to everyday problems.

Against the backdrop of its current start-up phase, the Federal Ministry of the Interior, for Building and Community (BMI) organised a first national dialogue meeting on the New European Bauhaus on 6 May 2021. The BMI is lead ministry within the Federal Government and is cooperating on this issue with the Federal Foreign Office (AA), the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media (BKM), the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL), the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU), the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi). The event marked the start of an innovative and inclusive process in Germany. The Federal Government’s declared intent was to reach an understanding with its national partners, that is umbrella organisations, foundations, scientific institutions and interested groups etc., on what the goals of the initiative are to be. The understanding reached among those involved was also to be communicated to the European Commission, thus helping to sharpen the contours of topics addressed under the initiative – not least in relation to the pilot projects being set up as part of the New European Bauhaus. The non-specialist public will also be actively involved going forward.

This Position Paper sets out interim results of the discussion so far, a discussion which has taken and is taking place in a context which reaches well beyond the building industry. The following brief spotlights serve to illustrate this:

* Under the source principle as defined in Germany’s Federal Climate Change Act, the building sector accounts for around 14% of direct emissions. Applying the polluter pays principle, though, the entire field of action around buildings accounts for some 40% of total greenhouse gas emissions in Germany.
* The building sector failed to meet the emissions budget set for 2020 under the Federal Climate Change Act.
* Transforming the building stock and the building sector value-added chain towards climate and greenhouse gas neutrality by 2045 and 2050 respectively poses a massive challenge.
* The projected increase in extreme weather events in Germany, such as days hotter than the average, storms and heavy rainfall, will pose more and more as yet unknown challenges for towns, cities and buildings.
* Affordable building and housing is an eminently important socio-political issue which cannot be allowed to enter into questionable competition with issues around climate action and climate adaptation.

In light of the above, it is clear that we need a new strategy and new approaches. Given how little time there is left to achieve the climate goals set, we will only be able to defuse the often implicit conflict between our resource-consuming habits, growth-oriented economy (with its negative climate impacts) and quite understandable basic social need to maintain our standard of living going forward if we make the shift to sustainable development. But how can that be done? For more than two decades now much has been done at various levels to drive forward research and practice as regards sustainable and thus also climate-friendly development in the building sector, a great deal of knowledge has been gained, intents have been put into words, and incentives and framework conditions set. However, there has been no fundamental change or process of renewal as regards the planning, construction and operation of buildings. The New European Bauhaus addresses this dilemma by regarding the building transition as a task for the whole of society which is borne by a new narrative which acts both as driver and guidepost. A cultural change, no less, is what is needed – a process of development which is firmly rooted in society, which gives expression to a new attitude we have to designing the spaces we live in, which must place the focus on how we make use of what we have. Given the climate and greenhouse gas issue, the concept of “progress” needs to be redefined.

Taking recourse to the historical Bauhaus movement guarantees that the Green Deal and the required paradigm change will not only address the technocratic or economic level, but that this can be an integrative and holistic process in which those sectoral development trajectories which have already been launched can converge. Nevertheless, the aim in looking back to the Bauhaus movement is not to canonise or romanticise its historical influence. Rather, what is being tapped into, by way of example, is the narrative of a fresh start and of innovation, of a holistic, creative drive to build a new society. To do that we need to adequately translate “Bauhaus*”* to apply to today’s world. The New European Bauhaus convenes a creative space of encounter in which we can design our future way of living by creating new forms of organisation, new rules and structures, and forms of cooperation as prerequisites for the building transition.

First Insights

The dialogue event held in May 2021 represents the start of a longer-term learning process. So far, the following priority fields of action have emerged:

* Action at the neighbourhood level – in neighbourhoods and with the perspective and participation of people throughout the New European Bauhaus process, with urban green and open spaces which are linked to the built urban environment;
* Focus on the housing stock – on the “herd of elephants in the climate chamber”, on accelerating the process of optimising energy efficiency (which also has economic positives), taking account of affordability, in rental terms for instance, and of cultural heritage;
* Consider emissions and the use of valuable resources throughout the lifecycle – together with the opportunities afforded by emission-negative building by reusing a large amount of the stock, using renewable materials (e.g. wood) from sustainable forestry, and a high level of adaptability;
* Apply cultural knowledge and practices from other times and other places – to find new solutions and lend a specific role to the culture sector, creative artists and those involved in the protection and preservation of historic monuments in these transformation processes.

In the following, key positions which have been addressed in the discussion so far will be consolidated and presented in the form of theses. (Quotations are taken from the event.)

## 1. Rebuilding as a guiding principle

To date, energy and CO2-reducing ideas and normative concepts have primarily focused on new builds. The principal focus of the New European Bauhaus, however, is on the building stock, which accounts for the overwhelming majority of Germany’s built environment. Socio-culturally and economically circumspect development within the building stock which takes account of the goals of Baukultur and environmental conditions will have a key contribution to make to achieving climate change targets.

Standard solutions cannot be applied when it comes to developing the building stock; rather, design must pay attention to the identity, historical and Baukultur values, sense of home and character of existing places: “We need a new type of diversity in building and design that focuses on climate and culture.”

In this context new builds thus only have a complementary role to play – “the last resort following building stock retrofit and expansion”. Venice was referenced as an example in the course of the discussion. Its 1,600-year history continues to present a vivid picture of the intertwining of Baukultur, aesthetics and sustainability. It is precisely these guiding principles – preserving and developing cultural heritage and the stock which has grown over time – which are intrinsic, integral parts of this European city. And so the planned “new focus on rebuilding”, moving away from demolition and uncompromising new construction (as a lesson learned from modern times) and instead concentrating on the building stock and re-building (with its much lower environmental burden) can be regarded as the logical next step in developing Europe’s understanding of itself and forms the immutable heart of this a new narrative.

Whilst current technical standards can largely be implemented in new building to achieve building policy goals, considerably more constraints need to be factored in when working with the building stock. Careful analysis and planning produce additional benefits which should be rewarded and remunerated accordingly. The more know-how is available about existing buildings during the first delivery phase, the more targeted and more economical building and energy-saving measures can be planned and implemented. Incorporating users is key, since their behaviour contributes significantly to a building’s appreciation, preservation and sufficiency.

The modernisation rate needs to be significantly increased so that the climate-policy targets set can be achieved beyond the sectoral boundaries of the Federal Climate Change Act, specifically in the building sector. Tenants and owner-occupiers in particular need to be taken along, though. The issue of the potential costs of investing in measures to optimise one’s own home and rent hikes have an essential role to play in this. The financial burden must be fairly distributed. Tenants need to experience for themselves what climate action means, for example through landlord-to-tenant electricity generated by photovoltaic systems installed on the roofs of non-listed buildings. That could also boost acceptance and thus the willingness to pay for these systems. It is important to start considering rental payments as a whole in the context of affordable housing. However, given the cross-sectoral importance of the entire field of action around buildings, the interplay between refurbishment activities and decarbonisation strategies in other sectors (energy, building material industry) needs to be borne in mind.

## 2. Quality not quantity

Another relevant aspect can be summarised as “sufficiency”. What is needed to promote a change in building culture which emphasises different values and brings forth new models unlike existing ones (which often have dysfunctional impacts on the climate and the environment) is a new awareness of quality, focusing on what is essential, identifying with and feeling connected to a place and its Baukultur values.

Focal to the New European Bauhaus initiative is thus also the realisation that resources are finite, which contrasts with the idea that growth is endless. However, the question then arises of how to deal with that finiteness, how to distribute what is available to us and what economic gain we derive from it. We need new tools, technologies and formats for these negotiations.

More and ever-bigger residential accommodation is being built in Germany, and for a long time per capita living space steadily increased. This trend appears to have slowed somewhat, although it would still not be correct to say that living space has shrunk significantly. Measures to reduce per capita living space can also reduce the need for new builds and thus reduce land use, thereby contributing to both sustainable and affordable building. What is needed here are efficient and flexible floorplans which guarantee adequate housing quality to ensure that this step is not seen as a decline in standards and so that changing requirements can be adapted accordingly.

A lot has, undoubtedly, been achieved in recent years. Nevertheless, people do not generally use the technical savings made in order to reduce their ecological footprint, a more than merely theoretical possibility. They would rather have more living space with more technical gadgets, drive bigger cars, go on holiday more frequently and to more distant destinations, as a result of which there has been no overall drop in resource consumption of any significance (known as the “rebound effect”). Better technology alone will thus not get this job done if people do not at the same time adapt their behaviour.

The average economic service life of newly constructed residential buildings is between 60 and 100 years, that of office and commercial buildings only between 30 and 60 years. In order to increase these numbers in the long term, built structures need to be designed to be resilient in light of the needs of future generations, and at the same time incentives need to be created so that they are maintained in the long term.

Robust building technology and a high level of adaptability generally lead to longer service lives and are thus more sustainable, both in economic terms as well as in terms of resource use and lifecycle assessment. Keywords in this context are “simplicity” and “low tech”. Another important aspect of climate-adapted building design is resilience to the consequences of climate change (e.g. weather events, heat waves).

If we stick to our traditional fixation on ownership, then sufficiency will always be associated with “having less” – something which the majority of society finds rather unattractive. But if the focus is instead placed on the use of property, this can turn out to be a good deal for all those involved, including the environment. And so smaller housing leads to less land sealing, shorter distances travelled on account of greater housing density (thereby also reducing traffic volumes), less resource consumption for building construction and operation, and generally also to financial savings. Less costs less. (Zürich’s voluntary commitment to a “2000-Watt society” is an example.)

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of the digital transformation and working from home also needs to be considered in this context. On the one hand, these developments should not give the green light to a further increase in per capita living space. On the other hand, they offer the chance to re-evaluate the respective benefits of “town” and “country”. In the best case, the relevant, high-quality design of spaces with a high quality of occupancy will create attractive places worth living in, reduce the level of commuting, decrease the lack of housing in conglomerations and, in return, make rural regions more attractive.

Finally, high-quality, sustainable building and repair also has both an aesthetic and a cultural, or Baukultur, component. When it comes to developing the building stock the question arises of what contribution each building makes to the urban landscape, urban fabric and local culture of remembrance. Besides technical, economic and ecological aspects, planning, building and living also have to meet social and societal demands, that is the desire for a well-designed, liveable environment with a high Baukultur value.

## 3. Neighbourhoods as the point of reference

Mixed neighbourhoods are not only important in terms of social development. Given the interaction between humans, the built environment and nature, they also represent an important starting point for greenhouse gas reduction measures.

Climate-friendly building must look beyond the structure itself – to the neighbourhood, the community and the town or city as a whole. Besides measures to improve the energy efficiency of buildings, the focus should be on the links between building, developing green spaces and mobility (threefold inner-city development) and improving quality of life in the neighbourhood, town, city and urban region. It can also be beneficial for these approaches to address the “characteristic features” of towns and cities. Depending on their socio-cultural idiosyncrasies and identities, they can each unfold their own creative and innovative potentials for a sustainable future. Mixed-use, densely populated historical neighbourhoods can provide a model for our urban spaces of the future. “The New Leipzig Charter should serve as a strategic compass for the holistic approach and integrated thinking we apply to social, economic and environmental factors in urban planning.”

When making the necessary extensions to accounting limits, consideration should, in particular, be given to neighbourhood concepts, because integrated planning is much easier at the neighbourhood level than in relation to individual buildings. Integrated planning concepts for urban and neighbourhood development can also lay important foundations and open up a wealth of experience for building planning.

Besides (re)building, the focus should also shift to strengthening and expanding *blue-green* urban neighbourhoods. Urban greenspaces and bodies of water make a valuable and measurable contribution to minimise the climate change and to living a good, safe and healthy urban life. That is why legislative, planning and financial measures need to be formulated to maintain and develop these blue-green infrastructures in urban spaces, and to adapt them to the challenges posed by climate change. Municipal-level planning and concepts should be promoted. Extreme events such as heavy rainfall and drought pose huge challenges for infrastructures and water management. Land reparcelling, roof and façade greening, climate-resilient urban trees, as well as functionally and creatively incorporating water are examples of what can be done in that regard. Thinking and planning at the neighbourhood level, or even within urban contexts, must become the rule not the exception so as to be able to more cost-efficiently implement effective climate action measures. The transport transition is likewise linked to improving quality of life in neighbourhoods, towns, cities and urban regions, for example by reallocating private transport areas for general use by assigning open spaces for recreational purposes, and reducing noise pollution and exhaust fumes. Rural areas need intelligent accessibility concepts aimed at creating the necessary infrastructure so that people can do without owning their own car.

If neighbourhoods or other local structures or superordinate levels are taken as the point of reference, then an active social land use policy gives the public sector political leverage to influence costs at the level of individual buildings. Owing to their leveraging effect, public funding programmes, such as urban development funding and its expansion, trigger further investments (including by private third parties) at the neighbourhood level. Incorporating the non-profit housing sector (municipal companies, cooperatives etc.) more can make a valuable contribution in that regard.

Another relevant issue in this context is that of restructuring housing promotion. The question of what opportunities can be afforded by a combination of supply-side subsidies in the form of land promotion (setting appropriate conditions regarding the size of housing and building costs) and supplementary demand-side subsidies (based on available household income) would need to be discussed from a housing economy and legal perspective.

We need to come up with new ideas to ensure that criteria and processes at the various planning and building levels can smoothly engage, and we need to define and realise the optimal relationship between density, size of town or city, Baukultur, and the quality of the environment and of life.

## 4. From an energy to a resource transition

To be able to achieve the aims of the Green Deal it is absolutely essential that greenhouse gas emissions are drastically reduced or even avoided when buildings are constructed, operated and dismantled. In addition to building operation, emissions are mainly generated when resources are used for materials, construction, building site facilities and processes, as well as when buildings are dismantled. This is less about saving energy or energy-policy measures during a building’s service life and more about pursuing a new emissions policy, which is closely linked to the resource question. It is about considering a building’s entire lifecycle.

Only if overall resource consumption in relation to buildings can be significantly reduced will we also have the chance to make the energy transition by moving away from fossil fuels towards renewable energies within the entire field of action around buildings and to sustainably and permanently reduce CO2 emissions in this cross-sectoral field.

Models which are useful in this respect are those which take account of the fact that avoiding new resource consumption (i.e. using grey energy and renewable energies in supply structures) already significantly contributes to making savings and reducing CO2 emissions.

Translating our previously linear, consumption-oriented economic system into a circular approach is one of the keys to this transformation. We need to focus on answering questions such as: What strategies can we come up with for reusing or composting all building materials? How can recycled materials be used in new builds and rebuilds which apply high design standards? And how can entire structural components subsequently be used as a resource? The principles applied in the preservation of historic monuments and the practice of preserving existing structures can be transferred to other buildings in the stock. That means repairing rather than replacing, adapting materials used and constructions in the building stock, and implementing reversible measures. The aim would be to “reimagine what is meant by a responsible use of resources using *golden energy* not *grey energy*.”

Building with renewable resources, using recyclable materials, producing no waste, as well as recycling-friendly building methods will be guiding principles going forward. The relevant structural, tax and funding policy measures need to become more firmly established general criteria. The protection of resources, as well as waste and CO2 avoidance must become primary protective goals. Rules and regulations for reusing second-hand structural components and for using existing buildings as materials depots and urban mines should be further expanded. The thermal recycling of used building and waste products, such as wood, should be curbed in favour of reuse. Regional and regenerative building materials in particular should be promoted and the limits to regrowth sounded out. To that end the technical rules and regulations need to be reviewed and, where necessary, adapted. We also need to push ahead with research into renewable resources. Good building examples are the best way to get investors to become partners and thus to give a boost to this form of building. European environmental and health and safety standards pertaining to building products need to be revised.

The same holds true of the use of building products which can be deconstructed and recycled in a circular building industry. The regionalisation of building material production can make a key contribution, and can even be incorporated into those building methods which have evolved over time.

The interdependencies between the demand side (the building materials industry) and the supply side (building structures and infrastructures) must be thought of as cross-sectoral. Without transitioning towards marginal conditions which promote demand for low-carbon building products there will be no market for these products. Similarly, the issue of apportioning the necessary modernisation costs – to tenants and landlords – needs to be resolved in order to unleash the relevant forces to enable climate-friendly rebuilding. The corresponding social and economic-policy conditions also need to be put in place.

## 5. A new definition of economic efficiency

What is important when it comes to implementing a truly sustainable building concept across the board is transparency and acceptance of the need to limit those greenhouse gas emissions which are linked to the construction and operation of buildings, as well as to turn away from the primacy of economic efficiency in an individual case to a system of requirements which aims to stabilise and preserve the natural environment. The resource-based value of the building stock and follow-up costs for potential pollutant clean-ups, disposal costs etc. must be taken into account and made transparent.

Besides manufacturing and operational costs, both lifecycle and climate change costs need to be priced in and strengthened by using the opportunities available for emission-negative building with organic materials (like wood from sustainable forestry and examining the wide use of other materials such as clay, straw and mycelia). Expanding the system to include the entire building lifecycle transcends its limitation to a building’s service life, and conducting a lifecycle assessment places the focus on a building’s total impact.

Overall, what is urgently needed is a new definition of economic efficiency in the building sector and a reform of existing evaluations to increase measurability. In addition to the three dimensions of sustainability (ecological, economic and socio-cultural aspects), within which only formulaic compromises could and can at times be found, a definition encompassing “efficiency – consistency – sufficiency – resilience” could lead to new, future-proof approaches.

When it comes to the field of action around buildings, the foundations which need to be laid in terms of climate-friendly, sustainable, resource-saving and affordable construction are well-known and have been sufficiently researched. So far, though, they have not been widely put into practice. (“Our problem isn’t that of realising what needs to be done, but of actually doing it.”)

## 6. Recalibrating the rules

Constructions and building technology have been getting more and more complex for decades now. As a result, growing demands are being made of structural stability, of heat insulation, humidity, fire and noise protection, hygiene and health, as well as of general user comfort. Quality and equipment standards influence building costs, regardless of whether they are imposed by law or users. The ongoing review of and possible reduction in the number of rules and regulations can help to reduce the complexity of building. Calls are being heard in the debate for more courage to innovate, experiment and fail. The aim should be less to maintain the status quo in terms of norms and rules and to ensure that rules and regulations are more dynamic and open to future developments and new approaches. One way to do that could be to reduce the prescribed steps defined in rules and regulations, to have more rules and regulations with wide-ranging innovation clauses and to concentrate more on formulating targets.

Focusing regulatory law on limiting a building’s energy needs during its service life is not, or no longer, productive. Other approaches (e.g. at the neighbourhood level) need to be developed.

Competition and procurement law ensure fair access to the European internal market. A fixation on products, however, shows that procurement law in particular poses a hindrance to integrated and co-creation concepts, or can even inhibit them. It should be examined to what extent adaptations are necessary to be able to fulfil the intentions of the New European Bauhaus better and more rapidly.

## 7. Interdisciplinarity and co-creation

One key take-away from the Bauhaus concept is the need to strengthen integrated, holistic approaches and points of view and to ensure they are widely accepted by society. Besides the planning and artistic disciplines, consideration must also be given to the skilled crafts and trades and more regional cooperation. In the better case, this can also provide the scope for new business models and “wild” creative alliances. “A transdisciplinary, multi-level, -departmental and -generational work process can give rise to an ecological definition of society, economics, culture and life.” The increasing number of digital technologies and applications can help scrutinise and realign past processes and role allocations along the value-added chain.

Greater attention must be paid to users’ interests than has been the case in the past. Including society in building and planning processes should go so far as to mean that building becomes a transdisciplinary matter, in the sense that it is no longer done *for* users but *with* them. Strengthening the necessary co-creation process – including by drawing in all the other disciplines – is one of the prerequisites for fulfilling the social responsibility being called for and meeting the ambitious requirements set out in the Green Deal.

Involving young people has a key role to play in this, as has using a transdisciplinary and multi-generational process to tap into existing movements to formulate a holistic definition of society, economics, culture and living. And that should go hand in hand with transforming training and continuing training into interdisciplinary and lifelong learning.

In the context of the climate-policy efforts being undertaken, what society wants out of housing and life should be determined as part of a “new kind of scientifically supported participation process”. “Participation is more than just asking what someone wants from the dessert trolley.” The focus is on finding out what needs lie behind the often-heard narratives (e.g. detached, single-family houses) in order to be able to dissolve those structures and images and formulate appropriate new approaches. Placing the focus on detached, single-family houses, which is prevalent in Germany, is a core issue and needs to be discussed in the context of the qualities of apartment blocks, the building stock, utilisation options and, above all, the protection and affordability of various perspectives on life. “We need to apply sociological approaches in order to realign our traditional memory and values.”

We also need to pay more than mere lip service to participation. That is why bottom-up and top-down approaches need to be combined, given that both have convincing arguments to back them up. Bottom-up strategies are essential when it comes to understanding diverse needs and ideas and to promoting awareness and acceptance. Partnerships not only with science but also with art and cultural institutions as well as with the creative industry have an important role to play in this. The cultural dimension is regarded as essential to widely communicating new approaches. The key cannot be to only use design vocabulary, design and creative drive, as well as teaching about building history and Baukultur to get the message across to society, to motivate it and initiate a culture change. Instead, diverse forms of knowledge need to be brought together so as to be able to come up with new ideas. Top-down approaches can also set the frame for this so that matters can be adequately explained to users and to enable them to get involved in decision-making processes.

It is also becoming clear that the need to involve all the disciplines and the planned culture change also applies to existing administrative and governance structures. The enormous challenges faced by the building industry, and at the same time its significance, means that governments and administrations need to boost their capacities. Moreover, interdisciplinarity and co-creation can only succeed if administrations also realign their activities – less in terms of a governmental counterpart and more in the sense of expanding capacities in order to be able to go beyond providing mere legal evaluations and to strengthen their assessment skills to shape things for the good of the community, as creative players.

The holistic approach to building should also be promoted by having centralised contact points which provide scientific support.

The goals of the Green Deal can only be achieved if a discourse is initiated with all those involved in the field of action around buildings, with all those involved along the value-added chain in building, as well as with society, and only if the requirements made are comprehensible. The cultural diversity of various actors in modern societies needs to be incorporated: the know-how, values and practices of actors in civil society, politics, administration and science need to be reimagined together and regularly renegotiated in order to find the right customised solutions for specific places.

To that end, different actors in the culture and creative industries, in the fields of architecture, design, art, the preservation and conservation of historic monuments, building companies, the skilled crafts and trades, housing industry, disposal and decommissioning sector, as well as public cultural and educational facilities (e.g. museums, libraries, archives, adult education centres) need to get involved. This discourse should also be scientifically supported and driven forward by transformation research.

## 8. Discourse, experimentation and communication

The path of change is a social and cultural process requiring pro-active communications work. What is needed is a cultural transformation which creates an environment which is designed to a high quality and which receives consistent scientific support (“culture change”). This is not a linear process but a joint, interdisciplinary and visionary journey.

Besides needing to set the course towards the Green Deal, we also need to promote a culture of experimentation which allows people to think outside the box and a wealth of ideas to be consistently incorporated. “The culture of experimentation, inspired by the historical Bauhaus movement, is an exciting approach to creating liveable towns and cities.” In the 21st century we need to take account of the entire bandwidth of (climate) cultural diversity. Not every solution will work everywhere. But there must be scope for trial and error. Depending on the cultural context, sufficiency, efficiency and/or consistency strategies need to be applied or combined in new ways.

Communication, information and knowledge transfer must be integral parts of the process going forward. A discourse needs to be had with the population, clients, planners and builders. Networks, for instance of municipalities, hold great potential. They can help to eliminate prejudices, for example about the costs of sustainable building, and facilitate the necessary change processes.

Trial and error and experimentation, drawing together know-how and practices from across the whole breadth of society must be made possible in order to bring about climate-friendly solutions through social and technical innovations. The innovative potential of a variety of actors in civil society, business, politics and administration needs to be realised to the full.

Moreover, specialist know-how and what tend to be engineering and technological innovations need to be translated into an interdisciplinary culture of experimentation. The numerous existing urban planning and building promotion programmes and initiatives need to be coordinated and combined, and then supplemented by new transdisciplinary creative spaces and neighbourhoods. Demand for “international building exhibitions”, a format which originated in Germany and has evolved into the incubator of architectural, urban planning and regional planning innovations, has increased in recent years, and the idea has been taken up by neighbouring countries in Europe. Formats like this which promote innovation and are geared to quality, and which not only refer to planning and building but also to social and cultural change, must be included in the discourse around the New European Bauhaus and given a boost so they can continue to provide important impetus.

Initiatives which combine technology, business and society and are still at the design stage provide tailored support and encouragement to this transformation process. New competition formats such as the Living Labs Europe Competition (LLEC) generate excellent ideas, arouse interest in sustainable renovation and, in addition, create incentives to implement exceptional projects across Europe. Competition attracts attention and, due to the thrill of the game, motivates participants. Their exceptional ideas for transforming neighbourhoods lend the New European Bauhaus a pioneering role and set new benchmarks for attractive neighbourhoods which have been sustainably renovated as part of a joint, interdisciplinary project involving science and technology, art and culture. Competing projects exert a wide influence, inspiring others to rethink their own habits and tap into existing potentials.

Owing to the increasingly complex interdependencies, there must be creative and spatial freedom for innovations and thinking outside the box, meaning that room to experiment is essential. In analogy with the instrument of special economic zones, it should be examined whether “special building or special planning zones” could also be demarcated.

Research is an important driver when it comes to shaping the *building transition*. “Funding should not only be allocated to the act of building itself, but in particular to research and development and to innovations. They hold the potential for future knowledge transfer from Germany and the EU.”

Nevertheless, the transfer of knowledge into practice is still not going smoothly owing to a number of challenges. Considerable amounts of funding are often allocated specifically to technology research, but it is difficult to find partners to transfer that technology into practice. Scientifically successful approaches need to be transferred into practice more quickly and at the same time widely distributed. Transformation research needs to be significantly expanded and developed further to that end.

The precondition for getting new approaches established is low-threshold and target group-specific access to know-how as well as data sharing among scientists, practitioners and society (knowledge and technology transfer). Appropriate account must be taken of the role of art, cultural and architectural expertise when coming up with new solutions and transferring knowledge to different population groups.

The creation of a national experimentation and future campus organised by the Federation also lends itself well as a place for such an interdisciplinary exchange of ideas. In light of the upcoming building transition towards more sustainable systems, a flexible and expandable research platform comprising an ensemble of existing buildings could be developed and realised to test new preservation and restoration methods, as well as extending, developing, refurbishing and continuing to build existing structures. This research platform could act as a living lab with the corresponding infrastructure in which building becomes the subject of transdisciplinary research and experimentation – and based on simpler liability clauses. Research, planning, culture and the media, the skilled crafts and trades, industry and civil society could all come together in that lab, and national and European research and cooperation networks could be established, too.

9. Drawing on current and past cultural knowledge

Global change and its associated phenomena, such as climate change, intensified global communication via the media and migration processes, have already led to wide-ranging changes in the natural, built and social environment in European towns, cities and municipalities over recent decades. Often firmly established practices are thus increasingly losing their advantage or are becoming obsolete when it comes to designing towns, cities and neighbourhoods. Innovative solutions need to be found in view of climate action and adaptation. However, “we don’t need to keep reinventing the wheel”. For example, historical or cultural knowledge from other places can be (re)discovered and (re)used.

Pre-20th-century building practices were in many cases geared to durability and thus to sustainability. Many mediaeval structures are still more resilient to flooding and mould growth than many more recently constructed buildings. Countless practices fell into oblivion in the course of the 20th century, though. Archives and libraries around the world are treasure troves of such knowledge, which can be used in interdisciplinary projects (e.g. involving historians, building researchers and architects, designers and creative minds) to design our towns, cities and communities of the present.

In many parts of the world building design, working and social life have for centuries been adapted to the prevalent hot conditions as a matter of course. This knowledge and these practices are still available in many places and should be taken advantage of. That is why we need to enhance and promote these cultural knowledge bases in a targeted manner.

Appropriate consideration needs to be given to the role of culture, the creative industry and the media when generating and transforming know-how and practices to solve the challenges we currently face. For example, artists have since time immemorial devoted themselves to reflecting on the tension between culture and nature. Nature serves both as a motif and source of inspiration. Through their art they address the vulnerability and sensitivity of nature, are provocative and call out shortcomings to illuminate trends in a playful/critical manner and to enable the relevant corrective action to be taken. In this way knowledge and practices can be transformed and others inspired. That is why cultural and educational institutions need to be used as platforms for experimentation, knowledge creation and knowledge transfer.

At the same time, the cultural and creative industries are often the link in the chain between traditional economic sectors, new technologies, and modern forms of information and communication. By taking an unconventional look at new problems and applying other methods and approaches, creative minds can help to sound out practical ways of finding solutions to our current challenges.

Outlook

These first discussions showed that the New European Bauhaus presents us with a great opportunity to enter into a joint European dialogue in which we rethink the relationships between towns, cities, rural regions and building.

The New European Bauhaus is concerned with planning, building, preserving, using, dismantling and reusing as an overall process – with buildings which are no longer finished when the keys are handed over but which are considered, beyond that, in terms of cycles of various “lives” and impacts on those lives. It may be the case that we move from a binary, reflexive system towards a recursive one which is circular. Just like in an ecosystem, in which no individual can determine what happens to it, everything has to be part of that system.

Ultimately, what we are talking about is protecting and preserving the possibilities open both to us and to future generations for living a good, safe and healthy life, based on sustainable development and making wise use of our available and own renewable resources in Europe. Germany’s Federal Constitutional Court recently emphatically reiterated this mandate in relation to the Federal Climate Change Act.

That Act provides for greenhouse gas neutrality to be achieved by 2050. To that end, reduction targets were set for individual sectors, including for buildings. However, the yearly tranches determined in the Federal Climate Change Act only went as far as 2030, and it was this fact which the Federal Constitutional Court criticised. It called on the legislature to take further measures to “ensure the transition to climate neutrality does not further restrict fundamental liberties” and to more clearly define annual emissions for the period after 2030. We need to negotiate a social contract for a climate and building policy which is fair to all generations.

The dialogue on the New European Bauhaus has only just begun. The Federal Ministry of the Interior, for Building and Community (BMI) and the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (BBSR) wish to support this discussion process. All stakeholders are invited to continue to play an active part.

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