

Kraków Declaration

‘New European Bauhaus: Heritage & Transformation’

What we build and retrofit today, should aspire to become the cultural heritage of the future. What we demolish today is lost forever!

PREAMBLE

Europe has a rich and multi-faceted built heritage, which reflects the continent’s long and complex history. Only a very small part of this heritage is listed and protected by law. Yet, a considerable portion of our built environment holds significant cultural and architectural value, including elements built in the second half of the 20th century. The value of this more recent heritage is still underestimated and not sufficiently recognised.

Our built heritage faces many serious challenges, especially due to the effects of climate change, but also due to abandonment, disuse, unsuitable development, lack of maintenance, poor-quality renovation, and lack of funding. The preservation, restoration, retrofitting and adaptive re-use of this built heritage brings multiple benefits to citizens and society as a whole, for present and future generations. However, this requires continued commitment and investment from governments, communities, professionals and civil society.

By elevating the complexity of our natural and built habitat and ecosystem to an unprecedented high level of political priority, the New European Bauhaus invites us, individually and collectively, to reimagine our living spaces – both in urban and in rural areas – in order to make them more sustainable, inclusive and beautiful, whilst duly preserving their heritage characters, history and values and whilst responding to the needs of local communities.

The transformation of our built heritage requires the adoption of a different mindset vis-à-vis our built environment; an attitude that considers our built heritage as a living environment and a cultural asset that needs to be preserved but also that can be re-worked and re-modelled, if necessary, in response to the social, cultural, environmental and economic needs of our time. In this way, our built heritage can contribute in a meaningful and creative way to contemporary society’s needs and thereby be conserved and/or adapted in a sustainable and inclusive manner for the benefit of present and future generations.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

To support this process, the [Architects' Council of Europe](#), [Europa Nostra](#) and [ICOMOS](#) joined their voices and forces in order to shape and promote the following **7 guiding principles**:

1. Favour the renovation and adaptive re-use of the existing building stock

In Europe, 75% of our built heritage is considered to be energy inefficient and all EU Member States are facing a housing crisis, characterised by a shortage of affordable housing, a loss in quality of new constructions as well as the poor quality of a significant number of existing dwellings.

To succeed, the European Green Deal's [Renovation Wave](#) and the upcoming *European Affordable Housing Plan* must adopt a holistic approach and embrace the cultural and heritage dimensions of our built environment. Such an approach ought to inspire and drive quality planning processes and quality projects, in which a proper balance is sought between heritage elements and new interventions aimed at meeting today's challenges and the needs of all communities.

At a time when Europe is facing a housing crisis, millions of square metres sit empty, are in poor state of maintenance or are demolished. It is crucial to extend the life of existing buildings to save the carbon they embody, avoid the waste generated by their demolition, avoid the consumption of new land, and improve their performances. There should be a presumption in favour of re-use over replacement¹: feasibility studies should always be conducted to thoroughly explore the potential for renovation, functional upgrading and adaptation to new needs, in a respectful and creative dialogue with the heritage dimension of these buildings.

2. Take advantage of innovation and traditional knowledge

New technologies and innovation are critical to achieve the preservation and transformation of our built heritage. At the same time, the pursuit of 'novel' solutions should not disregard and jeopardise the enormous potential of traditional knowledge and know-how. Today, the art of building, developed over centuries, has something to teach us, especially about the vital interactions between buildings and their natural and social environment as well as their local climate.

Both the use of these types of knowledge in contemporary contexts and the application of new technologies to traditional contexts should be pursued. However, priority should be given to traditional architecture and design solutions, as well as to traditional and, as far as possible, re-used building materials, implemented using simple, low-tech and locally tested techniques.

¹[HouseEurope initiative](#)

3. Upskill architects and heritage professionals

The transformation of our built heritage can only be the result of the work of skilled professionals. But it is also contingent on the quality of administrative, policy and decision-making processes. We need to create new generations of professionals, builders, planners, managers, and decision-makers who adhere to the core values articulated in the New European Bauhaus, namely, to support the transition to a more sustainable, inclusive and beautiful built environment. It is crucial to develop innovative education and training models for architects and heritage professionals that foster greater synergies between the arts, architecture, landscape architecture, heritage conservation, interior design, spatial planning and craftsmanship.

4. Co-create with people, leaving no-one behind

To be successful and sustainable, the transformation of our built heritage should be achieved with contributions from all stakeholders in a democratic and inclusive way. It is essential to involve and engage everyone – especially users and residents, including younger people – from the outset of any financial investment and planning process of intervention on built heritage to ensure that the intervention will meet the needs and aspirations of local communities. Such debates boost social interaction and society's responsibility for cultural heritage, which is both local and European.

Building people's capacity to take responsibility must be at the heart of any design process, in order to co-create quality and lasting places which are sustainable, inclusive and beautiful for the benefit of all.

5. Champion quality as a core guiding principle of governance and funding mechanisms

The upgrading of our built heritage to current standards in terms of sustainability, accessibility, safety and energy efficiency faces numerous challenges. If applied in a strict and automatic manner, planning and building regulations may undermine the sustainable nature of historic constructions, but also may prevent creative solutions from emerging, wasting the values embedded in heritage places. Flexibility needs to be engrained in planning and local government bodies.

As stated in the recent [Europa Nostra Bucharest Manifesto, For Quality-Driven Cultural Heritage Practice in Europe](#), championing high-quality principles in all governance and funding mechanisms is essential, from the pre-project assessment stage to procurement, implementation and post-project evaluation.

The [New European Bauhaus](#) and the [Davos Baukultur Process](#), as well as ICOMOS [European Quality Principles for EU-funded interventions](#) and their [Future of our Past report](#) provide excellent tools to raise awareness among all stakeholders and ensure quality-driven projects, and favouring the renovation and re-use of the existing building stock. By adhering to quality principles, we can ensure that our built heritage is preserved for future generations whilst meeting contemporary needs.

6. Share knowledge and learn from each other

Thousands of excellent practices of transformation of our built heritage exist across Europe, as demonstrated, among others, by the laureates of the [European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards](#), the [EU Prize for Contemporary Architecture / Mies van der Rohe Awards](#) and also the [New European Bauhaus Prizes](#). The European Union should foster knowledge transfer and support peer-learning actions aimed at helping public authorities, professionals, investors and civil society to learn from best practices and learn from each other, in the continuity of the [Living Spaces](#) peer-learning initiative, which has enabled local and regional public authorities to learn how to plan and implement high-quality architectural policies and projects.

7. Adapt our built heritage to risks and ensure adequate preparedness

Adapting our built heritage to the effects of climate change is a pressing need, driven by the increasing impact of environmental changes on historic structures and cultural landscapes. It is essential to conduct vulnerability assessments to identify the specific risks that climate change poses to historic structures and develop comprehensive adaptation plans that outline strategies for protecting and adapting built heritage to the challenges of the changing climate.

Armed conflicts also cause direct physical damage to cultural heritage sites. Preventive measures like documentation and digital preservation can mitigate these impacts, in that they represent invaluable resources for post-conflict restoration and reconstruction. Built heritage is an essential resource for sustainable cultural, social, environmental, and economic recovery. Post-conflict reconstruction should prioritise restoring cultural heritage sites, aiding thereby both physical reconstruction and the psychological and social healing of affected communities.

CALL TO ACTION

The Architects' Council of Europe, Europa Nostra and ICOMOS call upon the incoming European Commission, recently elected Members of the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and its Member States as well as their cities and regions to:

- Improve the [European Public Procurement Directive](#) to embed quality principles and favour innovative approaches, including Architectural Design Competitions – to ensure that public procurers' decisions are based on quality criteria and public interest rather than short-term economic considerations.
- Adopt an holistic, quality-driven and cultural approach to the development of the forthcoming European Affordable Housing Plan – to ensure that housing not only meets basic needs but also fosters social inclusion, community well-being, and respects the diverse cultural and historical contexts of European cities.
- Implement the [Renovation Wave strategy](#) and the recast [Energy Performance of Buildings Directive](#) in the spirit of the New European Bauhaus' core values and principles and in line with the [Davos Baukultur Quality System](#) – to ensure that building renovations are not only energy-efficient but also beautiful, sustainable and inclusive, fostering a sense of belonging and well-being.
- Place quality as a core objective in all EU policies and funding programmes, which impact upon the built heritage, such as the [European Regional Development Fund](#), the [Cohesion Fund](#) and the upcoming Culture Compass – to ensure high standards in governance, project and programme management;
- Continue to support knowledge transfer and peer-learning among European public authorities on high-quality architecture and built environment, through the [Creative Europe programme](#), in the continuity of the [Living Spaces](#) initiative , and provide adequate education and training programmes for all generations of professionals through Erasmus+;
- Incorporate all the above guiding principles and quality criteria in the [EU enlargement and neighbourhood strategy](#), including the financial support provided through the [Instrument for pre-accession assistance \(IPA\)](#), as well as in the EU's future Mediterranean strategy, to encourage a sustainable and inclusive approach to urban and rural development in EU's partner countries, with due respect to the EU fundamental values.

IMPORTANT RESOURCES (in anti-chronological order)

- Europa Nostra Bucharest Manifesto, [For Quality-Driven Cultural Heritage Practice in Europe](#), November 2024
- European Commission, [Recommendations from the European Commission-led expert group on the safeguarding of cultural heritage in Ukraine](#), November 2024
- ACE [Manifesto on the New European Bauhaus](#), January 2024
- ACE Statement [Upskilling to deliver high-quality, architecture for a beautiful, sustainable and inclusive environment](#), April 2023
- OMC Group report of Member States' experts, [Strengthening cultural heritage resilience for climate change - Where the European Green Deal meets cultural heritage](#), September 2022
- ACE Statement, [For affordable and quality housing](#), May 2022
- New European Bauhaus Collective, [Statement on Public Procurement](#), 2022
- OMC Group report of Member States' experts, [Towards a shared culture of architecture](#)
- [Investing in a high-quality living environment for everyone](#), October 2021
- ACE Statement, [A sustainable, fair and beautiful built environment to address the climate and biodiversity crisis](#), October 2021
- Europa Nostra, in close cooperation with ICOMOS and the Climate Heritage Network, supported by the European Investment Bank Institute and the Creative Europe programme of the European Union [European Cultural Heritage Green Paper](#), March 2021
- Europa Nostra Statement, [Cultural Heritage as an integral dimension of the "New European Bauhaus"](#) initiative, December 2020
- ICOMOS, [European Quality Principles for EU-funded Interventions with potential impact upon Cultural Heritage](#), November 2020
- [New European Bauhaus Collective Statement, Making the Renovation Wave a Cultural Project](#), November 2020
- ICOMOS report, [Future of Our Pasts: Engaging Cultural Heritage in Climate Action](#), July 2019
- Leeuwarden Declaration, [Adaptive re-use of the built heritage: Preserving and enhancing the values of the built heritage for future generations](#), November 2018
- Davos Declaration, [Towards a high-quality Baukultur for Europe](#), January 2018
- ICOMOS, [Guidance on Post Trauma Recovery and Reconstruction for World Heritage Cultural Properties](#), 2017



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