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The Davos Baukultur Process – from Principles to Practice.

Oliver Martin
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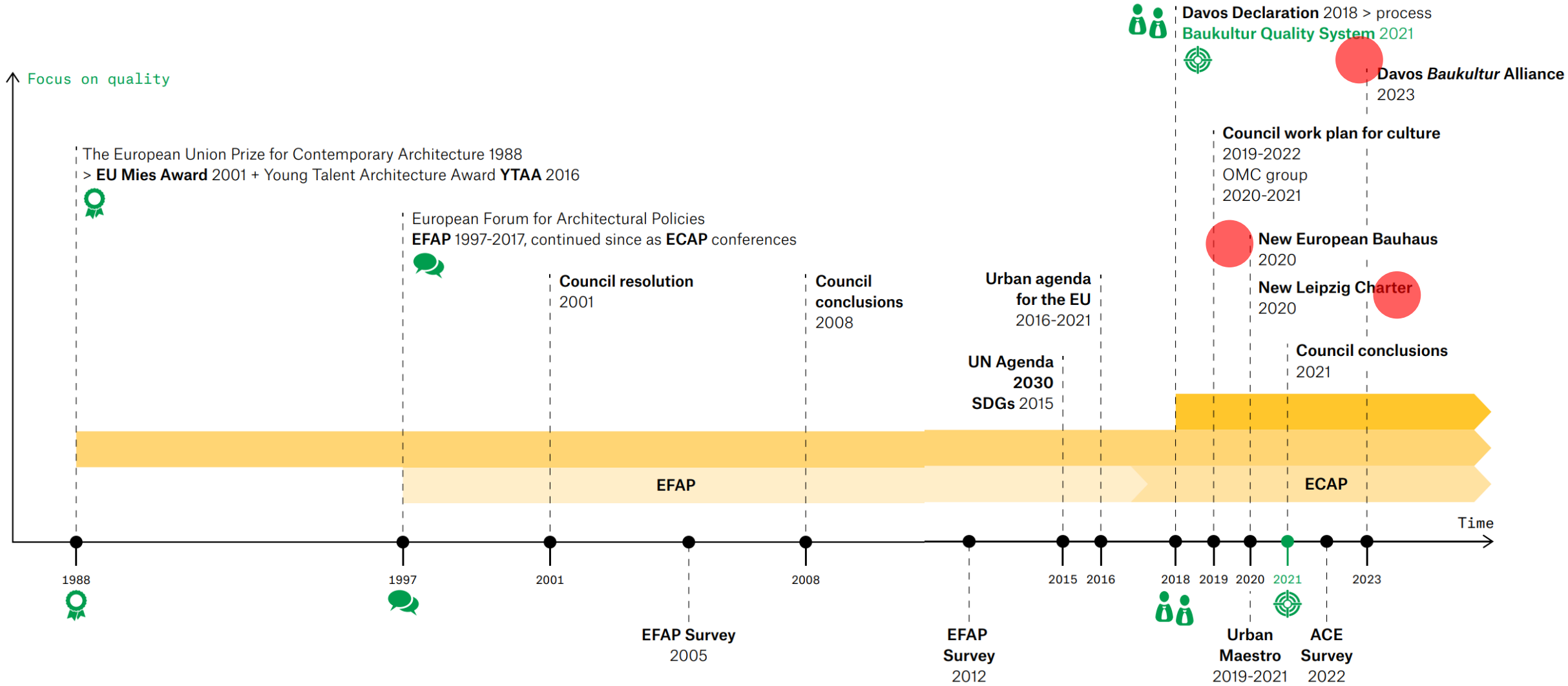
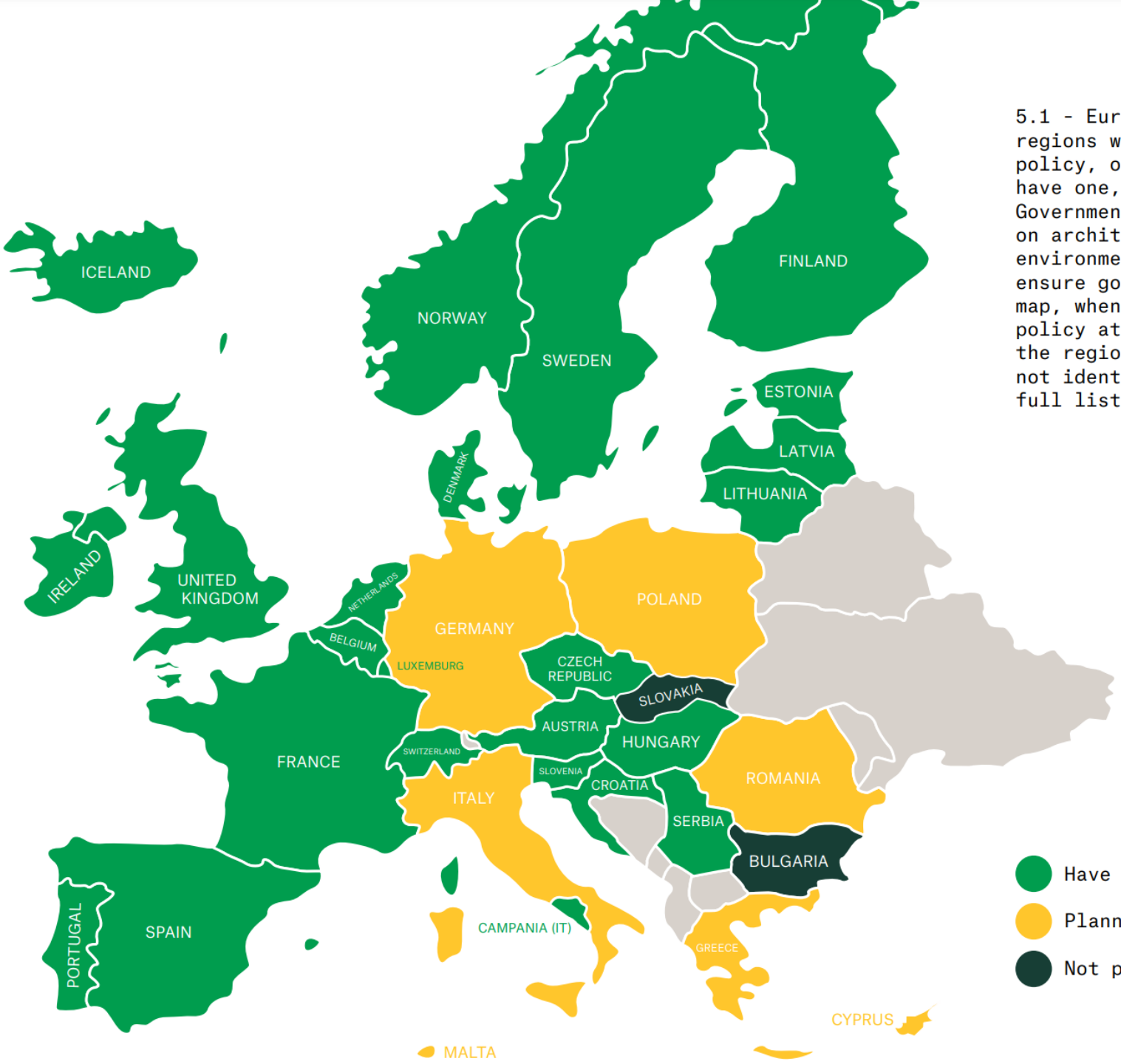
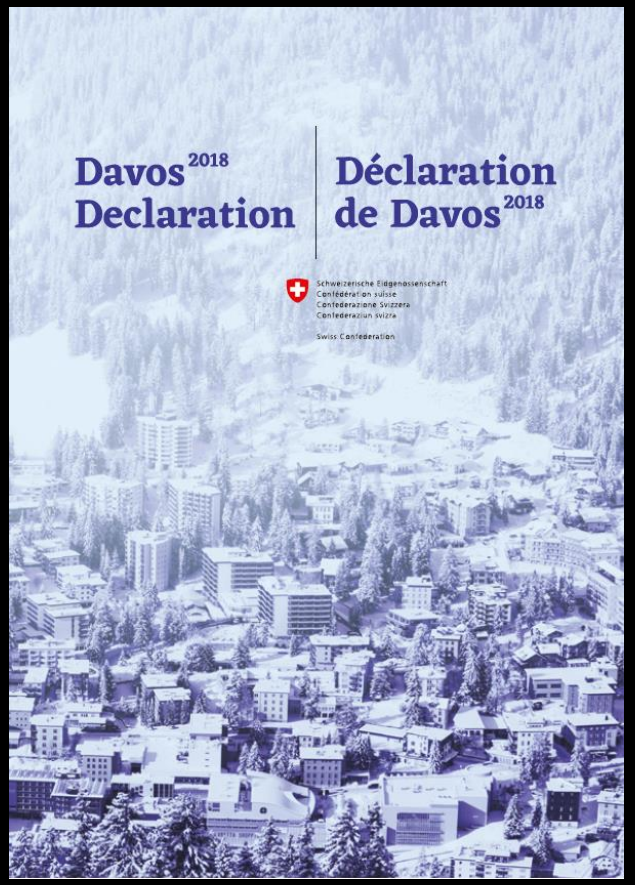
Architectural Policies as a European Standard, ECAP Conference, Gdańsk 11 June 2025





5.1 - European countries/ regions with an official policy, or planning to have one, that outlines Government aspirations on architecture and built environment design. To ensure good reading of the map, when a country has a policy at national level, the regional policies are not identified; for the full list see Table 5.


Davos 2018 Declaration
Déclaration de Davos 2018
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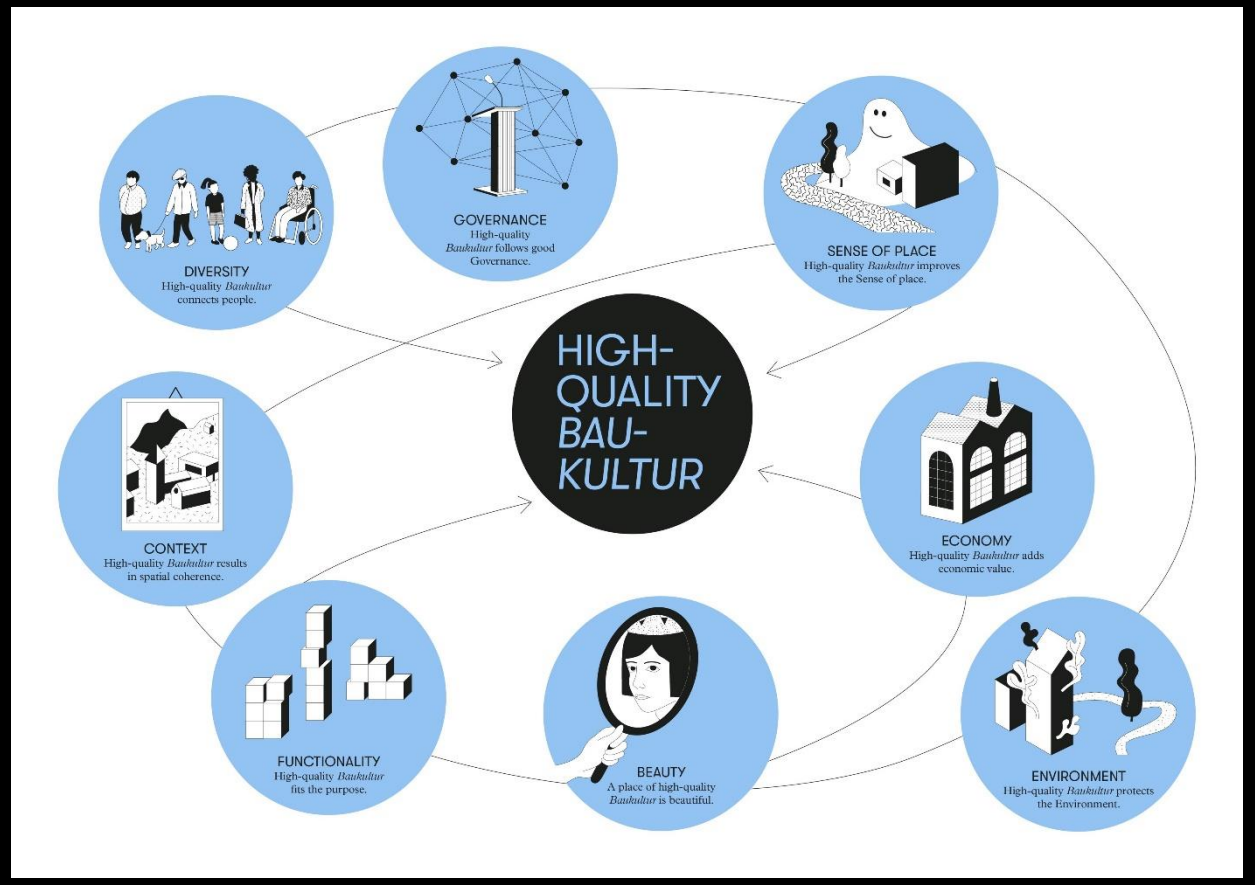
EUROPEAN UNION
2021
REPORT OF THE EU MEMBER STATE EXPERT GROUP
TOWARDS A SHARED CULTURE OF ARCHITECTURE
INVESTING IN A HIGH-QUALITY LIVING ENVIRONMENT FOR EVERYONE


HIGH-QUALITY BAU-KULTUR
DIVERSITY
High-quality Baukultur connects people.
GOVERNANCE
High-quality Baukultur follows good Governance.
SENSE OF PLACE
High-quality Baukultur improves the Sense of place.
CONTEXT
High-quality Baukultur results in spatial coherence.
ECONOMY
High-quality Baukultur adds economic value.
FUNCTIONALITY
High-quality Baukultur fits the purpose.
BEAUTY
A place of high-quality Baukultur is beautiful.
ENVIRONMENT
High-quality Baukultur protects the Environment.


WATERWAY
INVESTMENTS GMBH
wohnbau mainz
Metropolregion FrankfurtRheinMain
STADT FRANKFURT AM MAIN
Wer ist Hüttig & Rompf?
METROPOLREGION RHEIN-N
PREMIUM PLUS PARTNER
PREMIUM PARTNER
DIC
GEG
CG GRUPPE
Droomis
EQUADRO
Colliers

expo real

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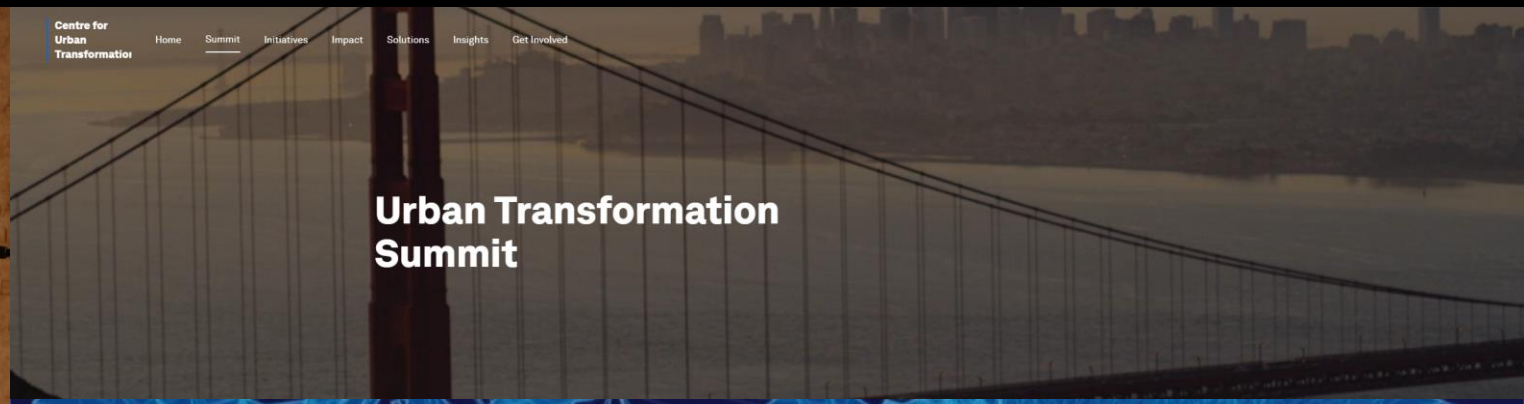

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From Data to High-Quality Baukultur - Baukultur Talks 04

Monday 17 February, 12:30-13:30 (Europe/Paris time zone)

Davos Baukultur Alliance

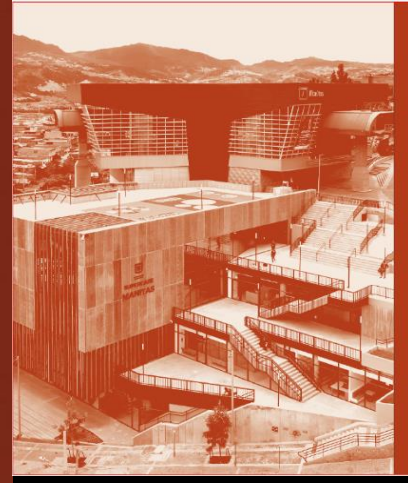
Virtual Session

From Principles to Practice

Approaches for High-Quality Baukultur

Davos Baukultur Alliance

2025

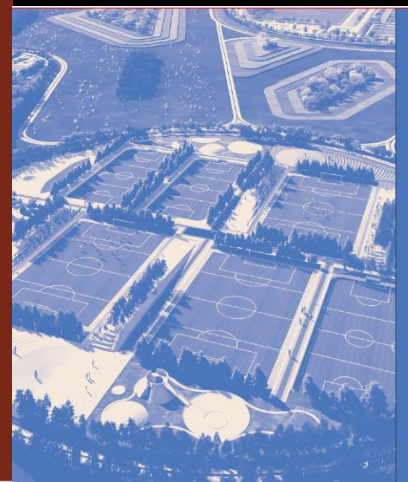


Affordability and social value creation

Approaches to delivering affordability, ensuring equity and strengthening social well-being

Sustainability and circularity

Advancing circularity through Phase Zero and end-of-life re-use



Resilience and climate adaptation

Strengthening the biosphere through regeneration and culture-based climate action

Resilient and adaptive Baukultur

The Davos Baukultur Alliance is committed to cultivating high-quality, liveable places through sustainable, regenerative and resilient design and development practices. The Alliance's approach centres culture, well-being, community agency and ecological balance in living environments. Resilience and climate adaptation, a core focus of the Alliance, can reduce vulnerabilities from climate hazards by enhancing local capacity to withstand and accommodate change. This principle can also strengthen the biosphere, restoring ecosystem health and altering relationships between people and nature through enduring, context-driven design and community-led strategies.

Resilient, climate-adaptive and high-quality Baukultur, as promoted by the Alliance, embraces principles that strongly align with the eight criteria outlined in the Davos Baukultur Quality System. These interconnected dimensions drive the Alliance's holistic approach to integrating resilience into high-quality Baukultur and urban development. They can empower communities, sustain cultural legacies and enable innovation to withstand – and thrive in the face of – climate challenges.

To advance these principles in practice, this paper explores two key impact areas: regenerative development for a thriving planet and culture-based climate action. Regenerative design and development focus on restoring and enhancing ecosystem health, embedding nature-positive strategies into the living environment and cultivating adaptive urban systems that replenish resources over time. Culture-based climate action emphasizes the role of local knowledge, heritage and social identities in shaping climate adaptation strategies, ensuring that resilience measures are contextually relevant and deeply rooted in the communities they serve.

The following sections explore these two critical topics, examining their role in advancing resilient and adaptive Baukultur. They also offer cross-sector approaches for practitioners and decision-makers. These outline actionable strategies for integrating regenerative approaches into urban development and harnessing cultural frameworks to drive effective climate adaptation and long-term resilience.

Unsplash

Regenerative design and urban development

The Earth's biosphere is a complex network of living and non-living things that sustain all life and regulate the planet's many systems and cycles. The biosphere's functional resilience has been pushed beyond the boundaries that the planet can safely sustain, threatening the delicate balance that supports life as humanity knows it. Notably, 44% of global GDP in urban areas is at risk due to nature loss.[2] What's more, the built environment significantly contributes to environmental degradation, generating over 40% of global CO_2 emissions,[3] and projections indicate that global natural resource consumption will increase by 60% by 2060 compared to 2020 levels due to urbanization and population growth.[4] Implementing regenerative practices offers a pathway to address these challenges.

The Davos Baukultur Alliance considers regenerative design to be a transformative approach to development that reconciles the need to strengthen the biosphere with the need to accommodate the resilience of human populations and settlements. The premise of a regenerative development model is to design solutions that generate net-positive impacts in perpetuity, restore ecosystems, replenish resources and strengthen community resilience.[5] This approach involves seizing every opportunity to embed nature-led design, systemic thinking and social equity in the built environment,[6] ensuring ecological and social regeneration. The regenerative design and development model is underpinned by three key dimensions that cumulatively create a holistic framework for aligning development with climate and social resilience. By applying this model, it's possible to cultivate thriving, future-proof cities that regenerate natural, social and technical systems.

TABLE 1

Three dimensions of regenerative interventions: a framework for future-oriented design and development

DIMENSION	GOAL	EXPLANATION
1 DYNAMIC	Design systems that can recognize, address and accommodate change, responding to uncertain conditions to protect and restore ecosystem health.	Draw from nature's systems as they shift in response to disturbances and changes. Know how to manage them, and embed this flexibility in built infrastructure, managing services and developing new programmes and collective processes. Identify different levers for embedding adaptability and consider trade-offs early, ensuring actions are systemic in scale and cross-sectoral.
2 MULTI-SCALAR	Transform interrelationships across social and natural ecosystems, from buildings and neighbourhoods to cities and regions.	At any scale, an intervention looks to give back more than it takes from its context (e.g. generate energy, clean air, harvest and purify water, store carbon, restore its ecosystem, deliver healthy spaces and/or strengthen social systems). It makes use of re-used and recycled materials to reduce or stop resource extraction and is designed to enable its users to lead regenerative lifestyles, thus carrying its objectives through to operational stages.
3 PLACE-BASED	Drive relationships that enhance natural and social ecosystem health locally.	It is crucial that development enables all life to thrive by restoring and replenishing local ecosystems, resources and social networks. It is equally essential to integrate local values, needs and opportunities into design and policy decisions, prioritizing inclusive and equitable outcomes. Another key aim is to strengthen connections between communities and their environments by embedding culturally relevant practices, sustainable livelihoods and community co-benefits into planning and development.

End-of-life re-use

The Davos Baukultur Alliance defines **end-of-life re-use** as a foundational strategy for embedding circular economy principles into the built environment and achieving sustainable and circular Baukultur. The built environment produces a third of the world's waste.[6] Rather than viewing the end-of-life stage of buildings and infrastructure as a point of waste generation, this approach reframes it as an opportunity for regeneration and circularity – maximizing the utility of existing assets, preserving cultural and spatial continuity and drastically reducing embodied carbon emissions.

Whole-asset re-use, relating to buildings, infrastructure and land, is among the most effective pathways to reducing the environmental impact of urban development. Adapting existing structures prevents emissions-intensive processes of demolition and construction, while materials re-use further minimizes resource extraction and construction waste, preserving the cultural and spatial fabric of cities. Additionally, the strategic re-use of land supports sustainable urban growth by curbing urban sprawl, revitalizing underused spaces and reinforcing more sustainable, low-carbon development patterns.

The built environment, including the operations and construction of buildings and infrastructure, is the single largest contributor to global CO_2 emissions, generating about 40% of total emissions.[7] Of a building's whole-life carbon footprint, as much as half comes from embodied carbon, which encompasses all of the greenhouse gas emissions associated with production and movement of the materials used in construction and demolition (as opposed to the amount of energy used for daily operations).[8]

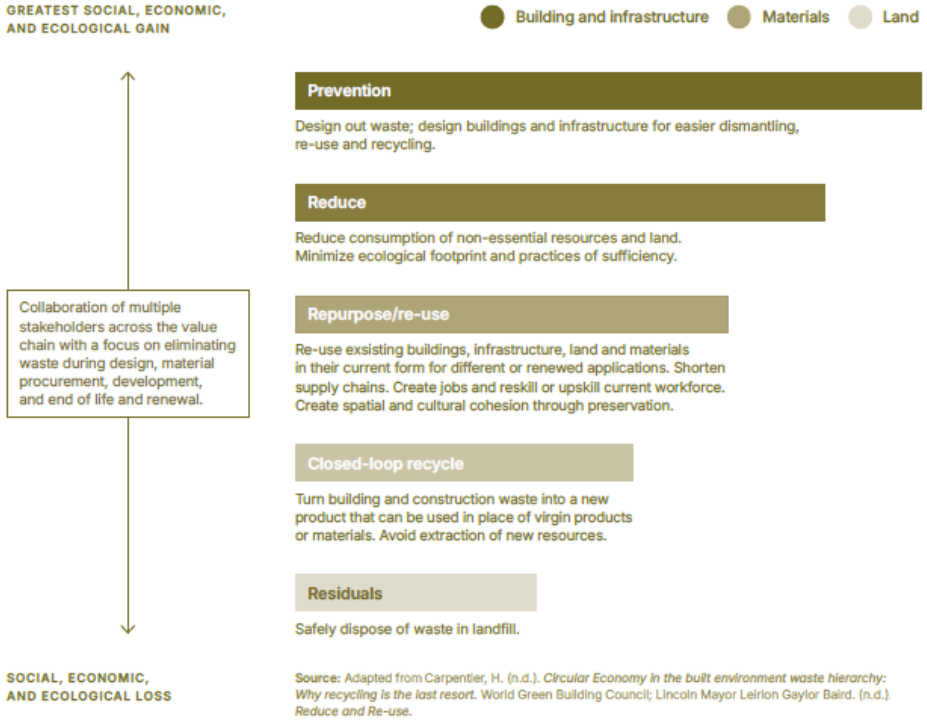
The Alliance calls on decision-makers, including policy-makers, urban planners, architects, developers and asset managers, to prioritize re-use as a central strategy in decarbonizing the built environment and strengthening circular local economies.

Through this call to action, the Alliance seeks to align architectural and urban development practices with climate goals, circular economy principles and long-term economic and social value creation. Re-use strategies should strengthen sense of place, support local workforces and mitigate environmental impacts by reducing demand for virgin materials and land. This would shorten supply chains and reduce construction waste as well as embodied emissions associated with extraction, processing and transport of materials. The vast majority of a building's carbon footprint is locked in at the time of construction – therefore, preserving and repurposing existing assets is critical to remaining within planetary boundaries.

The Alliance recognizes the efforts of counterparts who have offered clear policy strategies for measuring and capping whole-life carbon of buildings and infrastructure. For instance, such strategies are proposed in *Whole Life Carbon Assessment Mandates* and *Implementing a Lifecycle Approach to Infrastructure*, and cross-sector solutions are offered in *Reducing Embodied Carbon in Cities*. By embedding re-use in urban development, it's possible to drastically reduce whole-life carbon and waste, mitigate resource scarcity and create vibrant, adaptable places that honour cultural heritage while supporting future generations.

FIGURE 1

Hierarchy of interventions for circular high-quality Baukultur and re-use in urban development



Source: Adapted from Carpentier, H. (n.d.). *Circular Economy in the built environment waste hierarchy: Why recycling is the last resort.* World Green Building Council; Lincoln Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird. (n.d.). *Reduce and Re-use.*

Prioritizing local economic outcomes and workforce development

A thriving re-use economy – that not only reduces emissions and diverts waste but also drives local economic growth and workforce development – is essential to advancing sustainability and circularity in the built environment. Prioritizing re-use creates new job opportunities in deconstruction, material recovery, remanufacturing and resale while supporting small businesses and local supply chains. It also enhances neighbourhood vibrancy by reinvesting in existing infrastructure, preserving cultural identity and driving community resilience. To fully capture these benefits, it's essential to take a holistic approach to measuring and assigning value to circular materials and assets, while accounting for environmental, economic and social impacts. This includes improving quality of life through job creation and equity, and recognizing the re-use market's potential to support high-quality, inclusive built environments. By aligning re-use strategies with local economic priorities, industry leaders can ensure that circular practices deliver tangible benefits to workers, businesses and communities.

The Alliance supports a set of approaches (applicable within and beyond its membership and for both public and private practitioners) to advance re-use at scale and shift the built environment from a linear, extractive delivery model to a regenerative one.

Economic models

"Economic models"[18] are defined here as specific instruments that can fund and operate development projects and help ensure positive long-term value and outcomes in the form of social benefits and a high-quality living environment. The Alliance seeks to answer the question: what mechanisms will work on the neighbourhood or district level, rather than a regional approach? What mechanisms can be identified that would be useful to a range of stakeholders including investors, banks, developers and municipal leaders? Where, within an integrated economic cycle (Figure 1), are the opportunities for the public and private sectors to use economic levers to ensure a Baukultur that delivers affordability and social value?

An integrated economic cycle considers each phase of a project's development – from planning to delivery and operation – and seeks to identify consistent funding sources and mechanisms that will best advance the goals of project stakeholders. It provides a framework for achieving this alignment through a project's key stages. This approach helps ensure that long-term affordability, sustainability and meaningful social value creation is robustly integrated into urban development. The economic models outlined here can – and should – be combined as needed and used with other approaches to follow.

FIGURE 2

Integrated economic cycle

The Alliance has identified the following approaches for government, business and civil society leaders to consider when seeking to improve a project's viability and create social value:

APPROACH 1

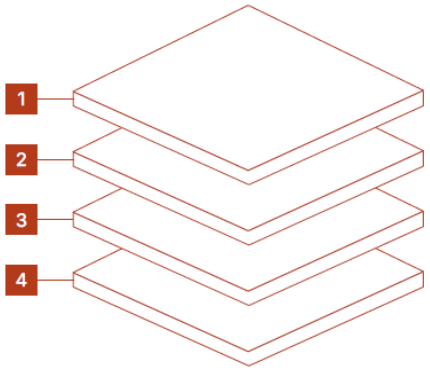
Consider collaborative funding models

These models offer innovative ways to pool resources. They can include multiple philanthropic organizations joining forces to create more impactful social programmes, as well as joint ventures, where each member retains their organization but creates a partnership through which to fund and deliver a project. Collaborative funding models help to distribute risk and can deliver a greater impact on social outcomes and the quality of living environments, if that is one of the model's objectives. They can also create challenges if the incentives and rewards for each funder are misaligned.

One type of collaborative funding model includes blended finance, which pools different kinds of finance and different rates of return to ensure that each funder can achieve the return that it requires. In this model, one entity might fund a project with a grant, while others may seek returns at market or other rates. The differing rates of return required by each funder support the project's overall viability.

FIGURE 3

Examples of blended finance models



1

Fund-level blended finance
The combination of concessional funding (public or philanthropic funds) with full return private capital for investments in companies' regular equity or bonds.

2

Company-level blended finance
Public or philanthropic investors provide credit enhancement through guarantees or insurance on below-market terms and subsized concessional loans through below-markets terms.

3

Outcome-based blended finance
Public or philanthropic investors invest in corporate bonds or loans with commitments to SDG impact, either in use of proceeds or the achievement of material sustainability targets.

4

Project-level blended finance
Public or philanthropic investors provide partial funding or guarantees for large infrastructure or energy projects that contribute to the SDGs to help attract further commercial funding.

Source: CFO Coalition for the SDGs. (n.d.). *Mapping Examples of Corporate Blended Finance*.https://www.cfocoalition.org/blueprints/p3-3-3-mapping-examples-of-corporate-blended-finance.

Getty Images

THE RENEW DISTRICT FRAMEWORK

Bankers without Boundaries' (BwB) Net Zero Neighbourhood (NZN) model, part of the RENEW District framework, uses blended finance to fund large-scale home retrofits. By combining public grants, private investment and outcome-based financing, it reduces risk and attracts capital for deep energy renovations. Addressing the challenge of scattered homeownership, NZN integrates multiple properties into a single investment structure, enabling economies of scale and cost efficiency. Beyond energy upgrades, funds support community-wide improvements like green infrastructure and mobility enhancements. Long-term revenue streams, such as annuity payments from energy savings, ensure financial sustainability and make the model scalable and replicable for broader decarbonization efforts. Read more in the Alliance's *RENEW Districts case study*.

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multi, multi, multi!

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Bloxhub
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France

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DGNB (German Sustainable Building Council)
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European Public Real Estate Association (EPRA)
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Federal Ministry of Housing, Arts, Culture, Media and Sport of Austria
Austria

Federal Ministry of Housing, Urban Planning and Building of Germany
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Flemish Department of Culture, Youth and Media
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General Directorate of Cultural Heritage of Portugal
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Global Infrastructure Basel (GIB)
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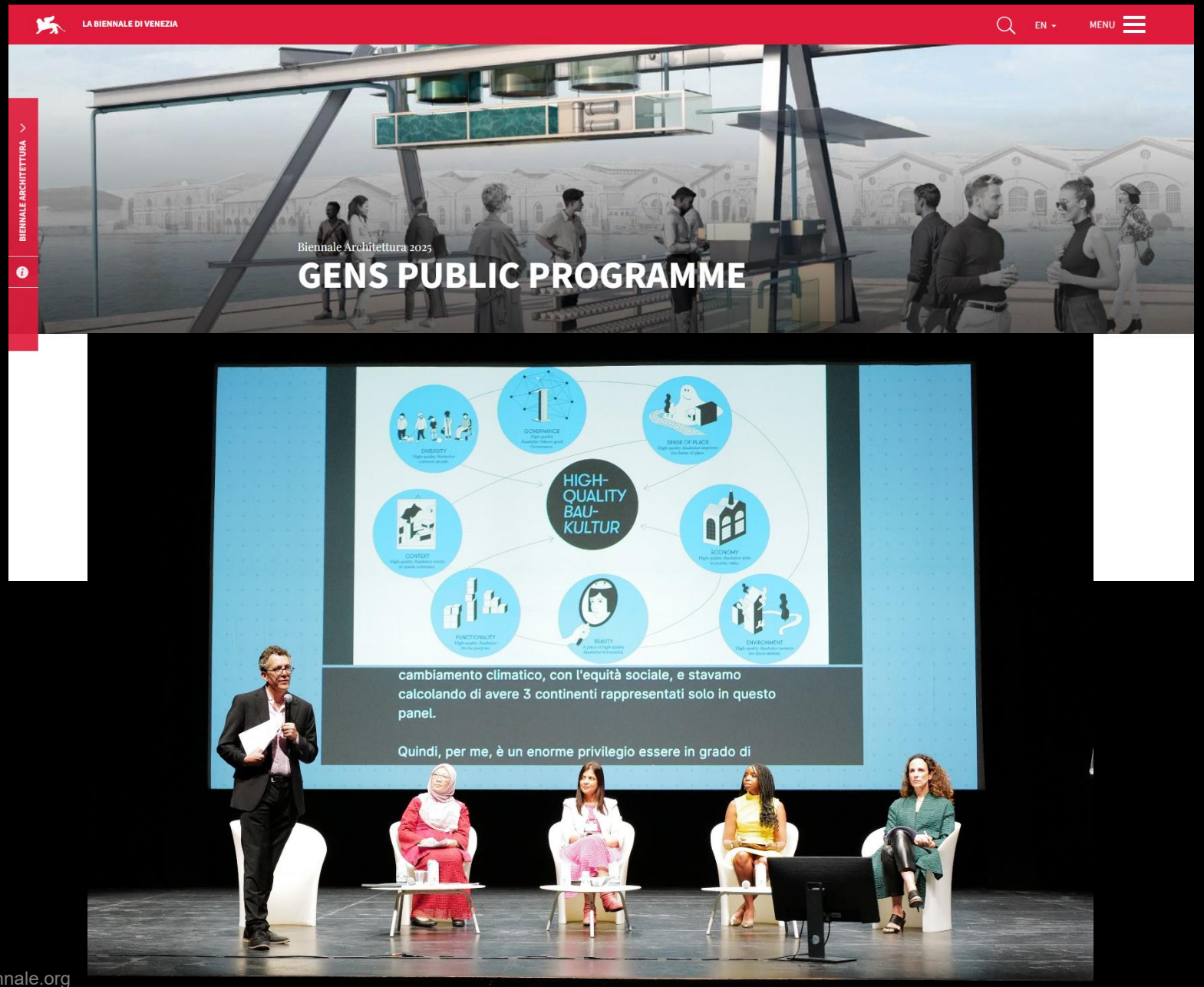
Global + local



Quality
in Canada's Built Environment

Roadmaps to Equity, Social Value and Sustainability

A research partnership funded by the
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Visit our public forum on quality ⟶ **LivingAtlasofQuality.ca**

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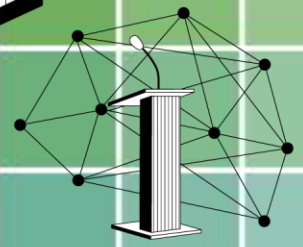

Quality!