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The New European Bauhaus initiative challenges spatial planners to deliver sustainable, beautiful, and inclusive living spaces

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The European context: Green Deal and New European Bauhaus

Climate change and environmental degradation are major threats to Europe and the world. The European Green Deal is a set of policy initiatives designed by the European Commission to address these challenges, aiming to transform the EU into a modern, resource-efficient, and competitive economy that is climate-neutral by 2050. In particular, it aims to achieve these goals by decoupling economic growth from resource use and leaving no one and no place behind.

The Green Deal, announced in December 2019, is considered one of the most ambitious environmental policies ever proposed by the EU and is based on four main pillars:

- Climate neutrality;
- A circular economy;
- Sustainable agriculture;
- Clean transport.

The Green Deal is a major undertaking, but it is essential if the EU is to meet its climate goals. Its implementation will require significant investment, but it is estimated that the benefits of the Green Deal will outweigh the social costs, creating new jobs, boosting economic growth, and improving the quality of life for all Europeans.

Within this framework, in her State of the Union address in September 2020, EU President von der Leyen announced the New European Bauhaus (NEB) initiative as an environmental, economic,

social, and cultural project.

By combining sustainability, investment, affordability, accessibility, and design, the NEB can contribute to the implementation of the European Green Deal and its overarching goal for the European Union to become the world's first "climate-neutral bloc" by 2050. The NEB is inspired by the historic Bauhaus movement, founded in 1919, which was born at a moment of profound transformation into the modern social and industrial age. The founders addressed this transformation in their work and sought solutions to the new challenges. It quickly became a global cultural movement. It brought together artists, designers, architects, and craftspeople. This transdisciplinary approach is still very much needed for the challenges of our time when we are once again facing profound changes.¹

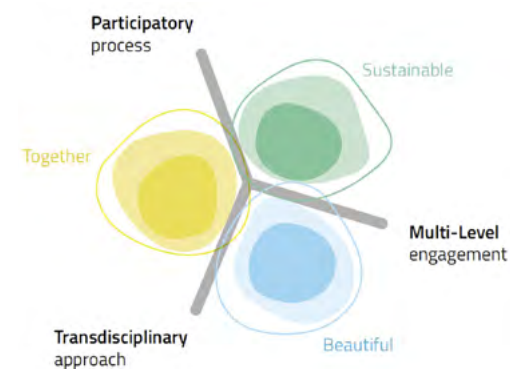


Fig. 1. NEB Compass: Values and Working principles (Source: European Commission 2022).

After a century, the NEB is a creative and interdisciplinary initiative that aims to connect the European Green Deal to buildings, living spaces, and experiences. It calls on EU citizens to imagine and build together a sustainable and inclusive future that is beautiful for their eyes, minds, and souls.

The NEB approach

The NEB approach defines as beautiful those places, practices, and experiences that are planned, designed, and implemented around

a triangle of three inseparable core values:

- “Sustainable”: Environmental sustainability, ensuring harmony with nature, the environment and our planet;
 - “Beautiful”: Aesthetic quality and enrichment, inspired by art and culture, responding to needs beyond functionality;
 - “Together”: Inclusiveness, promoting dialogue across cultures, disciplines, genders, and ages, fostering a culture of living together.
- The values are complemented by three working principles:

- Participatory process: involving civil society or representatives of social groups in a highly participatory framework;
- Multi-level engagement: engagement across scales, sectors and time is necessary to anticipate the impact of global issues on the local dimension and vice versa;
- Transdisciplinary approach: bringing together knowledge from different fields and practitioners from different fields.

The NEB is an interesting framework for spatial planning

One could be tempted to think that the NEB is an approach primarily concerned with buildings. On the contrary, NEB explicitly refers to buildings as well as public spaces, the organization of local communities, the management and use of blue and green infrastructure, the development of urban energy systems, and innovative community services. It refers to what we call ‘living spaces’, which we can somehow identify with the public part of the living environment, i.e. one of the main objects of attention of spatial and urban planning. It is therefore incumbent upon us, as spatial and urban planners, to enter into this mindset.

Indeed, in spatial planning, designing a project by putting values and principles in the foreground is not new, but it is often the programming (the functions) and the square meters built that take over. The NEB reminds us of our primary mission: planning for the common good.

The NEB Compass, a new evaluation tool... for planners?

The evaluation of current NEB projects is done through the New European Bauhaus Compass which is a guiding framework for decision and project-makers wishing to apply the NEB principles and criteria to their activities (European Commission 2022).

For each value and working principle, the NEB Compass presents three levels of ambition to inspire and guide the design of a project from its earliest stages. It does this mainly through questions and examples. The Compass aims to provide a workable and clear framework of reference, distinguishing between more and less ambitious endeavours. It suggests directions for the development of NEB projects and lays the foundations for more detailed assessment tools.

The Compass is structured in such a way that combining the highest levels of ambition of

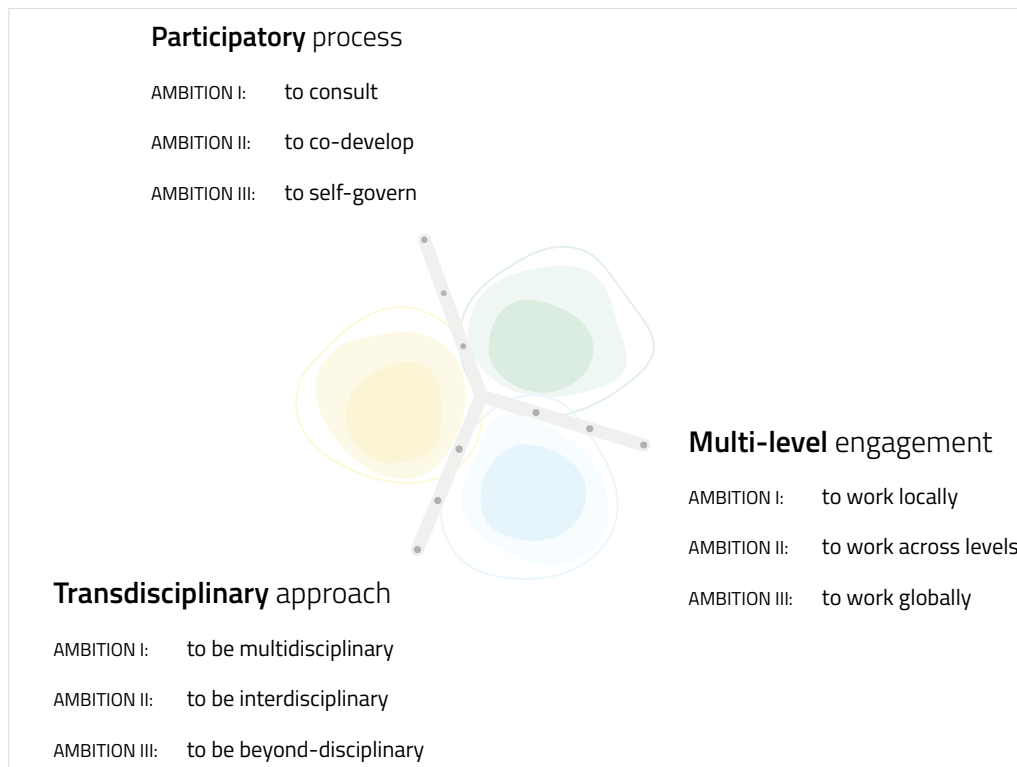
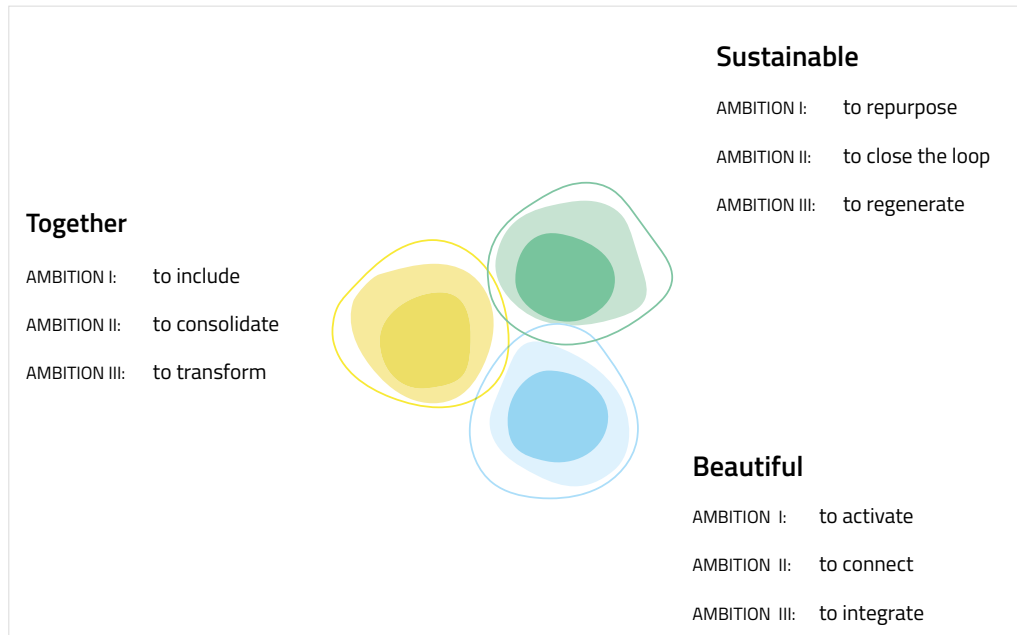


Fig. 2-3. NEB Compass, from the top: the ambition levels of the three values; the ambition levels of the three principles (Source: European Commission 2022).

each value and principle means initiating a profound transformation in the way we organize our societies. There is no possible trade-off between the different values and principles (either one or the other). Rather, they reinforce each other towards a new way of living that integrates all aspects. This could have implications for economic models, governance structures, and mindsets – which many projects address.

It is not a new assessment tool that replaces or integrates existing assessment systems available at the district or city level, but a new way of taking into account the multiple benefits of urban transformations (Bisello 2020) and of modifying governance structures (i.e. the framework of rules, procedures, roles and responsibilities that constitute decision-making processes and project management) (Borsboom-van Beurden *et al.* 2023) for complex decision-making processes and innovative actions.

There are several reasons why this tool can be of great interest to urban and spatial planners.

Firstly, if used from the beginning of the project, this tool encourages project leaders to aim higher: to move to a higher level of ambition in each value and principle. In particular, it is very useful for embedding the participation process, which is not always the case in all EU countries.

Secondly, it is an effective visual tool, its graphics are intelligent: it allows to integrate a certain complexity while being understandable and usable by all: politicians, administrations, citizens. As a result, it is also adaptable, for example by national, regional or local authorities, to respond more specifically to local realities and needs.

Thirdly, the NEB Compass makes it possible to highlight small-scale and low-budget projects that in another context would probably not have been taken up as EU reference projects. An example of this is the Hal 5 project, a mixed-use neighbourhood hotspot in Leuven, Belgium. Hal 5 is a financially self-sustaining temporary redevelopment of a derelict listed railway shed. The project was initiated by the neighbourhood. It provides affordable space and encourages cross-fertilisation between social organizations, entrepreneurs and neighbours (European Commission 2022). This project achieves the highest ambitions of values and principles and can be shared as an exemplary project among all EU countries;

Finally, it is a great opportunity to share a project evaluation tool between EU countries and to improve the exchange of knowledge through case studies.

Some Examples of NEB projects at the urban scale

Several already existing projects have been recognized as responding to the NEB criteria, ranging from small eco-buildings to community-rehabilitated backyards or from unconventional learning experiences for kids to art exhibitions in neglected urban areas.

The most remarkable have been awarded in the 2021, 2022 and 2023 edition of the NEB prize. Among those having an urban dimension we can mention: *La Fábrika* (NEB Prize 2021), Regeneration of beach dune systems in the metropolitan area of Barcelona and Gleis 21 (NEB Prize 2022), and Aalborg East (NEB Prize 2023).

La Fábrika in rural Extremadura (Spain) was initially a cement factory built under Franco's rule, then abandoned for decades. A group

of young people brought it back to life in 2009 and made it a collaborative space that has so far involved over 3.000 local, national and international contributors.² The project awarded under the category "Reconnecting with nature" in 2022 aims to protect and regenerate beach-dunes around Barcelona (Spain), that are part of a densely populated area under heavy pressure.³

Gleis 21 in Vienna's new *Sonnwendviertel* neighbourhood (Austria) won the category "Regaining a sense of belonging" by connecting the tenth district and the inner-city area. Its pivotal element is a building today visible from afar, its wooden facade contrasting with most urban architecture. Future residents have been involved throughout the entire process. They now collectively own, operate, and manage this co-housing-project that emphasizes affordability, inclusion, community, and solidarity.⁴

Finally, in 2023 Aalborg East (Denmark) got the prize for the best example of "Prioritising the places and people that need it the most"

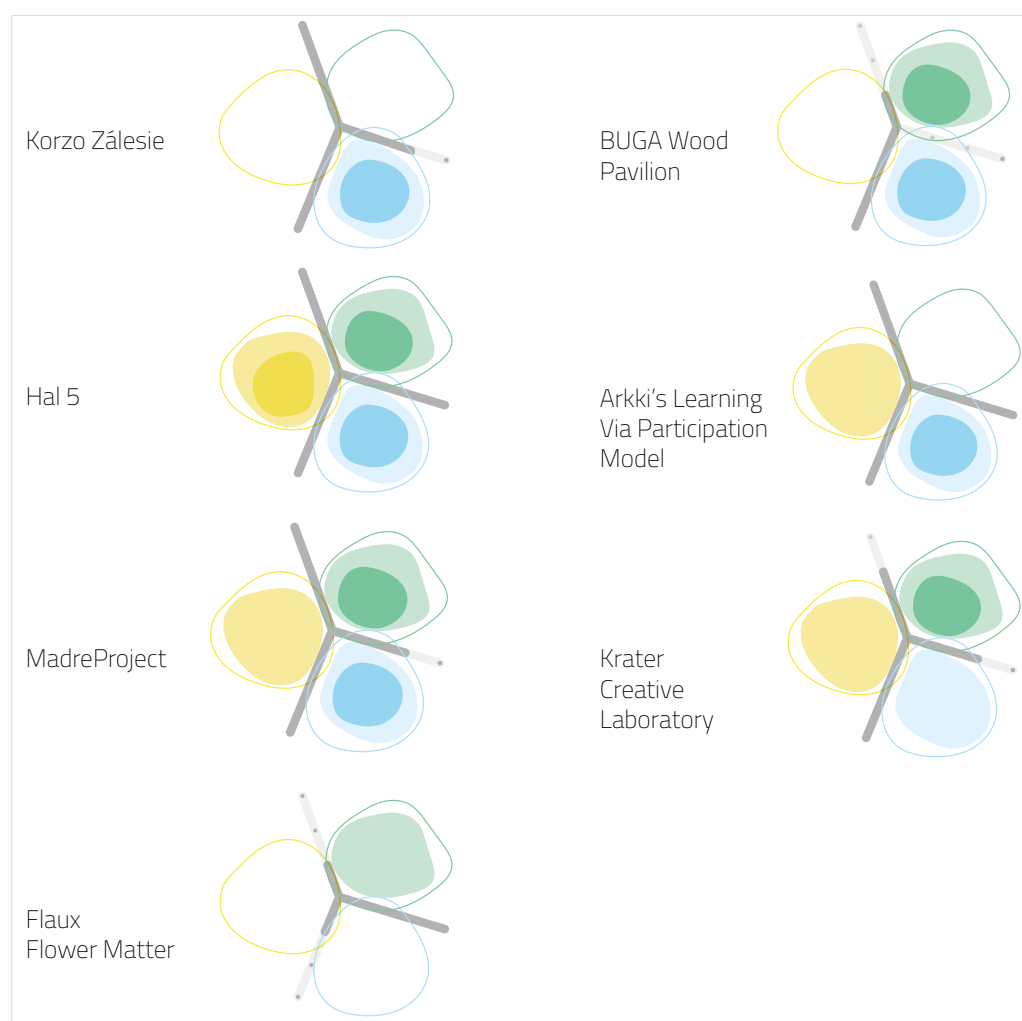


Fig. 4. NEB Compass: results of the assessment of the ambition levels of values and working principles of seven case studies (Source: European Commission 2022).

showing how a strategic masterplan can turn an area from isolated to inclusive. The innovative feature of the approach was that the residents had a seat at the table as urban planners, making this redevelopment a model for co-creation approach.⁵

Creating Actionable Futures

A specific focus on the urban dimension is the one provided by the Horizon Europe supporting action called “CrAft” (CReating Actionable FuTures) granted with €2 million in funding.⁶ CrAft is testing collaborative local models for NEB transformations in three “sandbox cities” (Amsterdam, Bologna and Prague), it will support future NEB lighthouse projects and provide guidance to the 112 cities (100 EU cities plus 12 cities from associated countries) selected under the “Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities” Mission.⁷ Overall sixty selected cities already joined CrAft to co-create and test collaborative governance models of urban transformation.⁸ They will engage in:

- Testing best practices in New European Bauhaus-inspired collaborative local governance models;
- Peer-to-peer learning through a mixture of online fora, physical meetings, site visits, access to learning materials and facilitation;
- Participate in think/do tank with students and youth communities;
- Locally tailored support to enable organizational development;

- Access to learning material already developed by existing platforms, including masterclasses and matchmaking sessions;
- Europe wide storytelling campaigns.

CrAft is also developing a promising assessment and guidance tool for use in complex urban interventions. Its whole systems approach fully integrates the NEB triple bottom line of realising sustainable, beauty and inclusive places to leave, ranging from the district to the urban scale levels of intervention. The Impact Model will help cities to identify essential leverage points for systemic change towards climate neutrality and resilience, by including all aspectual layers of sustainability (ecological, infrastructural, social, cultural, economic, aesthetical, legal, etc.) into innovative models for local collaborative governance and value creation that optimally use the co-benefits between the different sectors and minimize potential conflicts (Vandevyvere and Wyckmans 2023).

Next funding opportunities

In the coming months of 2023 and 2024 there will be plenty of EU calls for funding addressing the NEB of potential interest for cities and spatial planners serving in public departments or working as external consultants.

Some already known are listed in the table below.

ECTP-CEU, as a network of professional spatial planning associations and institutes, is

willing to help research consortia to engage and mobilize professionals all around Europe, contributing to the awareness creation on the NEB principles and evaluation models and bringing theoretical concepts closer to the real needs of regions, cities, and public administrations. ■

Footnotes

1 https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/system/files/2021-09/COM%282021%29_573_EN_ACT.pdf.

2 <https://2021.prizes.new-european-bauhaus.eu/node/269817>.

3 <https://2022.prizes.new-european-bauhaus.eu/node/304052>.

4 <https://2022.prizes.new-european-bauhaus.eu/node/295352>.

5 <https://prizes.new-european-bauhaus.eu/application/26544>.

6 Financed by the call: HORIZON-MISS-2021-CIT-01-02 - Collaborative local governance models to accelerate the emblematic transformation of urban environment and contribute to the New European Bauhaus initiative and the objectives of the European Green Deal.

7 https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe/climate-neutral-and-smart-cities_en and <https://smart-cities-marketplace.ec.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/2022/nordic-edge-2022-112-climate-neutral-cities-where-start-workshop>.

8 For the full list see <https://craft-cities.eu/>.

References

Bisello A. (2020), “Assessing Multiple Benefits of Housing Regeneration and Smart City Development: The European Project SINFONIA”, *Sustainability*, vol. 12(19), 8038.

Borsboom-van Beurden J., Bisello A., Vettorato D., Vacha T., Jakovljevic D. (2023), *Systemic Changes in Governance*, European Commission [<https://smart-cities-marketplace.ec.europa.eu/insights/publications/systemic-changes-governance-equipping-local-governments-realising-climate>].

European Commission (2022), *New European Bauhaus Compass* [https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/system/files/2023-01/NEB_Compass_V_4.pdf].

Vandevyvere H., Wyckmans A. (2023), *D1.1: NEB Impact Model - Summary for Cities*, CrAft Project [<https://craft-cities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/CrAft-NEB-Impact-Model-Summary.docx.pdf>].

NEW EUROPEAN BAUHAUS DEDICATED CALLS			
TITLE	WHEN	REFERENCE	BUDGET
EIT Community Co-Create NEB: Local communities and public authorities building sustainable, beautiful and inclusive public space - 2024	July 2023 - October 2023	Horizon Europe (HORIZON)	€ 120k
New European Bauhaus - innovative solutions for greener and fairer ways of life through arts and culture, architecture and design for all	October 2023 - February 2024	HORIZON-CL2-2024-HERITAGE-01-01	€ 16Mil
Demonstrating the potential of nature-based solutions and the New European Bauhaus to contribute to sustainable, inclusive and resilient living spaces and communities	October 2023 - February 2024	HORIZON-CL6-2024-BIODIV-02-2-two-stage	€ 10Mil
Contributing calls			
Digital solutions to foster participative design, planning and management of buildings, neighbourhoods and urban districts (Built4People Partnership)	May - September 2024	HORIZON-CL5-2024-D4-02-05	€ 10Mil

Tab. 1. Some NEB dedicated calls in the coming months of 2023 and 2024 (Own elaboration).