



# Conversation for the New European Bauhaus

A collective reflection on an « innovative, sustainable, inclusive»  
encompassing project at the service of European construction

Since the launch of The New European Bauhaus (NEB) in October 2020, Akuo gathered a group of interdisciplinary stakeholders with a view to fully take part to the co-creation phase. First, we collectively published an op-ed in the international press (available [here](#)), then we gathered for a meeting with the NEB team early February. This eventually led to having bilateral exchanges with a view to feed the below paper.

Our group is composed of renowned architects, urbanists, NGOs, political science professors, city organisations, renewable energy producers introducing thus a solid diversity in our thinking. But above all, we are European citizens committed to the future of our society, to the sustainability of our planet, the inclusion of each and every part of the population.

We, collectively, want to design, create and build our future. An overall enthusiasm emerged for the movement along with a desire to develop it further in light of the objectives related to the ecological transition, social inclusion, the development of a European narrative, the transformation of the regulatory framework related to the built environment, and the evolution of single-use structures towards a more systemic approach to architecture and cities potentially affected by the NEB.

We believe the New European Bauhaus should be the start for a new phase of the European construction ('Bau') and attract all citizens, professional stakeholders desiring to make the EU a better place for a sustainable living.

We believe such a European narrative should impulse an entire new set of initiatives be they bottom-up driven or legislative-driven.

This paper is structured around three main axes: (1) the extension of the NEB concept to make it more accessible, (2) the position of the ecological transition at the heart of architecture and urbanism, (3) the breakdown of existing silos via co-creation processes.

## Part 1

### Making the concept of New European Bauhaus broader

#### A) A NEB that goes beyond the European elites/ a unique initiative to reconnect the EU and the Europeans

The New European Bauhaus should not be reserved for European elites but include everyone, as was rightly pointed out by Elisa Ferreira, EU Commissioner for cohesion and reform and Alexandra Mitsotakis, Co-founder and president of the World Human Forum.

If the NEB is to impulse a new European construction process, it must remain open to innovative ideas, communicate climate-oriented goals to people and remain accessible to each and every citizen while giving everyone the opportunity to participate.

A starting point should be to ensure that communication around NEB is everything but elitist. A special care should be given to targeting all segments of the EU society from all 27 member states.

Actually, a subtitle could be introduced to balance the elitist current naming, such as "**New European Beginning**", enhancing communication purpose of the movement.

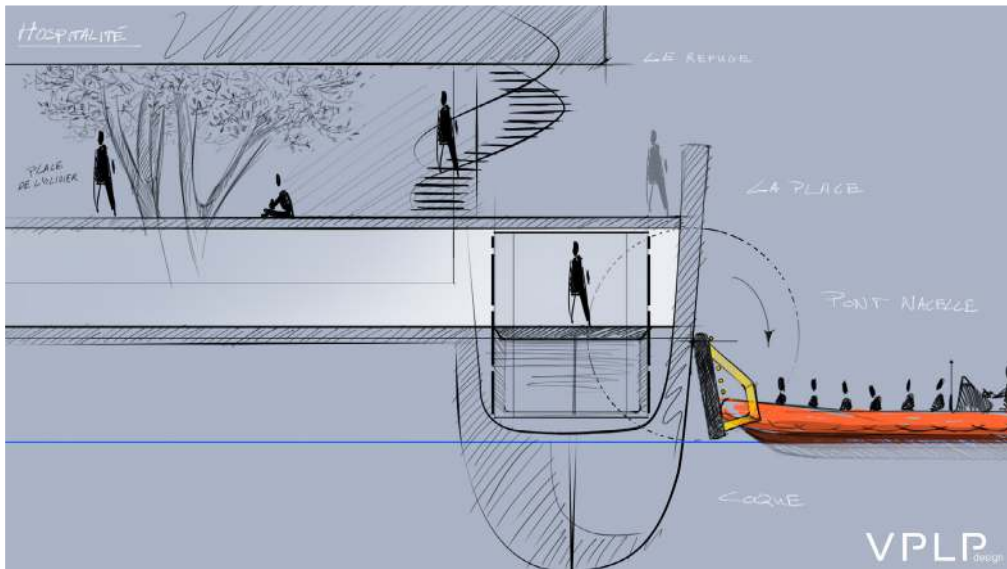
As a matter of fact, the European construction process was led by peace purposes and societal integration of different people from different nations. For the NEB to impulse a new phase of the EU construction – it must reflect the threats/challenges the EU is facing now: climate change and social division are two main threats to the EU cohesion hence peace.

We believe therefore, the NEB should put at its core **ecology and societal integration** (diverting from bourgeois' objectives as rightly pointed out by Pr. François Gemenne<sup>2</sup>). Urban planning and architecture are perfect means to achieve to tackle these challenges. In that regard, interesting work is being carried out by the "Perou" association<sup>3</sup>, aiming at articulating social and architectural action in response to the perils of the environment. Referring to European fundamental human rights and the resulting «right to the city», their vision encompasses architecture as a tool for the integration of the multitude of undesirables, commonly counted as social or even ethnic cases, but never considered as full inhabitants. The New European Bauhaus could be a renewed flagship of the European integration culture.

<sup>1</sup> Alexandra Mitsotakis

<sup>2</sup> specialist of environmental geopolitics and migration dynamics and co-director of the Hugo observatory, see: <https://habitableproject.org/partners/the-hugo-observatory-university-of-liege-belgium/>

<sup>3</sup> A research-action laboratory on the "hostile city", see: <https://www.perou-paris.org/>



We believe it is important this new movement, that will ultimately lead to legislative proposals, set from the beginning core values at its heart. It is key to spread sustainable architectural concepts worldwide while respecting local and traditional constructions, and working on societal integration. This could be done while fostering local and sustainable sourcing of materials.

Last but not least, the NEB – once up and running – should nurture new generation. To that end, a **training, labelled “New European Bauhaus”** (as suggested by the Coldefy architecture Agency), would serve the purpose to ensure each stakeholder from the construction sector to get the right understanding from each other and get common visionary training.

A training, labelled NEB, would close knowledge gaps and strengthen links in the sector. For instance, architects could be provided with deeper knowledge of the economic constraints of a given project while promoters are given insights about urban planning and the sociology of the city.

Providing the New European Bauhaus with a broader audience would create new perspectives coming from different backgrounds in order to make the fight against climate change more effective and inclusive while adding more diverse vision of aesthetics and art.

Hence, we plea for a less elitist communication, the definition of core values and dedicated training.

## B) The NEB: an opportunity for reshuffling the legislative approach and test new models?

We acknowledge the New European Bauhaus was not made for legislative or governance purposes, yet we see a huge potential in the **NEB movement in questioning and possibly getting rid of legislative boundaries to societal and ecological innovations**. To make our point, we will rely on 3 examples:

- (1) EU regulations on ceilings' heights: current regulations, whether at the European or national level being so strict and detailed prevents reconversion and rehabilitations of existing buildings, incentivising building demolition and hindering re-use of materials. Such legislations are in complete contradiction with the waste hierarchy largely promoted by the EU. Building from scratch should be the exception and reconversion or rehabilitation, the rule. As the Bouwmeester Maitre Architecte (BMA)<sup>4</sup> agency of Brussels recommends: « we should move from the renovation wave to the reconversion wave ». In that regard, new EU regulations could represent an opportunity to impulse the reconversion and rehabilitation of existing buildings.
- (2) Transposition of EU legislation regarding construction material: because the EU legislative process related to building implies transposition at national level, it induces a potential of 27 different frameworks, making it very difficult to promote collective intelligence and reflection on materials. This is the case for the use of innovative materials such as bamboos or unused wood resources, as pointed out by the RDAI Agency.<sup>5</sup> . The European integration could be an opportunity to create a single European space for construction materials to become the leading power in re-use. This process could be fostered by an increased access to raw materials and insurances.
- (3) Going a step further, the NEB and the pilot projects that will be launched could be an opportunity to test regulatory sandboxes<sup>6</sup>. Innovative constructions, taking up the values of the NEB, could be made in a spirit of experimentation, without regulatory constraints and centred around collective management and design. It could bring a structural change in the way buildings are administered and therefore how their life cycle is handled.

<sup>4</sup> <https://bma.brussels/en/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.rдай.fr/>

<sup>6</sup> Claire Roumet, Energy Cities , <https://energy-cities.eu/>

## Part 2

### Putting the ecological transition at the heart of the building

#### A) New ecological concepts adapted to the building

The NEB should be put at the forefront of any new initiatives in the below concepts:

First and foremost (as stated above), a **lighter footprint** should be the new motto and the NEB should put an end to the « destruction-reconstruction mechanism »<sup>7</sup>.

Second, foster the **local sourcing of raw materials**. These materials are often more adapted to the geographical and climatic realities of a given country. In addition to that, local sourcing provides opportunities for the development of local jobs.

Third, encourage **lifecycle thinking for the built environment**: in that respect, the EU framework 'Level(s)', which brings buildings into the circular economy should be further developed as it supports users all the way from the design stage through to operation and occupation of a building.

Finally, shift the **operating model of architecture** from machines to biology and living organisms, to have the built environment acting as metabolisms. Such a concept (so called STREAM building<sup>8</sup>) transforms a building into is a living organism that metabolizes waste and transforms it into a resource ("cradle-to-cradle"). The Stream Building concept incorporates urban agriculture as a vector for **circular** and **solidarity**-based economy.



<sup>7</sup> Bouwmeester Maitre Architecte agency

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.pca-stream.com/fr/projets/stream-building-7>. The Stream Building is among the winning projects of the 2015 City of Paris call for innovative urban projects, "Reinventing Paris." It is a manifesto of PCA-STREAM's research-action method and was collaboratively designed by the thinkers of the STREAM Review and the future operators of the building.

## B) Rationalize resources and optimize energy consumption/production in buildings

In order to promote local sourcing of raw materials, the NEB should support the **creation of an EU-wide construction material database** collecting the different material and know-how available in all EU regions<sup>9</sup>. By mapping the different quarries in Europe, quantify the raw materials and qualify them depending on their use for various climatic and geographical challenges, the NEB would support local sourcing. Such a database would also allow to expand thinking and use on renewable materials such as wood, wicker or hemp.

Such database could be complemented by an **analytical tool** to measure the overall emissions, energy output or carbon content of projects. It is only by empowering the citizens and decision-makers with the entire sustainability spectrum that the NEB will create the opportunity to improve building sustainability. An outstanding example being the sustainable outcome developed by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA).



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Furthermore, not only the buildings could consume less, they could also be based on «return on emissions models», as stated by Shigeru Ban, where the building is thought as a **net producing domain of energy** rather than a net consuming one.

### Comments:

In that respect, all kinds of renewable energy equipment (such as solar tiles<sup>10</sup>) should be a full part of any new projects coming out of the NEB because it is now possible to reconcile aesthetics and environmental protection in the building sector.

<sup>9</sup> Initiated by the RDAI Agency

<sup>10</sup> Such as the ones developed by Akuo



## Part 3

### Breaking down social and architectural silos

Echoing Olafur Eliasson, we believe the NEB must encourage breaking silos in architecture.

**Why?** Let us provide you with 3 reasons:

1. The **"European way of life"** is an inclusive one<sup>11</sup>: it is one of the European strengths in comparison to other construction cultures around the world. In Europe, the consortium culture is very much prominent, and it should be further diversified to echo the diversity of our societies. Consequently, the New Bau of the EU is to include, include and include.
2. A new construction movement would be meaningless if it would forget about some part of the population, be they in or outside the city. We should strive for **"Zero Exclusion, Zero Carbon, Zero Poverty"**<sup>12</sup>. Such a goal would be better achieved by spurring collaboration between engineers, architects, and social scientists. With an increased diversity of profiles during the conceptualisation of the project, the interdisciplinary scientific dialogue can help encompassing the complexity of the issues that intersect with one another and help tackling poverty issues, among others.
3. In the building decision-making process, we currently face an over representation of economists, engineers, and financial sectors in comparison to landscape architects, urban planners or sociologists. The formers are mainly following their own agenda while the latter are more taking into account **geographical and sociological realities**. This is especially true for public orders, when the state directly deals with a major construction group who may not share the collective ambition behind a project. In this scenario architects have little influence on the selection criteria and direction of the project. By doing so, we may downgrade the societal and ecological assets of a built project.

<sup>11</sup> Coldefy Architecture agency


<sup>12</sup> Convergences



## How?

1. Breaking silos in architecture would mean adding multiple functionalities, involving several more actors in a given project. This raises the question of the **distribution of wealth** between the potential beneficiaries. Such an issue should be addressed in the NEB thinking to be able to see the wood in the trees;
2. Create a new body with an advisory role for **urban organisation** at the local or European level. This kind of body already exists in Belgium (Bouwmeester) or Denmark (Royal Danish Institute), in other member states: they are empowered to submit an informed report to mayors and help them take enlighten decisions when passing public orders;
3. Inject **collaborative co-construction process** into any new projects and make sure citizens are fully part of it;
4. Address the dimension of **impoverishment of the population** from the start in order to see which peri-urban areas could be integrated into the local economy with an overall aim of territorial revitalisation.

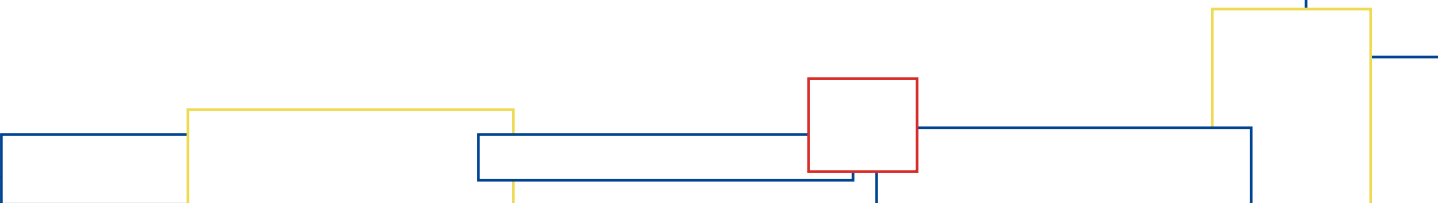
## Conclusion



As a multi-sectorial group of stakeholders, we truly believe the New European Bauhaus is an amazing opportunity to further build the European Union reflecting the European society at large.

Indeed, we believe the NEB should put at i ecology and societal integration at its core as to echo our current challenges and also to empower the new generation with the design of their society.

The European Commission is about to launch a call for pilot projects. We believe the pilot projects should encompass at least the following:

1. **Collaborative co-construction process** to involve citizens but also landscape architects, urban planners or sociologists
  2. **A lighter footprint**
  3. **Local sourcing of materials and know-how;**
  4. **Lifecycle thinking for the built environment**
  5. **Renewable energy integration**
  6. **Address inclusion challenge**
  7. **Initiate a reflection on the creation of a material database and an analytical tool** to measure the overall emissions, energy output or carbon content of projects.
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On the long-term, we believe the NEB should allow:

- The reflection on the existing building-related legislation/**boundaries** that prevent genuine smart and ecological architectural/building projects
- The setting-up of a dedicated NED **training**
- An inclusive **communication**

Let us make this initiative a genuine paradigm shift in the building/'bau' of an ecological and inclusive society.

