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ARCHITECTURAL POLICIES AS A EUROPEAN STANDARD

Proceedings of the international conference
10–12 June 2025

GDAŃSK 2026











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Editing and graphic design:
Mikołaj Wantoch Rekowski/BAM, Piotr Lorens/BAM
Illustrations: original work by the authors and editors; public domain

Full video record of the conference available at: https://tiny.pl/2rsfnrr9

ISBN 978-83-982995-1-0

Organisation

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1 Inauguration

Piotr Grzelak

Deputy Mayor of the City of Gdańsk

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A warm welcome to Gdańsk, and to this exceptional venue, the Artus Court, for the opening of the conference "Architectural Policies as a European Standard". It is an honour for us that it is here that we can hold a debate devoted to the role of architecture and the quality of space in the development of contemporary European cities.

I am glad that the Ministry of Development and Technology has taken on the role of co-organiser of the conference, and that our participants include such distinguished guests as Dr Jacek Karnowski, Deputy Minister of Funds and Regional Policy, and Normunds Popens, Deputy Director-General for Regional and Urban Policy at the European Commission. Their presence underlines the standing and the international dimension of today's meeting.

The subject of the conference is architectural policies, considered both from a European perspective and — which is particularly important — from the point of view of cities and local communities. It is at the local level that architectural and urban planning decisions have the greatest impact on the everyday quality of residents' lives.

The starting point for this discussion is also the need to continue developing architectural policy at the national scale. Many challenges still lie ahead of us in this area. One of the conference's key postulates is to give architectural matters greater weight, in line with the principles of the New European Bauhaus.

I extend a warm welcome to the representatives of the European Union member states, to city architects, and to the representatives of European and national professional organisations, including the European Council of Spatial Planners (ECTP-CEU), the International Society of City and Regional Planners (ISOCARP), the Association of Polish Architects, the Chamber of Architects of the Republic of Poland and the Society of Polish Town Planners. Your presence confirms the importance of the issues under discussion and the need for cooperation across borders.



Fig. 1.1. Deputy Mayor of Gdańsk Piotr Grzelak at the opening of the conference at the Artus Court. Source: Jarosław Zulewski.

Today's conference was preceded by meetings of the European Directors of Architectural Policy (EDAP) and of city architects. I am glad that these could take place here in Gdańsk — a city that has for years attached particular importance to architecture and to the quality of public space. One expression of this approach was the establishment, four years ago, of the City Architect's Office.

During the opening of the conference, appointments to the second term of the Gdańsk Architecture Council will also be presented. I wish you all fruitful deliberations and inspiring discussions. I hope that this meeting will contribute to further strengthening our sense of shared responsibility for the quality of the space in which we live and which we are shaping for future generations.

dr Jacek Karnowski

Secretary of State at the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy

Thank you very much for the invitation, and my congratulations to Mr Piotr Lorens and to the entire organising team on preparing this conference. I hope it will become another significant step towards creating well-designed, high-quality urban spaces.

Many European countries are currently working intensively on shaping spatial policy at both national and local levels, clarifying the principles of architectural and urban design. In Poland this issue is of particular significance, because in recent years we have been witnessing dynamic economic growth accompanied by very rapid development of the built environment. The pace of these processes calls for clear frameworks and for a consistently implemented spatial policy.

The subjects addressed during the conference are also important in the context of securing European funds and of delivering the milestones connected with the reform of the Spatial Planning and Development Act. Architectural policy is increasingly becoming one of the key elements in the effective implementation of development policies.

In recent years many countries and regions have adopted their own architectural policies. These are of particular importance for cities, but also for the role of city architects, who are increasingly becoming the people responsible for the quality of architecture and public space. This requires of them broad, interdisciplinary knowledge in the field of shaping the urban environment.

From my own experience as Mayor of Sopot, I know how important a role is played by the city architect, the urban planner and the heritage conservator. It is worth mentioning that a monument is currently being erected in Sopot to the person regarded as having done most for the shaping of the town. It is neither a mayor nor a president, but the city architect of the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Paul Puchmüller. It was he who gave Sopot its urban and architectural sense, creating the "heart" of the town that to this day determines its distinctiveness and popularity.

There is no doubt that we badly need architectural policies. We must not only formulate them, but also implement them consistently. I hope your conference will become a space in which to answer the key questions: who should the architect be today, who the urban planner, and how should urban and architectural policies be introduced and delivered in Poland. Much has already been done, yet a great many challenges still lie ahead of us in building a coherent architectural policy and a policy towards the professions of architect and urban planner.

Thank you very much, and I wish you fruitful and inspiring discussions.



Fig. 1.2. Deputy Minister Jacek Karnowski at the opening of the conference at the Artus Court. Source: Jarosław Zulewski.

Normunds Popens

Deputy Director-General, Directorate-General Education, Youth, Sport and Culture

It is a real honour for me to take part in this conference today, and especially that it is being held in a port city. I come from a port city myself — Riga. Ports are of course no longer what they once were, but I believe that port cities have always played an important role in social and economic development.

At the outset I would like to express my thanks to the Ministry of Development and Technology and to the City of Gdańsk for placing architecture where it belongs — high on the public and political agenda. Gdańsk is not merely a port city. It is a city that shows how architecture and urban space embody history, resilience and renewal. We are pleased to be part of this event and to support this conference, which provides an excellent and very timely opportunity to reflect on how better to position architecture and how it can contribute to the broad transformation of our societies at every level.

It is no secret that the member states of the European Union — including both their urban and rural areas — face many challenges today. We are going through profound transformations in numerous sectors, and this process is unavoidable. I am deeply convinced that architects and, more broadly, architectural and cultural policies play an exceptionally important role in these changes.

I would also like to thank the Polish presidency for its support and for the very concrete progress achieved in several key areas. Let me mention a few of them. First, the presidency's decision to place young people and young artists at the centre of the European cultural agenda deserves particular recognition. We welcome the adoption of the Council conclusions on the situation of young artists, because we believe that supporting the younger generation is a necessity. We must give young people a genuine share in decision-making processes and make them active participants — unfortunately, this is still not the standard in Europe.

At European Union level we are considering how to strengthen this process through dialogue with young people. We are increasing the number of such dialogues, carrying out evaluations of our programmes and initiatives, and setting up a Youth Council attached to the President of the Commission. Our aim is not merely to listen to young people, but also genuinely to implement their proposals — and that is crucial.

At the same time I want to stress that this is not only about the young. It is about reconciling the interests of all generations. We have been tasked with developing a concept of intergenerational fairness. For the first time the European Union will have such a strategy, which is due to be adopted in February. Within it we are looking at every area — including culture, architecture and urban development — and considering how to do better.

The second key issue is the Culture Compass for Europe. In conversations with economists, engineers or representatives of the financial sector I often hear that culture is "something nice", an add-on. I then reply: no — culture is not an add-on. It is a necessity. It is part of European values and of our DNA, which rests on cultural diversity. The values that culture supports are the foundation of our systems. We cannot treat it as a "nice to have" — it is an absolute "must have" that requires full support at every level: European, national, regional and local, including in cities.

It is no secret that the cultural sector is the first to suffer in times of crisis, but it is also the sector that helps us recover from crises fastest and reunites society. The Culture Compass is intended, for the first time, to place culture at the centre of EU priorities and to demonstrate how effective



Fig. 1.3. Normunds Popens at the opening of the conference at the Artus Court. Source: Jarosław Zulewski.

support at different levels can deliver real results. This is not about legal regulations or directives, but about strengthening cooperation between the European Commission, the member states, stakeholders and other key actors, including local authorities.

We have already begun a dialogue with stakeholders, and we are keen for architecture to find its proper place in the Compass. It will be a strategic document, which is why it is so important to define the narrative concerning the role of architecture correctly. Subsequently we want the Commission communication — planned for December — to be endorsed by a joint declaration of the Council and the European Parliament, and then translated into concrete measures supporting the cultural sector, including architecture.

In parallel we are working on the new financial perspective. I have also been asked to lead the negotiations on the multiannual financial framework, which is an exceptionally difficult task. The EU budget is of enormous importance, and some programmes — such as Creative Europe — genuinely change lives. At the same time the needs keep growing: competitiveness, security, defence. Despite this, we are fighting to ensure that culture retains a strong and independent place in the EU budget.

In this context the Culture Compass is also meant to help us answer the question: which projects at European level should we support? "Living Spaces" is one of the emblematic projects, as are the awards for young talent. Today you have the opportunity to see the exhibition accompanying the conference, presenting the winners of architectural awards. These are precisely the kinds of initiative we want to strengthen — even if they are small in budgetary terms, their impact on the lives of participants and on the cultural sector as a whole is enormous.

I would also like to underline the importance of cohesion policy. I worked in this field for thirteen years, visited almost every region of Poland, and talked with local authorities about programme implementation. It is there that I see enormous potential for culture and architecture — provided that investments are embedded in the broader context of local development, tourism and long-term strategies.

I also want to thank Poland for its support during the war in Ukraine. That war is a tragedy taking place in Europe. Our institutional cooperation in this area is an expression of solidarity and will also be of key importance in the context of the conference devoted to the reconstruction of Ukraine. Although Ukraine needs weapons, technology and defence, it is widely acknowledged that culture also requires support — because it is culture that unites people and protects identity and values.

Culture is a universal language and part of Europe's DNA. Cultural diversity makes us stronger, but it requires protection and conscious support. Culture plays a key role in shaping identity and building resilient communities, and in the way we design and inhabit our spaces.

This is precisely why the New European Bauhaus initiative was created, along with programmes supporting cross-border cultural cooperation under Creative Europe. Architects and the cultural sector play a fundamental role in them, both at the co-design stage and in implementation. The initiative is complex, but if it becomes genuinely mainstream within public policy it can help us create spaces that are sustainable, beautiful and co-created by citizens.

We live in times that demand more than technical solutions. We must talk about adaptation to climate change, but also about the housing crisis. That is why we have set up a dedicated task force on housing. The problem of affordable housing affects everyone — young people, students, seniors. Architecture can and should play a key role here.

Architecture is not merely a form of cultural expression. I am a chemical engineer by training and studied at a technical university, where architects were part of a technical institution. Architects combine engineering knowledge with aesthetics, culture and beauty — and that is what makes this profession exceptional. For this reason I believe that the European Green Deal and the New European Bauhaus are in essence projects in which architects play a central role.

In closing, I want to emphasise that we do not intend to create EU directives on architecture. What we are discussing is better coordination of national architectural policies and cooperation with you — the stakeholders. That is how we see the future of architectural policies in Europe.



Fig. 1.4. Mayor of Gdańsk Aleksandra Dulkiewicz at the opening of the conference at the Artus Court. Source: Jarosław Zulewski.

Aleksandra Dulkiewicz

Prezydent Miasta Gdańska

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today we begin an international conference devoted to the development of architectural policies. This is also the moment of inauguration of the second term of the Gdańsk Architecture Council. I offer my warmest thanks to everyone appointed to it for accepting this commitment, and I wish you satisfaction in taking part in its work.

Your readiness to serve us with your advisory voice I consider as an expression of the architectural community's trust in the authorities of Gdańsk and in the spatial policy that we consistently pursue in our city. I am counting, however, on your creative contribution and your critical eye, which — as I hope — will favour a steady improvement in the quality of urban space. The fact that the Gdańsk Architecture Council brings together architects from every part of Poland confirms the city's openness to a dialogue that reaches beyond the local point of view.

Looking at our city, one may have the impression that its spatial structure is already almost complete. The process of development and transformation is, however, continuous, and so many challenges still lie ahead of us that require appropriate decisions and long-term thinking about space. For that reason I am very glad that in this process I will be able to count on your expert support.

Members of the Gdańsk Architecture Council appointed for the 2025–2029 term:

1. Prof. Lucyna Nyka, PhD, DSc, Arch. – Chairwoman of the Council
2. Zbigniew Maćków, Arch. – Vice-Chairman of the Council
3. Monika Arczyńska, PhD, Arch.
4. Natalia Balcerzak, PhD, Arch.
5. Jacek Droszcz, Arch.
6. Ryszard Gruda, Arch.
7. Prof. Sławomir Gzell, PhD, DSc, Arch.
8. Tomasz Konior, PhD, Arch.
9. Paweł Wład. Kowalski, Arch.
10. Prof. Magdalena Kozień-Woźniak, PhD, DSc, Arch.
11. Prof. Ewa Kuryłowicz, PhD, DSc, Arch.
12. Andrzej Kwieciński, Arch.
13. Michał Leszczyński, PhD, Arch.
14. Bartosz Macikowski, PhD, Arch.
15. Paweł Majkusiak, Arch.
16. Magdalena Staniszkis, PhD, DSc, Arch.
17. Prof. Bolesław Stelmach, PhD, DSc, Arch.
18. prof. Antoni Taraszkiewicz, PhD, DSc, Arch.
19. Wojciech Targowski, PhD, Arch.
20. Szymon Wojciechowski, Arch.
21. Katarzyna Zielonko-Jung, PhD, DSc, Arch.



Fig. 1.5. Presentation of appointments to the members of the Gdańsk Architecture Council at the opening of the conference at the Artus Court. Source: Jarosław Zulewski.



Fig. 1.6. The opening of the conference at the Artus Court. Source: Jarosław Zulewski.

2 Introductory addresses to the first day of the conference

prof. Piotr Lorens
Gdańsk City Architect

I am happy to welcome you on the first day of the conference "Architectural Policies as a European Standard". Preparing it took almost half a year and was made possible by the commitment of many people and institutions, to whom I would like to express my particular thanks here.

First of all, my thanks go to the event's principal co-organisers: Bohdan Biś Lisowski, Chair of the Polish Council of Architecture; Borysław Czarakcziew, representing the Chamber of Architects of the Republic of Poland within ENACA; Bartosz Macikowski, Chair of the Council of the Pomeranian Chamber of Architects; and Ryszard Gruda, likewise representing the Chamber of Architects of the Republic of Poland. Among the co-organisers and moderators of the conference is also Małgorzata Tomczak, editor-in-chief of the magazine Architektura i Biznes, which is the event's media patron. Cooperation with Jutta Kastner, representing the European Commission, also played an important part in the preparation process. It is thanks to her involvement that it was possible to invite such a distinguished group of speakers and guests. I thank you all most warmly for these many months of work.

The programme of our meeting comprises six plenary sessions, each of which includes both individual presentations and panel discussions. In addition we have prepared two sessions of introductory addresses. The event as a whole will be summarised in a conference declaration, and I invite you all to take part in drafting it.



Fig. 2.1. Gdańsk City Architect of Piotr Lorens speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

Architecture as a force for unity – building resilience, culture and hope in Europe

Ruth Schagemann
Przewodnicząca Rady Architektów Europy

I stand before you today not only as President of the Architects' Council of Europe, but also as a European. I grew up believing that Europe is more than a market — that it is a project of peace, solidarity and shared culture. For me, that idea has always been expressed in the built environment: in the cities, homes and neighbourhoods that we create together and for which we bear responsibility.

I would also like to express my appreciation to the organisers of the conference and to the institutions that joined forces to make it possible — the City of Gdańsk, the Ministry of Development and Technology, and the European Commission. What decided the success of this undertaking, however, was above all the commitment of the people behind those institutions: their time, their competence and their conviction about the importance of architecture.

I regard today's address as an invitation to reflect on the future of our cities, homes and shared spaces, and on the policies that shape them. The way we build reflects the way we live. And the way we live determines the direction in which our societies develop.

We stand today at a crossroads. Europe's geopolitical landscape is changing rapidly. Security, economic resilience, the energy transition and stability have become key elements of the European agenda. In this context the role of architecture may appear secondary, but in reality it is fundamental. Every resilient community rests on trust, and architecture materialises that trust in space. Cities are places that ought to provide a sense of safety, cohesion and community — and it is architects who help to create those conditions.

Europe's strength does not derive from treaties or alliances alone. Its foundation is the capacity to guarantee citizens dignified living conditions, in which public space, housing, education and sustainable development are a priority rather than an afterthought. Architectural policy is, in this sense, a strategic instrument that builds Europe from within.

In parallel, the European Commission is reshaping the single market, making it more competitive, greener and more digital. It is worth asking, however, what model of competitiveness we want to develop. Should it be a market based solely on the criterion of price, or one that values innovation, cultural durability and the long-term value of design? A truly competitive Europe is a Europe that supports creativity and quality. Architecture is not an obstacle to efficiency — it is a source of it.

The Architects' Council of Europe stands for a fair and open market for architectural services, high standards of education, effective enforcement of public procurement law, and the use of digital tools in a way that strengthens rather than replaces design expertise. Competitiveness without quality is short-lived, and quality without competitiveness is impossible to sustain. Together they define European excellence.



Fig. 2.2. Ruth Schagemann speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

The essence of Baukultur is an understanding of architecture as care for people, places and the future. The 2018 Davos Declaration set the direction, and the New European Bauhaus gave it fresh momentum by linking sustainability, beauty and inclusiveness. The transformations we are experiencing are not merely technological processes — they are cultural ones.

Gdańsk is an example of a city in which architectural vision meets civic will. From the reconstruction of the Main Town to the adaptive reuse of the Gdańsk Shipyard grounds and the building of the European Solidarity Centre, the city demonstrates that the quality of space is the result of conscious decisions and a long-term strategy. Here architecture becomes a carrier of memory, identity and values.

Architects are mediators of transformation. Design practices across Europe act as economic agents, centres of knowledge and laboratories of innovation. According to the data of the Architects' Council of Europe, hundreds of thousands of architects working in thousands of small and medium-sized practices make a significant contribution to the economy, to job creation and to the development of innovation, while remaining deeply rooted in local communities. This is why clear legal and institutional frameworks are needed to strengthen the role of architects in planning and investment processes. Design is not a one-off stage but a process that requires trust, cooperation and fair conditions.

An important element of this system is public procurement, which is not only a legal procedure but also a cultural choice. Moving away from the lowest-price criterion in favour of quality is a condition of sustainable development. Architectural competitions remain one of the most important instruments of innovation, transparency and public debate, opening the profession to young designers and giving public institutions access to the best ideas.



Fig. 2.3. Conference participants. Source: Grzegorz Mehring

One of the greatest challenges facing contemporary Europe is housing. We must reject the false choice between affordability and quality. High-quality architecture is not a cost — it is an investment in health, climate, community and the future of society.

Architectural policy covers not only housing but also urban planning, landscape, rural development and urban regeneration. In the face of digitalisation, artificial intelligence and the industrialisation of construction, we need strong architectural policies rooted in local context yet consistent with European values.

Spatial education, support for young professionals and the strengthening of competences within public administration are of key importance. Architecture is not merely a technical activity — it is a cultural and social project.

We are not designing only buildings. We are designing the future. That means defending architecture as a public good, engaging in dialogue with decision-makers, and having the courage to think of Europe as a shared cultural, spatial and social project, but also a political and human one. Let us build it together.

Spatial planning and architectural policies: principles, regulations and practice

Markus Hedorfer

President of the European Council of Spatial Planners

This is the fourth time I have had the pleasure of speaking in Gdańsk about spatial planning in the broad sense. It is the first time, however, that the main theme has been architectural policies. I regard them as an exceptionally important subject, one that also calls for the perspective of spatial planners — as I shall try to demonstrate in the remainder of this address.

I would like to discuss the relationship between spatial planning and architectural policy under three main headings:

1. Principles.
2. Regulations.
3. Practice.

Principles

One may say that the concept of architecture refers above all to buildings. A broader concept is Baukultur, which embraces the entire built environment. The broadest category, however, is architectural policy, which integrates many layers and values: human-centredness, sustainability, beauty, public participation, nature-based solutions, and regulatory systems that make it possible to implement these principles at different levels, from the international to the local.

These principles correspond to key European Union initiatives such as the European Green Deal, Next Generation EU and the New European Bauhaus. In this context one should also point to the Davos Baukultur Quality System, which derives from these approaches and remains closely related to architectural policies.

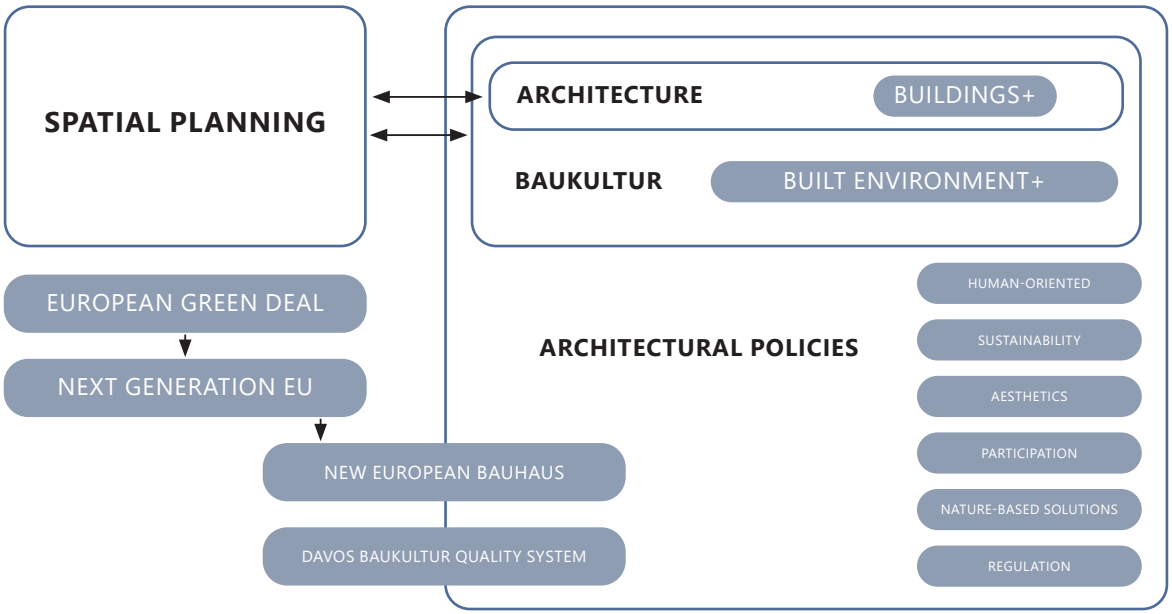

Fig. 2.4. Diagram showing the mutual relationships between architecture and spatial planning. Source: Markus Hedorfer.

Spatial planning stands in close relation to architecture, to Baukultur and to architectural policies. From the perspective of spatial planning, architecture is one of many disciplines — alongside economics, hydrology, geology and the natural sciences — that influence the shaping of space.

Spatial planning and architectural policies have distinct competences, which nevertheless interlock to a significant degree and in part also overlap. That is how their relationship may be described at the level of principles.

Regulations

Turning to the question of regulation, it is worth referring to the draft architectural policy in Italy, colloquially known as the "architectural quality act". The draft was presented in April 2024 and remains at the legislative stage.

The act consists of sixteen articles. One of them defines architecture as the design and construction of buildings and the organisation of the human living environment. The notion of a "New Urban Renaissance" has also been introduced, which in my view is somewhat pretentious. Its definition includes such elements as:

- an integrated model of urban regeneration,
- demographic change,
- social cohesion,
- a review of the fundamentals of the urban economy,
- a re-valorisation of natural heritage,
- dematerialisation,
- energy cities,
- biodiversity,
- job creation,
- the promotion of cultural tourism,
- the development of local and regional economies.

Some of these notions are interesting and inspiring; others, as already mentioned, are declaratory and rhetorical in character.

The fundamental problem with the draft act is the absence of any definition of urban or spatial planning. At the same time urban planning appears in several provisions, among others in the context of:

- the promotion of architecture and urban planning,
- the government "Plan for Architecture", which also covers urban planning,
- the promotion of education and research in the field of urban planning and architecture.

The lack of a definition of spatial planning must be regarded as a significant legislative gap. The alternative would be to remove references to urban planning from the act altogether.

Further problems with the draft are an unduly restrictive approach to the regulation of architectural competitions, and the treatment of urban planning as a part of architecture — which, from the perspective of urban and spatial planners, is an unacceptable position.

Practice

The third aspect is practice and its evolution. It may be described as a process of movement from urban planning, through urban and regional planning, to contemporary forms of planning that also encompass the environmental dimension, public participation and many other aspects.

Two years ago I took part in the workshop "Natura Connect Consortium — Exploring Visions for Possible Nature Futures in Europe" in Leipzig. I was the only spatial planner among ecologists, forestry specialists and representatives of other fields. That experience made me realise the need to change the way we think about the relationship between planning and nature — not only in terms of nature-based solutions, but in a more fundamental sense.



Fig. 2.5. Markus Hedorfer speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

Until now the dominant approach has been one in which planning was directed primarily at human needs while taking environmental requirements into account. This paradigm is also visible in architectural policies, where the human being remains at the centre of attention. Today, however, a change of perspective is needed: planning for nature, while taking human needs into account. This may be described as a kind of "Copernican revolution" in spatial planning — a shift of the centre of gravity from an anthropocentric model to a more ecocentric one.

Another practical example is the process of rebuilding Ukraine, in which I am deeply involved. Among other things I take part in the "Rebuilding Ukraine" working group operating within the Davos Baukultur Alliance. In these discussions we consistently stress the importance of spatial planning not only as an instrument for reconstructing destroyed infrastructure, but as the basis for creating a comprehensive vision of development.

It was once said that architecture is a process, not a project. That claim invites reflection. Until now I have held that the essential difference between architecture and planning is that quality in architecture relates above all to the object, whereas quality in planning relates to the process. I still hold that view, while acknowledging that the relationship is not binary and encompasses many intermediate forms and meanings.

On the need for Polish Architectural Policy. Architecture is the art of transforming space

prof. Bolesław Stelmach

Director of the National Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning in Warsaw

I find myself speaking about a difficult problem, because it concerns Polish architectural policy — or rather the absence of one. It is hard to describe something that formally does not exist.

For years I have followed the development of Gdańsk, among other things through my cooperation with the late Andrzej Duch, for many years director of the Department of Urban Planning and Architecture. Gdańsk is an example of a city capable of pursuing a coherent spatial policy — local and municipal — even where it is not literally written into strategic documents or legal acts. The late Mayor Paweł Adamowicz and a team of outstanding urban planners and architects such as Andrzej Duch were able to implement such a policy consistently. The example of Gdańsk proves that good spatial policy can also function outside formal legislative frameworks, although this should of course not be the rule.

Architecture is the art of transforming space. Professor Marek Budzyński adds that it is the art of transforming space in order to sustain life. Today these words take on a new meaning — a far deeper one than twenty or thirty years ago.

Architecture is also a mirror of a society's level of development in its humanistic dimension, in its building culture. Poland, like other European states, signed the Davos Declaration in 2018, which underlines the importance of Baukultur and commits signatories to pursuing a responsible and sustainable architectural policy. These commitments are also reflected in the Preamble and in Article 5 of the Polish Constitution. Against the background of West-European and Baltic states,

however, Poland stands out for its lack of a state architectural policy, the lack of regulation of the architectural profession, and mounting spatial chaos — the consequence of bad law and of even worse application of it.

The communities of architects and urban planners have for decades been sounding the alarm about the enormous social and economic costs of this situation: the degradation of the landscape, urbanisation without urbanism, the chaotic sprawl of cities, towns and villages. One need only refer to the successive editions of the reports of the Committee for Spatial Economy and Regional Planning of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Studies on Spatial Chaos. Among the principal causes one must point to legislative deficiencies, including the absence of an architecture act and of statutory standing for the profession of architect; the progressive degradation and pauperisation of the profession; the elimination of competitions as an instrument for selecting designs on the basis of quality; and insufficient protection of the copyright of the authors of architecture and urban design.

For centuries architects have practised a liberal profession rather than a profession of public trust. The legal status of the profession is not properly regulated, unlike that of doctors or lawyers. In Poland architecture still functions within the "construction" section of the Act on the Sections of



Fig. 2.6. Prof. Bolesław Stelmach speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

Government Administration. This is a legacy of the communist system, in which architecture was treated as one of the construction trades, subordinated to mass production carried out through prefabrication systems. After 1989 this paradigm did not fundamentally change. In 2018 it proved possible to negotiate only the inclusion of spatial aesthetics within the domain of culture — which the architectural community aptly described as "putting powder on a corpse". Aesthetics is, after all, the effect and not the aim of a sensible spatial policy.

Poland has no government-adopted architectural policy, no architecture act and no act on the profession of architect, even though such solutions follow from EU standards. The draft act on the profession of architect, ready to be put on the legislative path, was frozen in July 2019 and has not been taken up to this day.

The theses of a Polish architectural policy have for years been formulated by the Polish Council of Architecture — formerly chaired by the late Krzysztof Chwalibóg, now by Bohdan Biś Lisowski — in cooperation with the communities of architects and urban planners, the National Institute of Architecture, the Association of Polish Architects (SARP) and the Chamber of Architects of the Republic of Poland. This is a professional-community initiative operating outside state structures.

An important step was the establishment in 2017 of the National Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning. The institution works to protect the achievements of Polish architects and urban planners and carries out educational and publishing activity, making up for years of neglect. Its competences are limited, however — among other things, it has no means of taking an active part in the legislative process.

The successive failed attempts to reform building and planning law between 1989 and 2025 reveal the weakness of the state in this area. In Poland the right of land ownership is still sometimes equated with the right to build, which follows both from practice and from court rulings. Legislative problems have their source in low public awareness of the value of space as a common good, which translates into the marginalisation of the issue by political elites.

Although architectural and urban design competitions and the criterion of spatial quality are recognised as key instruments for shaping spatial order, they account for less than 1% of public procurement procedures. Despite the introduction in 2019 of an obligation to organise competitions for large design commissions, these provisions are widely circumvented.

The quality of space — as they say in the Podhale region — "never caught on here". All the more reason to press consistently for a change in this situation. The debate on European architectural policies may become an impulse for broader reflection and public mobilisation. Outstanding works of contemporary Polish architecture often come into being in spite of unfavourable systemic conditions. While the architectural and construction standard of many exceptional projects meets European norms, the quality of space in our cities, towns and landscape remains one of the weakest elements of Polish spatial reality. Let us try to change this. We must work towards the adoption by government of a State Architectural Policy, and then, on that basis, of an Act on Architecture and the Profession of Architect. At the same time we should work towards the architectural and urban planning community taking over the collective management of economic copyright, including 1% of the real value of an investment for the architectural and urban design concept and 1% of the real value of an investment for design supervision over the delivery of a public space or building.





Fig. 2.7. Conference participants. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

3 Plenary Session I
Architectural policy in the context of national specificity

Bohdan Biś Lisowski

Chair of the Polish Council of Architecture

Welcome to the first plenary session. It is an honour for me to open a conversation devoted to the theme of architectural policy in the context of national specificity.

In the face of globalisation, the standardisation of investment processes, the need to adapt to climate change and the growing digitalisation of the design environment, a fundamental question shall be asked: what makes our architecture remain "ours"?

As the built environment becomes increasingly uniform across every continent, the role of national identity, memory and culture takes on particular significance — not as a nostalgic reference to the past, but as a durable point of reference for contemporary design and policy decisions.

Today's discussion raises questions about the possibility of reflecting national character in the architecture of the twenty-first century. We are asking how public policy can support that reflection while avoiding both formalism and exclusion. We are also asking whether cultural distinctiveness can coexist with innovation, sustainability and global relevance.

Architectural policies are among the few instruments that allow these issues to be addressed at different scales: from national law to urban planning, from shaping public awareness to public procurement procedures. Today's session brings together experts who not only analyse these processes but also take part in creating and implementing them on a daily basis — in public administration, local government, design practices and cultural institutions.

The session will open with three inaugural addresses offering a broad yet grounded view of contemporary architectural policy.

Architectural policies in Europe: an up-to-date overview

João Bento

Researcher at the National Laboratory for Civil Engineering

My presentation is based on a publication issued in 2024 that sets out a panorama of the actors, policies and instruments promoting high-quality architecture and Baukultur in Europe. The study was commissioned by the Architects' Council of Europe (ACE) and financed under the Creative Europe programme.

The ACE's decision to prepare a second edition of the publication created an opportunity to update the data and to take account of changes occurring in the member states up to 2025. This address offers a synthetic discussion of the study's most important findings; the full version is available as a free report on the ACE website. The publication is divided into eight chapters, which set the structure of the analysis.

Context and scope of the research

The first chapter introduces the aims and scope of the study. At European level the terminology relating to architectural policies is varied and context-dependent. Terms in use include architecture, placemaking, design, the built environment, spatial planning and Baukultur. Despite terminological differences, all these concepts converge on a common goal: raising the quality of the built environment.



Fig. 3.1. Cover of the publication "Architectural Policies in Europe". Source: João Bento.

The European architectural policy framework

The second chapter provides an overview of the European architectural policy framework, covering European Union policy documents, European Commission initiatives, the pan-European Baukultur process and emerging policy networks.

The origins of European architectural policy are connected with the establishment of the Mies van der Rohe Award and with an EU Council resolution around the year 2000. In recent years these efforts have been reinforced by the Davos Baukultur Alliance and the New European Bauhaus initiative, which focus on promoting high-quality architecture and a high-quality built environment.

The arctors of architectural policy

The following chapters discuss the study's methodology and the institutional actors responsible for shaping and implementing architectural policies. The analysis shows that in most countries competences in this field lie with ministries of culture, the environment or urban development.

In some countries the post of state architect or chief government architect has been established, with the task of providing design leadership and strategic advice to improve the quality of public architecture and develop a culture of placemaking.

Another significant outcome of these policies has been the emergence of specialised cultural institutions. Since the 1990s Europe has seen dynamic growth in architectural institutions popularising the cultural value of architecture. An important role is also played by non-governmental organisations, civic movements and cooperation platforms, which take part in design-governance processes and promote high-quality architecture at national and local levels.

The fourth chapter also describes inter-parliamentary committees, platforms or councils for architectural quality, created to improve coordination and cooperation between different sectors of public administration.

Policy documents and typologies of approach

One of the study's principal aims was to identify policy documents relating to architecture, taking the form of acts, strategies or memoranda. A comparison of the situation in 2012 and in 2025 indicates a clear increase in the number of states with formally adopted architectural policies. This trend suggests that in the coming years almost all EU member states will be covered by documents of this type, setting out governments' objectives and aspirations for the design of the built environment.

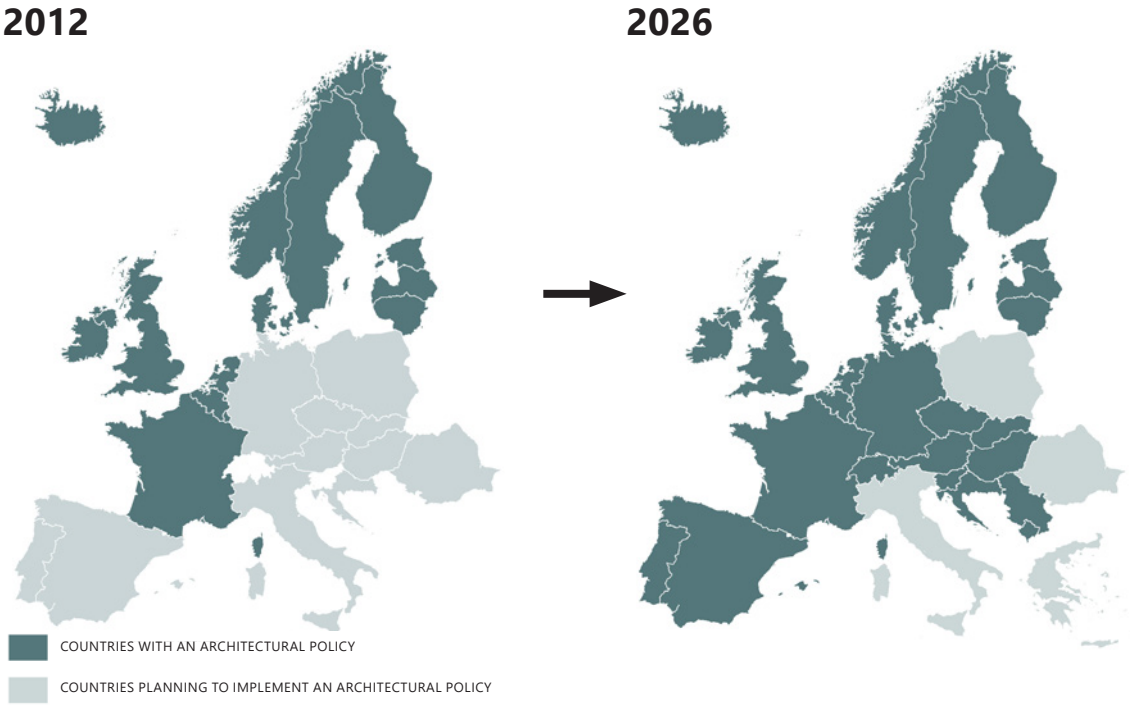

Fig. 3.2. European countries with a national architectural policy in place and countries planning to implement one. Source: Mikołaj Wantoch Rekowski.

The analysis made it possible to distinguish three main models of approach to architectural policy:

- legislative (including France, Lithuania, Spain and Sweden);
- comprehensive (including Austria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Latvia, Luxembourg, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Iceland and Norway);
- sectoral (including Belgium, England and Wales).

The study found that only nine states declared having a dedicated budget for implementing architectural policies. France has significantly larger resources than the other countries, but these also cover heritage protection, conservation of historic buildings and the promotion of architecture, which makes it difficult to assign them unambiguously to particular areas.

An analysis of the dynamics of policy development confirms the growing number of states and administrations implementing documents of this kind. Germany is one of the most recent examples, and many countries — such as Denmark, Czechia, Ireland and Finland — have updated their strategies in recent years. Architectural policies at municipal level are also gaining importance, particularly in the Nordic countries, where almost a hundred cities have already adopted their own documents in this field.

Instruments and implementation tools

The chapter devoted to the instruments of architectural policy presents a broad range of formal and informal tools serving to deliver policy objectives such as raising public awareness, promoting good practice and developing education.

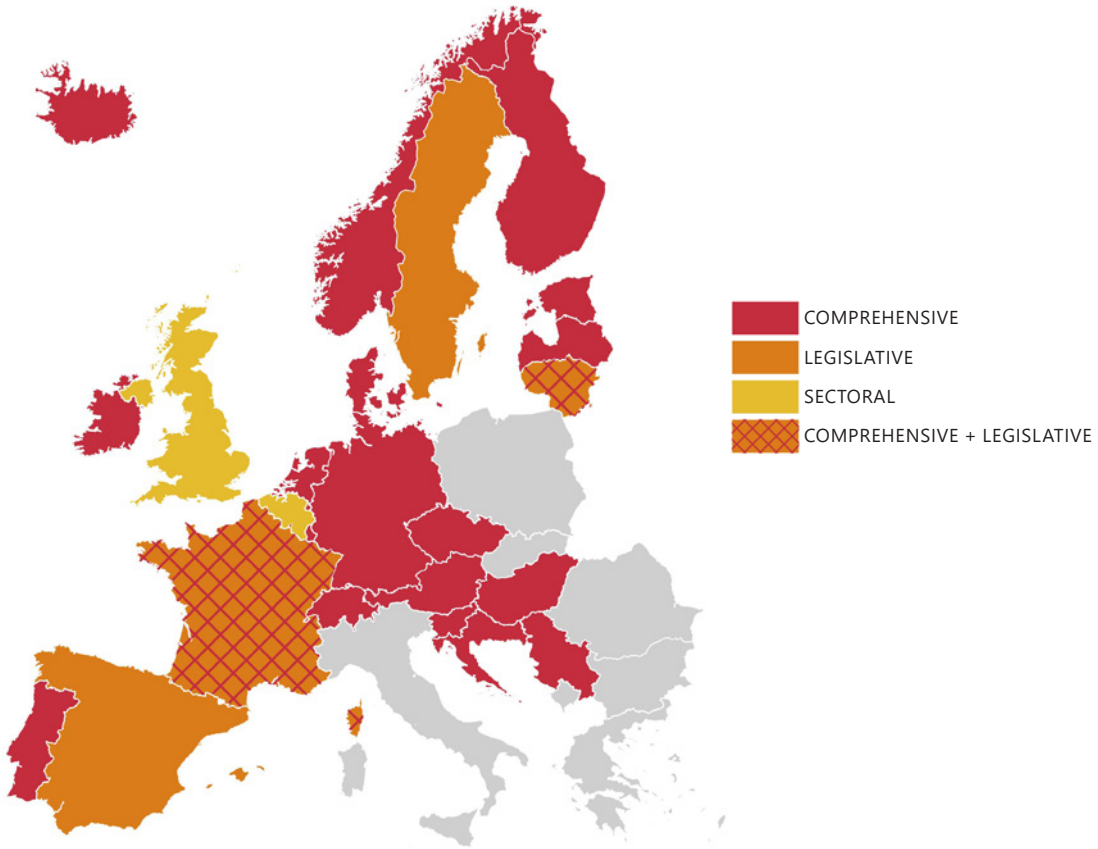

Fig. 3.3. Types of official architectural policy documents in European countries. Source: João Bento.

Formal tools are normative in character and follow from the obligations of the state, whereas informal tools rest on soft-power mechanisms. The analysis shows that most European Union recommendations fall into the category of informal instruments, focused on strengthening institutional capacity and promoting a culture of design quality.

The impact of architectural policies

The closing chapters of the study are devoted to analysing the impact of architectural policies. It was demonstrated that European policy initiatives have played an important role in shaping national and regional architectural strategies, setting the agenda and legitimising action taken by member states.

At the same time the study revealed the limitations of these policies, including difficulties in implementing initiatives and the long-term character of their effects. A key problem remains the lack of cross-sectoral integration — public administrations still operate in separate "silos", which hampers a comprehensive approach to the quality of the built environment. A further challenge is the absence of dedicated funding, which limits the scale and effectiveness of the measures undertaken.

Conclusions

The study confirms that the public sector, working together with other actors, plays a key role in creating conditions favourable to the development of a high-quality built environment. Architectural policies influence design-governance processes, initiate new forms of cooperation, promote good practice and strengthen the culture of placemaking. At the same time their effectiveness depends on better policy integration, stable financing and consistent implementation at every level of public administration.



Ryc. 3.4. João Bento speaking at the conference. Źródło: Grzegorz Mehring.

How can planning be part of architectural policy, and vice versa?

Elisabeth Belpaire

President of the International Society of City and Regional Planners (ISOCARP)

It is extremely interesting that two worlds are meeting here today: architectural policy and spatial planning. Globally this is by no means obvious. For that reason, rather than presenting a catalogue of ready answers to the question "how?", I would like to share some reflections on both "how?" and "why?".

The City Architect

We are fond of the notion of the city architect — the government architect, the state architect, the Baumeister. Although the term sounds unambiguously architectural, it also contains an important planning dimension. Placemaking, mentioned by the previous speaker, may form part of the mandate of this role, covering buildings, public space, infrastructure and landscape. It is a natural bridge between planning and architectural policy.

That is precisely why we are here: we believe that planners should co-create architectural policy and that architects should take part in planning processes. We see the future of the city architect's role in the work of multidisciplinary teams combining architectural, urban design and planning expertise, able to respond to the complex challenges of the built environment — from urban regeneration, through shrinking cities and post-conflict areas, to the design of new urban structures.

Form follows what?

Architects know the saying "form follows function". My own professional path led from architecture, through engineering, to urban design and spatial planning. In recent decades architectural policies in Europe have extended this principle, recognising the importance of culture, of architectural quality and of the quality of the built environment.

In today's world, however, form and quality follow far more factors than function alone. They follow finance, politics, power relations, developers' interests, planning regulations — and often their absence.

That is why a conference such as this one is a moment for reflection: which systems of values and needs do architectural policies actually respond to? If policy shapes the form and quality of the built environment, should we not shape it together? After all, we decide what may be built, where, at what density, how it is connected, where the flows run and how much green there is. Architects focus on the experience of space, on how it functions and on its symbolic meaning. We are not two parallel professions — we are co-authors of space. One plus one is more than two.

Perhaps, then, we should redefine that classic sentence and say: quality follows the future. But what is the future?

A shared global task

Architects usually begin work from a design brief. Today we have a shared, global brief. It is non-negotiable and has a clearly defined time horizon — the future begins now.

We all know that the climate crisis is one of the key challenges, but not the only one. We are dealing with a polycrisis: biodiversity loss, a health crisis, growing social inequalities, and a housing affordability crisis that has made its way onto both the global and the EU agenda.

Nine out of ten people today live in areas with unhealthy levels of air pollution. Seven of the nine planetary boundaries have been crossed. Around 70% of energy use and production waste is generated in cities. Public space is increasingly being privatised, and at the same time it can be a source of exclusion, conflict and inequality.

Cities are therefore on the front line of the response to contemporary crises. If they are well managed, well planned and well governed, they can also become a space of enormous opportunity and of alternative scenarios for the future.

We know that by 2050 around 70% of people will live in cities. We also know that 60% of the built environment is yet to be built. That is an enormous responsibility, but also an opportunity.

A few months ago we organised the first international conference devoted to new regenerative cities. Today we deal with climate change mitigation, adaptation, resilience and planning. Should we not, however, go a step further — towards a regenerative built environment? A manifesto for the new regenerative city has been drawn up, and we encourage you to take part in shaping it.

The client

Who is the client of architectural policy and planning? The government, the European Union, the public sector? Or above all, people? On the front line are not cities as structures, but the health and wellbeing of their inhabitants. Are we building a better world for future generations? Is the human being at the centre of what we do?

During the congress in Toronto we listened to Indigenous planners guided by the principle of the seven generations — looking seven times twenty years into the future and seven times twenty years into the past. This approach redefines the relationship with the land on the basis of reciprocity, respect and responsibility. It reaches beyond architecture and urban design, forcing us to rethink how we use resources, how we consume and how we produce waste.

The human scale of systems

The environment in which we live, move, work and rest affects our health and wellbeing, and that of other species too. It can encourage a healthy way of life and prevent illness, but it can also exclude and deepen inequalities.

This is why the neighbourhood scale matters so much. It is the key environment of everyday life, a critical resource for social and environmental resilience. It requires community engagement and deep immersion in the diversity of residents' experience. Planners work precisely at this scale — and that is one of the most important values they can bring to architectural policies.

Equally important is the city region — an often-overlooked level that is the space of systems: ecological, mobility, food and water systems. Its significance will continue to grow.

Setting new directions

As ISOCARP we represent planners from many regions, cultures and systems. What unites us is passion, experience and an interdisciplinary approach to planning. This gives us not only a unique opportunity but also a responsibility to create a global planning charter.



Fig. 3.5. Elisabeth Belpaire speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

The planning charter defines who we are as planners, why planning matters and what good planning is. It sets out values such as long-term thinking, a systems approach rooted in place, community engagement and the public interest. It explains the differences and synergies between planning and architectural policies, strengthens interdisciplinary cooperation and offers a point of reference for the quality of the built environment.

In this way we can integrate planning with architectural policies — avoiding silos and duplication of effort while drawing on our specific competences. Together we build better places: inclusive, high-quality, resilient and just.

The German Federal Government's guidelines for Baukultur: "Co-designing space for the common good"

Stephan Mayer

Federal Ministry of Housing, Urban Development and Building

As a policy official at the German Federal Ministry of Building and Urban Development, and an urban planner by training, I would like to present the German federal government's guidelines on Baukultur — a document adopted recently that marks a new stage in the shaping of this policy.

Germany has a federal system consisting of three levels: the federal government, the federal states (Länder) and the municipalities. At federal level there are legislative competences relating to the national building code. Already in paragraph 1 of that code the concept of Baukultur appears as one of the interests to be taken into account in building planning. The basis for federal funding programmes lies in constitutional provisions on state competences that make it possible to support the Länder in urban development and social housing. The sixteen federal states have

sovereignty in building law and competences in the field of housing construction. Municipalities, in turn, oversee spatial planning and are responsible for implementing policy at local level through land-use plans.

Baukultur policy at federal level already has a history. In 2000 — twenty-five years ago — the Architecture and Baukultur Initiative was created. In 2006 an act established the Federal Foundation of Baukultur as a communication platform for disseminating knowledge about planning and building in society. A key impulse for the present guidelines was Germany's adoption of the Davos Declaration in 2018. It was this that became the basis for beginning work on the document. The preparatory process was launched in 2022: a research project, an expert advisory board and focus groups were set up. Inter-ministerial working groups with representatives of eleven federal ministries took part in drafting the guidelines. The aim was to increase acceptance of Baukultur policy, to reach a wider audience and to produce a real impact in practice. Last November the guidelines were adopted by the federal government and presented in the Bundestag.

The guidelines represent the federal government's understanding of Baukultur, rooted in the New Leipzig Charter and the Davos Declaration on green, just and productive urban development. On this understanding, Baukultur encompasses the sum of human actions that continuously shape our designed environment. The guidelines underline the federal government's commitment to applying principles of high design quality in the process of shaping the built environment. It is worth noting that the federal state is Germany's largest public investor. The guidelines are legally binding only at federal level — not for the Länder or the municipalities. They are, however, a clear signal and a point of reference for the wider community delivering construction investment in Germany.

The eight guidelines are arranged in a three-tier model. The inner tier covers central, value-based fields of action: protection of the climate and of resources — with particular emphasis on preserving existing building stock — creating identity through the built environment, and promoting knowledge, skills and cross-sectoral cooperation. The middle tier focuses on spatial fields of action: frameworks for wellbeing, sustainable land management, the shaping of healthy living environments through the development of green space, and the district as the key level of intervention — understood both as an urban district and as a rural area. The outer tier concerns processes: developing experimental spaces and projects that transform the built environment, and supporting participatory, cooperation-based processes.

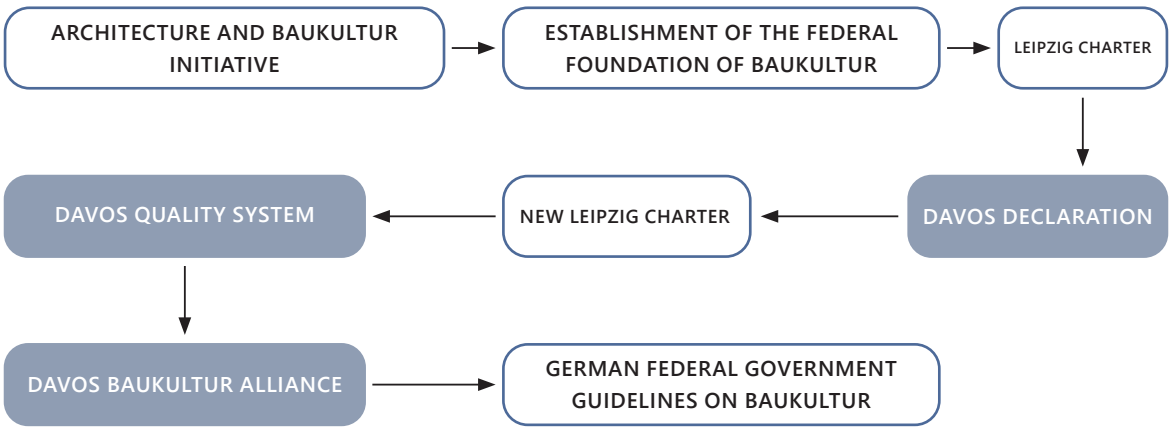

Fig. 3.6. The process of developing Baukultur documents in Germany. Source: Stephan Mayer.

The guidelines are accompanied by concrete measures addressed to the federal government and by recommendations for public and private investors. These are intended to make it possible to assess policy implementation at the level of delivery. The impulses the guidelines are meant to send include: promoting education and training in Baukultur, disseminating knowledge about good-quality design, supporting research and innovation, strengthening quality instruments, adjusting framework conditions in federal law, initiating changes in European regulation, and developing funding programmes.

The outlook for the coming years assumes above all the building of partnerships with the Länder and municipalities — so that they adopt the guidelines as a point of reference and develop their own strategies within their competences. Another important task is engaging the private sector, which should treat Baukultur as a benchmark of the quality of its own work. The federal government also wants to work actively with institutions such as planning associations and professional chambers, and to strengthen the Federal Foundation of Baukultur, which every two years prepares a report on the current state of Baukultur in Germany. The guidelines can now serve as a point of reference for assessing progress. Germany remains active in international networks — within the European Directors of Architecture and the Davos Baukultur Alliance. The aim is to focus political and public attention on the key issues of Baukultur and architecture, with a strong social, ecological and cultural dimension.



Fig. 3.7. Stephan Mayer speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

Panel Discussion I

Participants:

1. Bohdan Biś Lisowski – Chair of the Polish Council of Architecture (moderator),
2. Martin Dubbeling – International Society of City and Regional Planners (ISOCARP),
3. Martina Juvara – International Society of City and Regional Planners (ISOCARP),
4. Anda Kursiša– Member of the ACE Executive Board and of the Latvian Association of Architects,
5. Ruth Schagemann – President of the Architects' Council of Europe (ACE),
6. Petr Lešek – Vice-Chair of the Czech Chamber of Architects, architect and founder of Projektil Architekti.

Bohdan Biś Lisowski

What does architectural policy mean to you, and do you see its presence in built architecture and in urban planning?

Ruth Schagemann

I am deeply convinced that architectural policy is the right direction — and that it takes time and people's initiative to develop it. Only if we are convinced of it ourselves can we convince others. And others are always very hard to convince: we can preach a great deal among ourselves, but the question is how to convince politicians, mayors, the construction industry. This is why the Davos Alliance is an important network — there we try to bring together all the actors, including those who at first glance may not favour these changes.



Fig. 3.8. Panel participants, from the left: Bohdan Biś Lisowski, Ruth Schagemann, Petr Lešek, Anda Kursiša, Martina Juvara, Martin Dubbeling. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

Petr Lešek

I am glad that architectural policies exist at all — that is the starting point. But now is the time really to promote them and to show politicians and everyone involved that they have genuine value. At the moment we are in a situation where everyone knows it is some kind of document, some general agreement — but implementation is almost non-existent. In Czechia neither the cities nor the ministry really know about it. We need to show that architectural policy brings concrete benefits to everyone. Because at the moment nobody treats it as anything more than paper.

Bohdan Biś Lisowski

So you do not see that presence — what we have on paper — in urban planning?

Petr Lešek

Exactly. Let me just add that in Czechia planners, architects and landscape architects all belong to a single chamber — so I am speaking on behalf of all of them, without distinctions.

Anda Kursiša

Policies matter not only as documents but as a dialogue between all stakeholders. We are still at the stage of documents that are advisory in character. It will be an enormous step forward to move them into legislation — and that requires coordination and mutual understanding between all parties. And even once they become part of the law, the dialogue will still go on endlessly.



Fig. 3.9. Petr Lešek during the panel discussion. Source: Grzegorz Mehring

Martina Juvara

We live in times of very rapid and radical change. That is why we need a point of reference — a foundation that defines quality and a shared understanding of it. We must focus on quality, not solely on price or on reacting to one crisis after another. Even if implementation is not yet clearly visible in practice, the very fact that the discussion is going on and that we are building a shared understanding is of enormous importance.

Martin Dubbeling

Creating better cities together is a complex and time-consuming process — you cannot work it out at a desk. Meetings such as this one, in places such as Gdańsk, are therefore extremely important. Although everything is changing, we must return to the roots of our profession. As planners and architects we often react too impulsively — every few years a new topic appears: the smart city, the sustainable city, nature-based solutions. They need to be absorbed, but without going overboard. Every city is unique, yet it also has features in common with others — just as Gdańsk is in certain respects similar to Lübeck or Hamburg. We need to study this and to visit cities repeatedly.

Bohdan Biś Lisowski

Should every European state adopt a national architectural policy?



Ryc. 3.10. Anda Kursiša podczas panelu dyskusyjnego. Źródło: Grzegorz Mehring.

Ruth Schagemann

Definitely yes. It is often mistakenly assumed that Brussels is imposing something. In this case it really is about the member states — and not only about them. Since this morning we have been saying that everything comes down to the level of the city, the region, the locality. A policy need not be exclusively national in character — it may also be regional. Nevertheless I am convinced that member states should implement it, because that follows from responsibility. And that responsibility stems from a simple fact: space matters.

Bohdan Biś Lisowski

How do individual countries treat national architectural policies, and what are their real effects? What does this look like in Czechia?

Petr Lešek

We have had an architectural policy for ten years. But frankly, it has produced no effects, because it is too abstract, it operates at state level, and the state has no idea how to make use of it. Everything happens bottom-up: it is the cities and the architects who have to cope as best they can. Although we are already on the second edition of the architectural policy, the situation has not changed. Every time I talk to the ministries I hear: "Not now, this isn't the right moment — there's a pandemic", "there's a war in Ukraine". There is always something more important. That is the fundamental problem: everyone is looking only as far as the next day. There is no thinking in a five-, ten- or twenty-year perspective. When I say that a holistic approach is needed, people are afraid of it — they run away, because they prefer to solve individual problems. And yet joining different questions together is the heart of the matter. Politicians fear such an approach because they cannot see a concrete, quick result coming from it.



Fig. 3.11. Martina Juvara during the panel discussion. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

Bohdan Biś Lisowski

That resembles the situation in Poland — there is always something far more important than architecture. This may follow from the logic of the electoral term: if the effect will not be visible within four or five years, politicians are not interested. We see this, for instance, with architectural competitions organised just before elections, whose results have to be announced a few weeks beforehand so that voters can be shown what will be built. That is another subject, but it is in a way connected with architectural policy.

Anda, what systemic instruments can support architectural policy at national level?

Anda Kursiša

In Latvia we have mainly advisory instruments. We have the Latvian Architectural Strategy for 2022–2027 and the National Architecture Council attached to the Ministry of Culture, which has an advisory function and can support various documents and declarations. We adopted the 2018 Davos Declaration and the principles of the New European Bauhaus. A few days ago our architecture act was sent for inter-ministerial consultation — it took more than fifteen years to reach that stage. We are keeping our fingers crossed, because we have elections next year, and elections can disrupt the continuity of legislative processes. For a year we worked through 154 comments on the act — weekly meetings, systematic consultation, persistent daily work. We gave the architecture act the highest priority within our association. We see ourselves as a competent partner in future legal change — and we will continue in that role.

Bohdan Biś Lisowski

Martina, can architects working internationally still design with sensitivity to national identity?

Martina Juvara

We do not need to erect new barriers and say that only Polish architects may build in Poland, only English ones in England. First, English architectural practices employ people of many nationalities anyway. Second, cities such as Gdańsk are proof that over the centuries many people came here from all over Europe and jointly created the culture of a trading city — and that is precisely what shaped this exceptional architecture. In the Middle Ages master builders travelled the continent and created a distinctive Gothic language in different places. This cultural exchange is something we should cultivate. What we must watch out for concerns not the nationality of architects but the culture they wish to represent. If it is a culture of architecture subordinated solely to financialisation and exploitation, then perhaps it is not the culture we want. But that is not a matter of passports. Architects are trained to analyse context — and that is what we should promote. Competence should count for more than a passport.

Bohdan Biś Lisowski

Martin, how can we counteract the architectural uniformity resulting from global trends?

Martin Dubbeling

The key is to build a culture of drawing inspiration. Many of my colleagues do not travel and do not visit other cities — not even nearby ones. To broaden your horizons as a planner or a politician you have to be on the ground, to see things, to talk to planners, to make contacts. The point is to draw inspiration from the process, from the genius loci, from the context — not in order to copy someone else's successes, but to understand how other places work. That matters more than regulation itself.

Bohdan Biś Lisowski

Ruth, how does the Architects' Council of Europe promote standards of architectural quality in Europe?

Ruth Schagemann

The ACE does not impose standards — it is rather about connecting existing approaches, learning from one another and conducting a dialogue. In the Architects' Council of Europe we have fifty-two member organisations covering thirty-six countries, different languages and different cultural contexts. That diversity is at once our strength and the foundation of what we do. Personally I believe that the quality of architecture is not something subjective — it can be defined, promoted and protected. Architecture and spatial planning have the exceptional quality that they can be experienced directly — this is not something that stays in regulations on a politician's desk. Since 2019 there has been growing genuine interest within the European institutions in the quality of the living environment. We should encourage everyone — including politicians and those responsible for finance — to go out into the field and observe what really makes a difference. We already have many instruments and good examples, and our shared values are written down in the Davos Declaration and in the New European Bauhaus. Our task is to promote and demonstrate them — not merely to talk about them.

Bohdan Biś Lisowski

Petr, can the adaptation and regeneration of historic buildings be part of a national identity strategy?

Petr Lešek

Yes, and it should be. This is also an answer to the broader question of regionalism in architecture. The main focus is the local environment and the local community, because it is residents who are the real beneficiaries of everything we do. We must help them understand where they live, what the values and features of their place are and what they can be proud of. If residents are proud of their surroundings, they feel safe and become better citizens. People do not live in Czechia or Poland as an abstraction — they live in a specific town, in a specific place. The most important thing is to help them discover the values of that place and to encourage them to care for their own environment. I am convinced that if we succeed in this, everything will work far better.

Bohdan Biś Lisowski

Anda, what is the role of stakeholders and of the Ministry of Culture in initiating a policy framework?

Anda Kursiša

The main stakeholders in drafting the Latvian architecture act are the association of architects and the association of landscape architects. Unfortunately we did not manage to reach a compromise with the urban planners, which is why the act does not include content on spatial planning. The Ministry of Culture's role is to steer the legislative process — the ministry provides legal support and resources, and when a stronger push is needed the minister becomes personally involved. Another important partner is the Ministry of the Economy, which is responsible for the construction sector and most of the related legislation — it is with them that we hold the most consultations. The more sensitive the issues that arise in the process, the more stakeholders join in: the Ministry of Justice, real-estate market organisations and others. Sometimes a certain paradox appears — when we talk about self-governance for the chamber of architects, we draw stronger arguments from the act on the Bar than from the examples of European chambers. Such is the reality.



Fig. 3.12. Martin Dubbeling during the panel discussion. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

Bohdan Biś Lisowski

Martina, architecture accounts for around 30% of emissions in Europe. Why is emissions reduction in this sector not more strongly present in national climate commitments?

Martina Juvara

As a professional community we are in a sense absent from this area. Perhaps this happens because architecture falls under the Ministry of Culture, which does not take part in preparing national climate commitments. Meanwhile the emissions-reduction commitments that states present every few years contain very general and weak provisions on the built environment. And this despite the fact that in Europe — as economies gradually moving away from heavy industry and coal — it is cities that are the main emitters. By comparison, transport organisations have developed templates, metrics and guidance for states on incorporating reduction targets into national documents. Something similar is missing in our sector. I believe that in the coming years we as a professional community should strongly promote the inclusion of the built environment in national climate commitments — as one of the key objectives.

Bohdan Biś Lisowski

Martin, can European spatial planning policies be harmonised with local identity?

Martin Dubbeling

If local identity is excluded from European spatial policies, then such policies are useless. European policies should strengthen local identity — otherwise they make no sense.

arch. Bohdan Biś Lisowski

Ruth, does dialogue between countries lead to unification, or does it rather promote diversity?

Ruth Schagemann

To both — and that is Europe's greatest strength. Dialogue leads to shared understanding, but we must consider with whom we are conducting that dialogue. Dialogue among professionals has existed for a long time. Our narrative, however, is not yet rooted in the consciousness of European citizens — and that is an enormous area to work on. The House Europe initiative, through which citizens can make their voice heard before the European Commission, gathered only twenty thousand signatures in half a year. That means the narrative has not yet reached citizens. I am convinced that demand for quality must come from citizens — only in that way can we have a real influence on politicians. We have a long road ahead of us, but we are already on it. I encourage you to look at that initiative and to sign it — it is your voice in Europe.

Bohdan Biś Lisowski

Petr, how can we educate society in conscious design of space?

Petr Lešek

This is a question we have been grappling with in Czechia for about five years. Architects should speak clearly about the need to get to know the local environment and encourage people to take responsibility for their surroundings. In the Czech chamber we already have a list of one to two hundred architects ready to support schools in education. The problem is how to connect them effectively with teachers and reach everyone who is interested. We are trying to work through the Ministry of Education and other channels. This is not about training future architects — it is about educating conscious citizens. About people knowing what is good in their surroundings and what needs improving. If we succeed in this, everything will work far better.

Bohdan Biś Lisowski

Anda, what are the real effects of architectural policy in Latvia?

Anda Kursiša

The effects are somewhat dispersed, but let me name a few concrete ones. Working on the architecture act, we are building an important dialogue and a network of cooperation — we can see that we are not alone, and we are spreading knowledge about architecture. As a result, an ever wider circle comes to understand that architecture has value and cultural significance. Thanks to this we can receive direct support from the Ministry of Culture when it is needed — not by chance, but as a result of policy. At national and regional level, recognition of architectural competitions has taken root, which is not the standard everywhere. We also have financial support that allows us to speak about architecture, to spread knowledge and to act as a competent partner for various institutions.



Fig. 3.13. Bohdan Biś Lisowski during the panel discussion. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

Bohdan Biś Lisowski

Bohdan Biś Lisowski: Martina, do current academic curricula support reflection on local specificity?

Martina Juvara

I do not work in academia, so I can only observe this from the outside. But I do see a key tension: the balance between local specificity, a local architectural language and local building traditions on the one hand, and the international dimension on the other. We all have to work towards climate neutrality, install solar panels, apply new cooling and heating systems. That is knowledge of a global character, which has to be acquired alongside an understanding of local traditions. The question is how these two levels interpenetrate — how to learn from experiments conducted elsewhere, how to incorporate new materials and methods of building recycling into the local context.

Bohdan Biś Lisowski

Martin, what are the best practices in international cooperation?

Martin Dubbeling

I am a great fan of the German Internationale Bauausstellung — the international building exhibitions. These are not one-off competitions for a single building, but projects covering whole urban areas, lasting ten and sometimes twenty years, with a lasting effect. As a student and as a professional I visited Berlin, the Ruhr region, Hamburg — and I took my colleagues and representatives of the cities I worked with there. Not in order to copy, but to draw inspiration from how other places work. I hope that the New European Bauhaus will organise something similar at European level.

Bohdan Biś Lisowski

Let me sum up a few points from this session. Architectural policy is an act of culture. Heritage and modernity are not opposites but allies. The state has a key role, but so do cities. Education is the foundation. And finally — architectural policy must be real.



Fig. 3.14. The panel discussion of the first session. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

4 Plenary Session II
Architectural policy as a matter of public interest

Ryszard Gruda
Polish Council of Architecture

The second plenary session is devoted to architectural policy understood as an element of public policy. Architecture is not solely a matter of aesthetics or of the technical quality of buildings designed by architects and specialist teams or delivered by contractors. It is a strategic instrument of conscious state policy, taking account of social, environmental, economic and cultural aspects.

High-quality architecture has a direct influence on economic development, on the competitiveness of cities and regions, and on residents' quality of life. It affects our everyday experience of space, often imperceptibly but fundamentally. For this reason architectural policy should be seen as an important component of the public management system.

During the panel we will attempt to clarify the concept of architectural policy and its relationship to public policy. We will consider the role it should play within the structures of state and local administration. Who creates it, who implements it, and how does cooperation proceed between government, local authorities, public institutions and society? What function does the European Union serve in this process? What challenges lie ahead of us over the coming years?

Taking part in the discussion will be architects and representatives of local administration, public institutions and the academic community, which will allow the issues to be viewed from a range of perspectives: practical, institutional and scholarly.

Before we move to the debate, however, we will hear addresses by three experts presenting national and European experience in shaping architectural policy. Speaking will be Jutta Kastner, Ivan Blasi and Janusz Sepioł.



Fig. 4.1. Ryszard Gruda speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

From recommendation to action: towards a shared culture of architecture

Jutta Kastner

Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture

Architecture is neither a purely technical nor a purely aesthetic question. It is a cultural, environmental and democratic one. The built environment shapes the way we live, form relationships and function as communities. It affects our resilience, and also the way we relate to the past and the future. Architecture is by its nature a public matter. It determines how we live, move, interact and experience daily life. Built space is not merely the backdrop to social life — it is its stage. When we speak of architectural policy, we are therefore speaking of the public interest in its most concrete dimension.

In this spirit, in 2021 the European Commission, at the invitation of the member states, set up a group of experts nominated by twenty-three countries plus Norway and Switzerland. Its task was to develop recommendations on high-quality architecture and a built environment accessible to all. The work resulted in the report "Towards a Shared Culture of Architecture", which is an important point of reference for the contemporary debate on architectural policy.

The document calls for a fundamental change of approach: moving away from seeing architecture as a sectoral issue towards recognising it as a policy field that is cross-cutting and social in character. The report formulates six key recommendations that set the direction for states, regions and cities:

1. Promoting a culture of quality in the built environment — taking account not only of functionality and cost-efficiency but also of durability, contextual fit and the wellbeing of users.
2. Integrating architectural quality into public policies — architecture should be an element of housing, transport, climate and innovation policy, not an appendix to it.
3. Supporting transdisciplinary and participatory approaches — involving cooperation between architects, planners, engineers, artists, decision-makers and residents, including young people and older people.
4. Developing and disseminating knowledge — through research, education and the exchange of experience.
5. Strengthening international cooperation — enabling mutual learning and the building of shared quality standards.
6. Promoting sustainable, inclusive and beautiful spaces — in accordance with European values.

These recommendations are reflected in action taken at European Union level. A particular role is played by the New European Bauhaus initiative, announced in 2020 by President Ursula von der Leyen. The initiative links the principles of the European Green Deal with everyday living space, integrating the environmental, social and aesthetic dimensions. It also supports pilot projects, builds cooperation networks and strengthens local initiatives.

The EU Work Plan for Culture 2023–2026 likewise recognises the importance of Baukultur and of the quality of the built environment. Programmes such as Creative Europe support the Architects' Council of Europe and platforms for young architects, as well as projects strengthening cultural dialogue and social cohesion. Horizon Europe, in turn, finances research into regenerative architecture and the reuse of heritage. Quality criteria are increasingly appearing in public procurement, cohesion policy and green transition strategies, which testifies to the progressive integration of architectural quality into the mainstream of public policy

Concrete action can also be observed at national and local level. Germany has adopted new federal guidelines on Baukultur. France has implemented a national architectural strategy with a strong emphasis on education and public awareness. Austria is developing regional Baukultur policies, Denmark promotes climate-responsible design and inclusive housing, and Portugal and Slovenia are creating platforms for architectural culture. Cities such as Barcelona, Ghent, Warsaw



Fig. 4.2. Cover of the report "Towards a Shared Culture of Architecture". Source: European Commission.

and Helsinki use architectural policy as an instrument for strengthening design democracy and social inclusion.

At the same time, significant challenges remain to be addressed. Architecture should be more strongly integrated with climate, health and social policies. Quality criteria in public procurement should become the standard rather than the exception. Greater support is also needed for architectural education and for building public awareness. Architectural culture must be accessible and inclusive.

Architecture is a public good. We create it not only for ourselves but also for future generations. Policies that treat the quality of the built environment as a priority express care for the climate, for society and for democracy. The report Towards a Shared Culture of Architecture set the direction: Europe's built environment should be of high quality and should serve everyone. The process of realising this has already begun, but it requires further consistency: translating principles into practice, recommendations into policies, and policies into real places in which people can live well.



Fig. 4.3. Jutta Kastner speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

EUmies Awards: architecture as a matter of public interest

Ivan Blasi
Coordinator of the European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture

Poland has today become an important point of reference for the debate on architecture, and also for the European Union Mies van der Rohe Award. Since 2013 we have been conducting an intensive dialogue with Polish architects, observing a clear evolution in the way architecture is designed, communicated and socially received here.

Confirmation of this momentum came with the 2024 EU Prize exhibition at the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław. It presented, among other works, the PLATO Gallery by KWK Promes and the Targ Błonie project. Selected works can also be seen in the exhibition accompanying this conference. My thanks go to Michał Duda, director of the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, as well as to representatives of the Wrocław city authorities and to Piotr Lorens for making it possible to present the exhibition in Gdańsk as well.

Since its establishment in 1988 as a joint public initiative, the European Union Mies van der Rohe Award has consistently emphasised that architecture is neither a purely technical nor a purely artistic practice. It is an element of public policy. It shapes the living environment, influences social relations and serves as an instrument for responding to Europe's shared challenges.

The award's symbolic roots reach back to the Barcelona Pavilion designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Lilly Reich. Rebuilt in the 1980s, it functions not merely as a historic object but as a platform for public debate and architectural experiment. That tradition of interdisciplinary dialogue remains relevant today.



Fig. 4.4. The exhibition of the 2024 European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture – Mies van der Rohe Award in Gdańsk. Source: Grzegorz Mehring

A contemporary expression of it is also the Davos Declaration, which calls for a holistic approach to the built environment. This covers not only architectural form but also the social, environmental and economic consequences of design.

Over the years the award has become an instrument for promoting quality understood not as a luxury but as a condition of responsible development. Its importance was underlined in the report Towards a Shared Culture of Architecture, which identifies the award as one of the pillars of European architectural policy.

The understanding of excellence in architecture has changed. It is no longer limited to visual or technological merit. It also encompasses the capacity to respond to the climate crisis, social fragmentation, resource scarcity and the erosion of public space. A representative project today is one that is process-aware, locally rooted and generous in its impact — one that strengthens communities, makes use of existing resources and proposes new forms of belonging.

The award presents a European approach to architecture based not on style but on values. It recognises collective intelligence and cross-sectoral cooperation. Whatever the scale — whether the transformation of post-industrial land, an intervention in a small town or a public housing project — architecture can perform a transformative function, building social cohesion and resilience.

The award's significance extends beyond the profession. It influences public debate and policy-making, showing how design affects the everyday lives of residents of European cities and regions. It aligns with the objectives of the European Green Deal, which aims at climate neutrality by 2050, sustainable development and social inclusion.

An important element is also the Young Talent programme, which links education, practice and the public interest. One of its laureates, Laura Hurley, took part in the Youth Policy Dialogue in



Fig. 4.5. Ivan Blasi speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

Athens with Commissioner Glenn Micallef, devoted to social inclusion through culture and sport. This is proof that young architects are active participants in a broader social debate.

Climate change remains one of Europe's most important challenges. The built environment accounts for around 40% of global greenhouse gas emissions. In this context, initiatives supporting the renovation and adaptation of existing buildings, such as the European citizens' initiative HouseEurope, are of particular importance.

The award functions as an extensive network of institutions and experts, coordinated by the Fundació Mies van der Rohe with support from the Creative Europe programme. It creates a platform for dialogue through touring exhibitions, publications, an online archive of thousands of projects and cooperation with international partners, including a presence at the Venice Architecture Biennale.

Architecture is a heritage passed on to succeeding generations. The buildings created today will be the monuments of tomorrow. This is also underlined by the UNESCO–UIA World Capital of Architecture 2026 programme, led by Dominique Perrault.

The EU Mies van der Rohe Award remains the most prestigious European distinction in the field of contemporary architecture. It is not only a moment of celebration but above all a continuous process of reflection and action. In the face of climate and social crises, architecture must respond responsibly, consistently and transformatively.

From the "Pact for Space" to a municipal architectural policy

Janusz Sepioł
City Architect of Kraków

For almost fifteen years the call for a national architectural policy has been recurring in Poland. So far, however, it has not been realised.

My experience in central and regional administration, and now in local administration, inclines me to scepticism about the rapid emergence of such a document at national or regional level. I place greater hope in the local level. Analysing the measures taken in Warsaw, Gdańsk and Kraków, I see potential in the bottom-up path of municipal initiatives, which may become an impulse for broader systemic change.

The Pact for Space

During the last local elections in Kraków an initiative entitled the "Pact for Space" was created, launched by the monthly Architektura i Biznes. It was a concise, few-page document containing ten postulates concerning the quality of urban space. The groupings that signed it obtained a mandate to govern the city in those elections.

After not quite a year of the new Kraków authorities in office, one may venture a preliminary assessment of how these ten points have been delivered:

1. Spatial order — a Department of Spatial Order has been created, integrating spatial planning, architecture, surveying and the City Architect's Office.
2. Public debate — here one should rather speak of a shortfall; systematic, in-depth debates have been lacking.
3. Urban and architectural standards — work has begun on a catalogue of good practice, which is important in the context of the phenomena colloquially described as "pathological development".
4. Climate challenges — a range of initiatives has been undertaken, including measures to limit excessive hard surfacing and projects improving the city's microclimate.
5. 3xRE (Revitalise, Recover, Reuse) — the regeneration programme for the Wesoła district is being developed, along with concepts connected with the city's general plan.
6. Integration of activities — the Department of Spatial Order and work on the general plan and the development strategy provide a platform for coordinating municipal policies.
7. Architectural competitions — an ordinance of the Mayor of Kraków is being prepared introducing an obligation to use competition procedures for key public commissions; a number of competitions are in preparation.
8. City Architect — the role has been created and its standing strengthened, giving it greater institutional and communicative visibility.
9. Municipal Urban Planning and Architecture Commission — appointed in a new composition, it meets more frequently and its work is more widely documented and made public.
10. Urban Forum — the concept of a municipal debate platform remains at the organisational stage.



Fig. 4.6. Signatories of the Pact for Space for Kraków. Source: Piotr Malec.

In summary: some of the organisational postulates have been delivered, but it is necessary to move from declarations to systemic programmatic and legal solutions.

Principles of a municipal architectural policy

The next step should be a municipal architectural policy. In Kraków we have proposed eight key principles for it:

1. A high-quality built environment is a political objective and an element of the city's development strategy.
2. The quality of architecture is a factor in economic growth, social cohesion, climate resilience and cultural development — it is not a cost but an investment.
3. The policy should combine a short-term and a long-term perspective.
4. Genuine citizen involvement is essential.
5. Development must be rooted in the city's unique identity. In the case of Kraków an important asset is its strong academic community and the large part of the city centre inscribed on the World Heritage List.
6. The document should focus on qualitative and horizontal objectives that can be translated into concrete programmes.
7. It should not replace spatial development policy or investment decisions, but complement them.



Fig. 4.7. Janusz Sepioł speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

8. The city should move from a reactive role — accepting or rejecting private projects — to the role of an active initiator of its own public undertakings.

Thematic blocks and instruments

The scope of a municipal architectural policy can be grouped into four areas:

- procedures for awarding commissions,
- standards and quality indicators,
- the targeting of budget expenditure,
- promotional and educational activity.

Particular fields of activity for local authorities include: standards for public space, the quality of public investment, support for regeneration, reporting on the state of space, action towards climate neutrality, and strengthening the position of the City Architect.

We have defined key solutions grouped into four areas:

1. Planning and design procedures:
   - developing pre-design planning (masterplans, urban studies),
   - making competitions and other competitive forms of design selection obligatory,
   - organising debates and forms of participation.
2. Quality of spatial planning:
   - providing alternative options within local plans,
   - greater attention to the third dimension in design,
   - strengthening the role of the Municipal Urban Planning and Architecture Commission,
   - preceding plans with studies and study competitions.
3. Standards and indicators:
   - parking policy,
   - biologically active surfaces,
   - accessibility of schools, parks and services,
   - standards for co-living and rental housing (PRS),
   - cycling standards.

(The question of where these standards should be formally anchored remains open).

4. Developing the system for promoting architecture:
   - an architectural award of the Mayor of the City,
   - exhibitions, reports and publications devoted to new architecture,
   - reports on the spatial condition of the city,
   - making use of professional events and thematic days,
   - an active presence in social media.

Municipal architectural policy is a public policy and should be constructed in accordance with the standards proper to documents of this kind: it should include a diagnosis, priorities, a financial plan, organisational measures, principles of cooperation, monitoring and evaluation.

In closing I would like to put forward a thesis: the number of cities appointing city architects of a new type is growing. In my view the key task of this role — understood as a guardian of quality and at the same time a kind of "creative director" for local government — should be precisely the municipal architectural policy.

If local architectural policies can be implemented effectively, it will also become possible to create coherent solutions at national level.

Panel Discussion II

Participants:

1. Ryszard Gruda – Polish Council of Architecture (moderator).
2. Piotr Grzelak – Deputy Mayor of the City of Gdańsk.
3. prof. Sławomir Gzell – for many years head of the Chair of Urban Design and Rural Landscape at the Faculty of Architecture of the Warsaw University of Technology, and Honorary Chair of the Committee of Architecture and Urban Planning of the Polish Academy of Sciences.
4. dr Michał Leszczyński – President of the Board of Grupa 5 Architekci, co-author of 900 projects, teaching at the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture of the Lublin University of Technology and the Faculty of Architecture of the Gdańsk University of Technology.
5. Paweł Majkusiak – architect, partner in JEMS Architekci of Warsaw, whose works can be seen in many Polish cities, including Gdańsk, and abroad.



Fig. 4.8. Participants in Panel Discussion II, from the left: Ryszard Gruda, Piotr Grzelak, Sławomir Gzell, Michał Leszczyński, Paweł Majkusiak, Marcin Woyciechowski, Maciej Zielonka. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

6. Marcin Woyciechowski – architect, head of the design office of Grupa Inwestycyjna Hossa S.A., lecturer at the Gdańsk University of Technology, author of the highly regarded Garnizon district in Gdańsk.
7. Maciej Zielonka – Deputy Mayor of Gdynia responsible for urban planning and housing.

Ryszard Gruda

I would like to propose that we try to define the concepts of public policy and architectural policy and to determine the relations between them. What role should architectural policy play in the system of public governance? Who creates and implements it? What challenges face local authorities and the architectural community today?

To begin with, however, I would like to ask a fundamental question: what is public policy, and what is architectural policy? Are architects an important actor in the process of shaping and delivering it?

Piotr Grzelak

In my view the diagnosis presented earlier by Janusz Sepioł is a solid starting point for further conversation. I would therefore focus not on definitions but on practice — on which elements should appear in a local architectural policy.

Architectural policy, like any public policy, is a set of instruments serving to achieve a defined public objective. A condition of its effectiveness, however, is a community of values. To build that, we need knowledge and education that make a mature public debate possible. And here, at every level, there is a visible deficit.



Fig. 4.9. Piotr Grzelak during Panel Discussion II. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.



Fig. 4.10. Panel Discussion II. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

Cities are currently working on general plans. I am concerned, however, that this process is not always genuinely inclusive. The question is whether the values that matter to local communities are really reflected in these documents. Without conscious participation by residents it is hard to speak of authentic public policy.

Architectural education is particularly important. In Poland there is still no widespread awareness of the influence of space on quality of life, on health, on social relations or on a sense of safety. Without that awareness it is hard to build lasting support for the ambitious aims of architectural policy.

The Velo-city congress is taking place in Gdańsk in parallel with this conference. One of its participants pointed out that we need an urban movement that will "lead" residents out of virtual isolation and restore to them the experience of community in the real space of the city. That is a valuable observation in the context of the aims of architectural policy. The city should be a place for building relationships, and planning and design instruments should serve that end.

During a recent visit to Expo 2025 in Osaka I encountered an example of a space that — though functional — encourages isolation. A restaurant with individual booths fitted with chargers made it possible to eat a meal in complete solitude. It is an extreme image, but it illustrates well how designed space can affect social relations both positively and negatively.

For this reason I believe that in formulating an architectural policy we should clearly define the values we want to protect and strengthen: community, public health, safety, quality of life. These should be the foundations of the documents and measures adopted by local authorities.

prof. Sławomir Gzell

We find ourselves in a rather difficult position in this discussion, because many key questions concerning architectural policy have already been covered. There is, however, one area that could significantly support efforts towards its real implementation in Poland: an appeal to science as the foundation for decisions about space.

For some twenty-five years I have taken part in initiatives aimed at developing a national architectural policy. Frankly, it is becoming ever harder to maintain enthusiasm in this matter. At one of the meetings we were told outright that if terms such as Baukultur, Bauhaus or the Green Deal appeared in a document submitted for approval, it would be rejected. I leave the reasons for such a reaction to your judgement.

The problem has a deeper dimension, however. Since the establishment of the National Science Centre, which is responsible for financing scientific research in Poland, the community of architects and urban planners has sought the creation of a panel dedicated to architecture and urban planning. Members of the Committee of Architecture and Urban Planning and the deans of faculties of architecture took part in meetings with representatives of the Centre. Despite repeated attempts, the creation of such a panel was consistently refused. Only recently we received a further letter confirming that there is no agreement to it.

To demonstrate that architecture and urban planning are fully fledged scientific disciplines, we prepared a publication entitled "Architecture, Urban Planning, Science", which we sent to decision-makers. We received no response whatsoever.

It seems that stronger support from professional organisations would be needed. Under so-called deregulation it was decided that urban planning is not a profession of public trust. In consequence the professional self-government of urban planners was abolished, whose role had been to care for the quality of spatial planning, including local development plans. Today practically anyone with the right software can prepare a draft local plan, and a municipal council can adopt



Fig. 4.11. Paweł Majkusiak during Panel Discussion II. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

it. The profession of urban planner has been substantially devalued — and at the same time we complain about spatial chaos.

I do not prejudge whether urban planning should be part of architectural policy, or rather the reverse — whether architecture should be an element of a more broadly understood state urban planning policy. That is an open question. But without a systemic approach to space as a limited good, and in many places an irreversibly degraded one, it will be hard to speak of a coherent and effective policy in this field.

dr Michał Leszczyński

I have the sense that many important points have already been made, both by earlier speakers and in our discussion. I would like to address the question of architectural quality and architectural policy. There appears to be fairly broad agreement as to its importance. The key question, however, is: how do we translate these postulates into concrete legal and institutional solutions?

I see two principal paths here:

First — regulation. I believe that in Polish conditions it is the law that can effectively enforce particular quality standards. This means strengthening the role of architectural competitions, raising the standing of design through clear formal requirements, and unambiguously recognising architecture as a public good. It is worth recalling the example of France, where the architecture act opens with the statement that architecture is a public good and therefore subject to legal protection. That is not merely a declaration; it is the starting point for concrete operating mechanisms.

Second — good practice. Even under present conditions, systemic solutions are possible at local level. A good example is the "Pact for Space" implemented in Kraków, which shows that with sufficient determination and cooperation between different communities a coherent spatial policy can be developed. It is proof that change is possible not only through legislation but also through consistent local-government action and partnership models of cooperation.

Paweł Majkusiak

Let me bring a little scepticism into this discussion. We can create the best documents, packages or even a kind of "constitution" for architecture, but none of these acts will work by itself. What is needed are people who genuinely want to deliver them and implement them consistently.

We are in a city where a great deal is in fact happening. That is not, however, the effect of the system itself but of the work of specific people — the team of Mayor Aleksandra Dulkiewicz and her colleagues, including Piotr Grzelak, who has consistently raised the standing of the city architect. This shows that everyday, systematic work is of key importance. It is not enough to write down sensible principles once and assume that from then on everything will function properly. Every day one has to return to those principles and enforce them.

A great deal has already been achieved; the quality of public space in Gdańsk really is improving.

At the same time, I am opposed to unreflectively enshrining architectural competitions in legislation as a mandatory requirement in every situation. A competition is a valuable instrument, but only if it is well prepared and properly conducted. Otherwise it becomes a formality that does not translate into real quality. That is why I am cautious about attempts to solve everything solely through further statutory provisions.

Marcin Woyciechowski

I was introduced as the author of Garnizon in Gdańsk — a project that is positively received, although it does not rest on striking, spectacular architectural gestures. Its strength lies rather in complementarity: coherence between architecture, public space and the urban layout.

In the context of architectural and public policy it is worth considering the rigid division of competences that still operates in our cities. Public space is very often designed by road engineers, while architecture tends to be confined to development plots. Yet the city is perceived as a whole. Infrastructure elements, street proportions, the rhythm of subdivisions and the relations between buildings all directly affect how we perceive architecture and space as a whole. If these elements are designed without urban and compositional sensitivity, a harmonious result can hardly be expected.

The second issue concerns the historical moment in which we find ourselves. We have functioned as a free state for a relatively short time. We are not France or Sweden, where the tradition of planning and of stable institutions is much longer. The law in force today was largely shaped under strong pressure to counteract corruption. Hence its rigidity and formalism. Perhaps we have now matured to a stage at which we can allow ourselves greater trust, the emergence of authorities and more flexible legal provisions. The current regulations are often interpreted in a way entirely at odds with spatial order and architectural logic.



Ryc. 4.12. Marcin Woyciechowski during Panel Discussion II. Źródło: Grzegorz Mehring.

A change of approach would, however, require a deeper reorganisation of public administration and a move away from purely procedural thinking towards something more holistic and conciliatory. If such a direction really begins to take hold, it may create space for a more conscious and responsible architectural policy.

Maciej Zielonka

In answering the question about the essence of public policy and architectural policy, one would first have to define their aim. For me the overriding aim is to achieve spatial order. One must, however, clearly distinguish spatial order from architectural order. The former has a far wider scope and covers social, economic and environmental aspects, and not infrequently reaches beyond the boundaries of a single municipality. Architectural order concerns to a greater extent visual matters, the quality of public spaces and the form of development.

In conducting architectural policy and spatial management in the city, I see my role as that of a mediator. Every day I encounter conflicts of interest: property owners who have lived in a given area for years, investors expecting a return on capital, neighbouring residents with their own needs and fears, and councillors with differing sensibilities and differing obligations towards their electorates. In such conditions the search for compromise becomes crucial.

In Gdynia the institution of a city architect does not currently exist. We have a head of the architecture department who is responsible for administrative decisions such as development conditions and building permits. I am, however, open to a discussion about establishing the post of city architect in Gdynia. I would not want it to be a purely façade role. I am considering what real value such a person could bring: what they would deal with beyond administrative procedures, how they could support the quality of public space, and how to convince both the mayor and residents of the case for it.

prof. Sławomir Gzell

It seems to me that education, already mentioned, is of key importance, but so too are strong and responsible civic organisations. I mean bodies that act for the common good rather than exerting pressure for particular benefit. The concept of the common good should be constantly present in this discussion; it is what sets the direction of architectural policy.

The second issue is the courage of those responsible for spatial decisions. I recall a situation in Warsaw in 1995, when a proposal appeared to build the Atrium office complex along Jana Pawła II Avenue in the Wola district. At that time an atmosphere of strong suspicion prevailed — officials feared the legal consequences of every decision. Even so, there were people — the district mayor, the district architect, advisers and designers — who took the decision, guided by a conviction that it was right. The investment was delivered, and the fears proved groundless. The buildings functioned for years. Today they are being demolished for other reasons, but that is a separate matter.

This example shows that without courage grounded in competence and a sense of responsibility it is hard to speak of an effective architectural policy. Courage in action, when one is convinced that one is serving the common good, can become a foundation for public institutions and for civic organisations co-creating spatial policy alike.

Ryszard Gruda

Let us try to identify the threats, gaps and weaknesses of the current system, and at the same time define the tasks for the future. These two threads are closely linked.

Maciej Zielonka

We have a defined spatial planning system: local plans, general plans and decisions on development conditions. What is crucial, however, is that local plans be drafted as clear, transparent and comprehensible provisions — they are, after all, acts of local law.

From architects' perspective an important issue is urban and architectural competitions. I consider them a very valuable instrument for selecting the best design solutions, and often also a form of promotion for the city. In Gdynia, however, we had a situation in which competitions were written into local plans as an obligatory requirement. In a supervisory ruling the Pomeranian Voivode challenged such provisions, holding that a local plan cannot impose additional obligations going beyond the statutory framework.

This shows that a plan should set unambiguous rules but cannot introduce imprecise or excessive requirements. I have come across provisions such as "the building is to refer to neighbouring architecture". Such wording is open to any interpretation. If, alongside a five-storey, light-coloured



Fig. 4.13. Maciej Zielonka during Panel Discussion II. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

street frontage, someone designs a landmark with a red elevation and justifies that decision as a reference by way of contrast, then formally one may hold that a reference has been made. The question, however, is whether that was the plan's actual intention. Provisions must therefore be precise and legible for all participants in the development process.

I see the greatest threat to conducting a coherent spatial policy, however, at the boundaries between municipalities, especially in a metropolitan area such as the Tri-City conurbation. One city may pursue a consistent, well-considered policy, but just across its boundary another municipality is delivering a completely different strategy. From the point of view of residents and users of space the whole area functions as a single economic and social entity, whereas the planning instruments are dispersed. Effective coordination instruments at regional or metropolitan level are lacking. I regard this as the most serious systemic problem.

Ryszard Gruda

In closing I would like to refer to Bolesław Stelmach's earlier remarks about the need for an act on state architectural policy and an act on the profession of architect.

I wonder, however, whether the formula of an "architecture act" is not too narrow, and whether it may be perceived as action in the interest of a single professional group. Perhaps a better direction would be an act on the quality of space — a broader, more democratic concept covering the whole spectrum of issues connected with spatial order.

High-quality architecture is a public good and should be a matter of shared concern. The question is rather how to institutionalise that concern effectively and how to give it a legal framework that will not be merely a professional postulate but a real instrument for improving the quality of space.



Fig. 4.14. The closing of Panel Discussion II. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

5 Plenary Session III
Architectural policy in the context of the New European Bauhaus and the Davos Baukultur Process

dr Bartosz Macikowski

Chair of the Council of the Pomeranian Regional Chamber of Architects of Poland

Poland, like most European states, has been a signatory of the Davos Declaration since 2018. The ideals guiding the implementation of the idea of Baukultur, and with it the European Commission's New European Bauhaus initiative, should therefore become a key element in programming the development of the country, its cities and its villages — that is, of the built and natural environment broadly understood. Here in Poland, however, a question arises: are these ideas being implemented, and how? Or is it rather that in this respect we have a deficit — and one may venture the thesis that we do? That should prompt the question of what can be done to bring the principles of a high-quality built environment postulated by Davos Baukultur into the mainstream of social and local-government life, and to make them a natural element in the practice of the architect and the urban planner.

What can be done so that the ideas of encouraging courage and creativity, and of exchanging good experience in creating spaces that are beautiful, sustainable and inclusive as postulated by the New European Bauhaus, become an everyday reality of design and of public life — so that they become a way of building and supporting a "culture of community"? Architecture and urban design in the European space have historically produced a cultural phenomenon of cities and their communities (Baukultur) unmatched anywhere else in the world, and one always marked by high quality. It manifests itself also — and perhaps above all — in a beauty that today attracts tourists from around the world, but that also inspires artists and daily influences the quality of social life. The postulates of the New European Bauhaus are an attempt to reclaim BEAUTY: both the beauty that is our historical heritage and the beauty we should create each day by prioritising the quality of the built environment, redefining our needs while respecting the capacities of the natural environment and incorporating them into the shaping of our living sphere. This panel is intended as an attempt to share experience of implementing these ideas at city level in different parts of Europe.



Fig. 5.1. Bartosz Macikowski speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

The Davos Baukultur Process: from principles to practice

Oliver Martin

Chair of the Davos Baukultur Alliance

More and more states are developing their own architectural policies, and the European Union is engaging in initiatives such as the New European Bauhaus and the Davos Baukultur Process. This phenomenon reflects a growing awareness that the quality of our built environment in recent decades has often been inadequate. In many places a deficit in the quality of space is evident, which leads to the conclusion that we must plan and build more responsibly. This is precisely why in recent years many mutually complementary initiatives have emerged, whose shared aim is to improve the quality of the space in which we live.

The Davos process began in 2018 with the adoption of the Davos Declaration. The document was adopted at a conference of ministers of culture held in Davos during the opening of the World Economic Forum. The choice of that moment was not accidental. The point was to send a clear signal that building culture, known as Baukultur, is neither an add-on nor a decoration, but a fundamental element of social and economic development.

Baukultur assumes that the entire built environment is an expression of a society's culture. What we build, how we plan space, and also what we do not plan or deliver, is an expression of our Baukultur. High-quality Baukultur means pursuing quality understood in a holistic and multidimensional way.

That quality has been described through eight criteria:

- governance — covering planning strategies, good practice, the role of experts and public participation;
- function — relating to health, safety and accessibility;
- environment — including biodiversity protection, action for sustainable development and counteracting the effects of climate change;
- economy — understood as the long-term viability of an investment, taking into account the life cycle of the building and the relationship between construction and maintenance costs;
- diversity — covering the multifunctionality of space, integrating public spaces and counteracting ghettoisation and gentrification;
- context — relating to cultural heritage, local specificity, spatial coherence and the relationship with landscape;
- sense of place — understood as a feeling of belonging to a place and a landscape;
- beauty — that is, aesthetics, the positive reception of space and its atmosphere.

Visiting international property fairs such as Expo Real or MIPIM (Marché International des Professionnels de l'Immobilier), one can see the scale of the contemporary property market — billion-euro investments and elaborate financing systems. This is not a new phenomenon, yet for a long time representatives of the business sector were missing from many debates about the quality of the built environment. The discussion about quality often took place within a narrow circle of experts. For this reason, at the second ministerial conference in 2023, the Davos Baukultur Alliance was established. The alliance brings together the private sector, public administration, civil society and professional organisations. Its members commit to observing the principles set out in the Davos Declaration and the eight quality criteria. Since its creation the initiative has gathered more than eighty members from around the world.

Work is carried out both at conferences and within four thematic groups. The three main areas are: climate change and urban resilience; sustainable construction and the circular economy; and accessibility and social values. Each of these themes is analysed in relation to the eight quality criteria in a holistic way. An architectural project should therefore be at once environmentally sustainable, socially accessible, rooted in its place and responsive to climate challenges.

The first results of this work have been published as a report available on the alliance's website. It contains innovative case studies covering, among other things, the adaptation and reuse of existing buildings, culture-based solutions and examples of regenerative architecture. One of the key issues remains economics and the search for financial models that favour the creation of high-quality architecture, as well as identifying those that do not support it. The discussion covers, among other things, blended finance and investment incentives at the early stages of projects. Nevertheless, high-quality architecture is still largely financed by the public sector. For it to become a universal standard, it must be scalable and economically viable. This requires appropriate regulation, political support and proof of its long-term economic benefits.

A Pioneering Cities programme has also been launched, aimed at testing Baukultur principles in urban practice. The first cities taking part are Geneva and Kuala Lumpur. The project is intended to show how quality principles can be implemented in specific local conditions.

Two further aspects of the process are worth emphasising. The first is cross-sectoral, multi-level and interdisciplinary cooperation. Although its importance is widely acknowledged, current governance models often do not favour such cooperation. In practice it tends to be the result of



Fig. 5.2. Oliver Martin speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

informal meetings between the right people at the right time. What is needed, however, are new methodologies and more formalised models of collaboration.

The second important issue is the relationship between the global and the local scale. At this year's Venice Architecture Biennale the question arose whether the eight quality criteria are universal in character or are rather a form of exporting Western ideas to countries of the Global South. The conclusion of that debate was the conviction that the principles of quality are universal, but that the specific questions, methods and solutions must always be local and adapted to context.

Similar reflections appear in other countries too, for example in Canada, where work on the quality of the built environment has a strong academic base. The starting point there, however, differs from Europe's. North American cities such as Toronto operate in a different urban and social context. The contemporary suburbs of Zurich, in turn, increasingly begin to resemble uniform global landscapes.

The European point of reference remains the historic European city — with its layered structure, human-friendly scale, developed public space and material rootedness in place. The point, however, is not to copy historical forms but to preserve the principles: human scale, the quality of shared spaces and a strong relationship with context.

A future challenge is to overcome the gulf between the rich heritage of European cities and the banal, uniform architecture of global production. Cultural diversity is, after all, one of Europe's greatest strengths and the foundation of the quality of places. It is a value that residents expect, and one that should be consciously protected and developed.

Creation of the position of State Architect in Estonia

Andro Mänd
City Architect of Tallinn

I currently hold the post of chief architect in Tallinn, and I was previously also president of the Estonian Association of Architects.

Estonia does have an architectural policy document, but it dates from 2002. It was created in entirely different circumstances. At that time climate issues were not yet at the centre of debate, the New European Bauhaus did not exist, and the Davos Declaration had not yet been adopted. As a result the document is now clearly out of date. What is more, one may say that even at the moment of its creation its effectiveness was limited. In 2002 the prevailing belief was that simply adopting an architectural policy document solved the problem. In practice, however, no further action was taken after it was passed. At state level there was no institution responsible for implementing the policy. The document was formally in force and remains so, but in practice it proved ineffective.

The breakthrough came only in 2018, when the Davos Declaration was adopted. Soon after it was signed, the Estonian minister of culture set up a working group called Ruumiloome, which may be roughly translated as a team for the shaping of space. The group analysed the situation in Estonia and compared it with solutions applied in other countries in order to identify possible directions for change. A broad range of participants was involved: representatives of the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of the Economy, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of the Environment, the academic community, the largest municipalities and numerous professional organisations of architects, urban planners and landscape architects.

The breadth of the team's composition also had its consequences, however. The final document had to be agreed by all participants, which meant it took on a fairly general character. Even so, it was an important first step towards change.

It is worth mentioning the earlier context. Some thirty years ago the Estonian Association of Architects had already begun a discussion about creating the institution of a state architect. Initially the idea was not taken seriously. Politicians and officials reacted with considerable mistrust, and even stigmatised the architectural community by suggesting that the aim was to create a post similar to the one once held by Albert Speer. In practice this meant that no attempt was even made to understand the real intentions behind the proposal.

For three decades no breakthrough was achieved. Only in 2018 did a sense emerge that change was possible. After the 2019 elections, however, with the arrival of new ministers, the earlier prejudices and arguments returned.

We then decided to change our strategy. We stopped using the term "state architect", which for many politicians had become politically problematic. Instead we began speaking of the need to create a department of spatial design at government level — an institution responsible for coordinating spatial planning and decisions about space.

In parallel we began gathering concrete examples of mistaken investment decisions resulting from a lack of coordination at state level. One of them was the situation in the town of Valga in the south of the country. Over three decades its population fell by around a third, and a significant part of its building stock was abandoned. The Ministry of the Economy allocated funds to

demolish empty buildings on the outskirts and move residents into the town centre in order to strengthen its urban structure. At the same time, however, the Ministry of Education decided to build a new school precisely on those outskirts, near the forest. It is hard to regard such action as a rational use of public funds.

There were many more examples of this kind. Thanks to them it was easy to explain to the public, the media and politicians why an institution coordinating spatial decisions at state level was needed.

In practice this meant intensive lobbying. Over five years I held more than a hundred meetings with politicians, civil servants, local government representatives and journalists. Gaining the support of the largest cities was especially important. Initially local authorities were decidedly sceptical, fearing interference by central government. Once the potential benefits had been set out, however, they began to support the initiative.

We organised webinars for local authorities, visited them in person and held conversations with opposition politicians. In Estonia elections take place every four years and governments are coalitions, so the composition of the cabinet often changes after just two years. Maintaining relations with the opposition was therefore particularly important, since politicians who are in opposition today may soon be in government.

Before local and parliamentary elections, we also organised debates that were broadcast by major media outlets.. During campaign periods politicians are willing to take part in such events, especially in the presence of the media, which allowed us to obtain public declarations from them.

In parallel we published articles, organised conferences and raised the subject at every opportunity when representatives of the association spoke in public.

In the end one may say that "the heart began to beat again". At the end of 2023 the government took the decision to create a new Spatial Planning Department. Since May this year Estonia has had its first state architect — Tõnis Arjus.



Fig. 5.3. Andro Mänd speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

Panel Discussion III

Participants:

1. dr Bartosz Macikowski – Chair of the Council of the Pomeranian Regional Chamber of Architects of Poland (moderator).
2. Borys Czarakcziew – Chamber of Architects of the Republic of Poland.
3. Michiel van Driessche – City Architect of Groningen.
4. dr Tomasz Konior – Konior Studio.
5. Marcos Ros Sempere – Member of the European Parliament, Chair of the Urban Forum.
6. Catherine Vilquin – member of the Executive Committee of the European Council of Spatial Planners.
7. Oliver Martin – Swiss Federal Office of Culture, Head of the Baukultur Section, Chair of the Davos Baukultur Alliance.

dr Bartosz Macikowski

Today we are talking about Europe, about the Bauhaus and about Baukultur. This is not, however, solely about instruments and tools, which have already been discussed. Social energy and belief in the idea matter just as much. At bottom we are discussing an idea — and an idea is not something wholly unambiguously defined.

I have prepared a set of questions that may help to structure the conversation. At the same time I encourage all participants to formulate their own questions freely, to raise problems and even to bring the audience into the discussion. The most valuable conversation about the European Bauhaus will be one that stays alive, open and oriented towards the future — where we consider not only what this initiative is today but also what it may become.

To begin, I would like to turn to Marcos and ask about the institutional perspective — the European Parliament's point of view. How is the New European Bauhaus initiative perceived from that level? How do MEPs define its significance and role?

Marcos Ros Sempere

Let me begin by thanking the Architects' Council of Europe for the invitation to this event. My particular thanks go also to Ruth Schagemann and Piotr Lorens for inviting me to take part in this meeting again.

I will try to present my perspective both as an architect and professor of urban planning and as a Member of the European Parliament.

In my view we are currently at a key moment for the development of the New European Bauhaus initiative. During the previous parliamentary term the initiative was gradually developed. First came the idea itself, then a broad consultation process was carried out, and later an official European Commission communication was published.



Fig. 5.4. Participants in Panel Discussion III, from the left: Bartosz Macikowski, Catherine Vilquin, Michiel van Driessche, Borys Czarakcziew, Tomasz Konior, Oliver Martin, and Marcos Ros Sempere joining remotely. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

In the European Parliament we also prepared a very important report on the initiative, for which I was rapporteur. In it we indicated a number of concrete measures the European Commission should take to strengthen the development of the New European Bauhaus.

Towards the end of the term I also proposed a pilot project addressed to small towns, concerning the transformation of public spaces in line with the values of the New European Bauhaus.

Today we are at a particularly important moment in implementing this initiative. We have succeeded in securing 500 million euros under the Horizon Europe programme, which we had previously requested from the European Commission. In 2024 a dedicated New European Bauhaus funding area worth 120 million euros was also launched.

In addition, the creation of the New European Bauhaus Facility has recently been announced — a three-year financial programme worth 120 million euros, addressed to universities, research centres and other institutions developing solutions based on the initiative's three core values: sustainability, beauty and inclusiveness.

At the same time, however, very important discussions are under way about the future of European policies. The first of these is the mid-term review of cohesion policy. I do not want to go into detail, but it is worth emphasising that cohesion policy is in practice the most important financial instrument through which the European Union supports cities and municipalities in delivering investments connected with the built environment.

We are currently changing the rules governing these financial instruments, such as the European Regional Development Fund and the cohesion funds. The good news is that housing has been included among their objectives, along with references to the values of the New European Bauhaus.

The second important topic is the discussion on the European Union's next Multiannual Financial Framework for 2028–2034. This is a fundamental issue. We must mobilise the entire community — architects, urban planners, policy-makers, mayors and regional authorities — to put pressure on the European Commission and secure a separate budget for the New European Bauhaus initiative.

For my part, both as rapporteur for the New European Bauhaus initiative and as chair of the European Urban Forum and coordinator of my political group in the European Parliament's REGI committee, we do not intend to give up on this goal. We will consistently press for a dedicated budget for the initiative in the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

We find ourselves, however, at a very delicate moment. New priorities have emerged in Europe arising from the current geopolitical situation: the need for strategic autonomy, for strengthening competitiveness, and questions of defence and security.

At the same time we must defend the conviction that European citizens should be able to live in spaces of high architectural quality, spaces rooted in culture and accessible to all. That is precisely the essence of the values of the New European Bauhaus.

I therefore encourage everyone present, and architects in particular, to work with policy-makers. Only in this way can we secure a lasting place for this initiative in the European Union's future budget.



Fig. 5.5. Michiel van Driessche during Panel Discussion III. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

dr Bartosz Macikowski

We now know that the New European Bauhaus has its own framework for action and has been included in the financial timetable. One may say, then, that its definition is relatively precise.

Catherine, what is your perspective? As an urban planner, how do you see the New European Bauhaus in the context of your city? How do you view the initiative from the point of view of its practical usefulness for urban development?

Catherine Vilquin

I would say that the New European Bauhaus is now well recognised as an idea, whereas the tool developed within it is not yet sufficiently well known.

As a spatial planner I discuss it within the European Council of Spatial Planners. The tool is exceptionally interesting, because it is not an ordinary table of criteria with boxes to tick, but a visual representation of three fundamental values: sustainability, beauty and inclusiveness.

It also sets out working principles that are crucial in the planning process, because they concern how a project is managed and how the whole process unfolds. In practice it is often difficult to show within a project how the process ran and which principles were observed. These principles include, among others: a participatory process, engagement at multiple levels and a transdisciplinary approach.

The ability to use a tool that allows a project to be assessed during delivery or after completion is very valuable. As planners, in our organisation we can actively promote this tool, because it is accessible, intuitive to use and easy to present to residents, stakeholders and city authorities.



Fig. 5.6. Borys Czarakcziew during Panel Discussion III. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

dr Bartosz Macikowski

During Martina Juvara's presentation yesterday a provocative remark was made that we do not need stakeholders, but simply people.

Perhaps, then, it is worth returning to the question of how to persuade residents and local communities to take part in this discussion. It can in fact be put to all the panellists: how do we convince ordinary city residents that this is an idea precisely for them?

I would, however, like to repeat the question about the New European Bauhaus and address it to Michiel. What is your perspective, both in the context of your city, Groningen, and in a broader cultural context? How do you see the initiative and how is it being implemented in practice? What lessons from your experience might be useful for other cities?

Michiel van Driessche

From our perspective the New European Bauhaus is a very broad initiative, which on the one hand is its strength, but on the other means that many practitioners find it hard to understand exactly what it is. In that sense one may have the impression that its real impact on design and planning practice is still limited. What would be needed, therefore, is a more in-depth discussion about which concrete goals and programmes we want to pursue within it.

I listened with great interest to the introduction, which referred to matters such as security and adaptation to climate change. The presentation on creating the office of state architect in Estonia also showed clearly how strongly the practice of architecture and spatial planning can be connected with broad social challenges.

At the same time, during the morning sessions a good deal was said about the cultural value of architecture. It was even suggested that we should not focus too strongly on contemporary topics such as smart cities or climate adaptation.

In my view such an approach would be problematic. If we do not accept that our profession should actively respond to these challenges, we will continue to be seen as a community that makes no real contribution to solving them.

I therefore believe that the key task is to link the cultural value of architecture with the challenges of the present. In this sense the New European Bauhaus can play an important role. My impression is that the initiative is moving in precisely this direction, although in practice its potential is not yet being fully used.

dr Bartosz Macikowski

Borys, I would like to ask about your perspective as a practising architect working within the realities of the Polish planning and investment system, which — as we heard earlier in the addresses by Janusz Sepioł and Bolesław Stelmach — is not among the easiest.

I am also interested in your view from the European level, as a board member of the Architects' Council of Europe. How do you assess the significance of this initiative from that perspective?

Borys Czarakcziew

I think it is very important that in Poland we are beginning a serious discussion about the New European Bauhaus. One may say that this is only the start of a broader debate, which will presumably develop in further stages. It takes on particular significance that we are discussing it here in Gdańsk — a city in which the idea of solidarity acquired a universal dimension and became a symbol of global significance.

From the very beginning the Architects' Council of Europe has been deeply engaged in the development of the New European Bauhaus initiative. We are also part of the Davos Baukultur Alliance. I must admit, however, that when I first heard Ursula von der Leyen's address calling for the creation of a new European generation, it sounded rather abstract to me. Only after several years did I begin to understand the sense of those words better, because recently several phenomena have appeared that fundamentally change the way our society functions.

One of them is increased life expectancy. We no longer operate solely within a three-generation model of grandparents, parents and children. Today we are dealing with a more complex social structure: different generations coexist, from older generations through to those described as X or Y.

The second important factor is the enormous technological transformation connected with digitalisation — the development of artificial intelligence, robotics and other digital technologies. In many areas what until recently seemed like science fiction is becoming reality. A good example is the story of Claudia Mitchell, the first person fitted with a bionic arm controlled by signals from the nervous system. In one experiment the device was transported to Tokyo while she herself was in Florida, and she was able to control it remotely. This shows the scale of the changes we are dealing with.

Today entirely new challenges are appearing, including in architectural design. Even in a matter as basic as designing housing, we do not always yet know what needs will be had by users relying on new assistive technologies.

To this must be added issues that have become particularly visible in recent years: the mounting effects of the climate crisis and the need to improve the energy efficiency of buildings. At the beginning of the twenty-first century we were not yet fully aware of the scale of these challenges.

The pandemic, too, showed us how important it is to rethink our way of life and our way of inhabiting space. And then came another factor: the question of security and defence. Most of the people in this room do not remember the experience of war; we know it above all from our grandparents' accounts. In discussions within the Architects' Council of Europe we therefore concluded that we are living at a moment that may be described as a time for rethinking many fundamental questions.

We speak of four actions: rethink, reuse, recover, rebuild. This also means the need to redefine the role of the architectural profession. Architects, thanks to their multidisciplinary education, can act as coordinators in the processes of responding to these complex challenges.

At the same time the twenty-first century has shown us clearly that we can no longer operate as specialists taking decisions alone. A multidisciplinary and holistic approach is needed, based on cooperation between many different fields and communities

dr Bartosz Macikowski

Tomasz, you are an architect who very clearly stresses the importance of building culture. How, then, in the context of the ideas promoted by the New European Bauhaus, do you define your role as an architect today?

dr Tomasz Konior

I come from Katowice, in Silesia. For the past hundred years this was an area strongly tied to heavy industry, to coal mines, steelworks and many serious environmental and social problems. Today the region is undergoing a profound transformation and is looking for new directions of development.

Perhaps that is precisely why I am an enthusiast of the classical tradition of urban design. With great satisfaction I observe, and try to make use of, the good models present in historic cities: their strong spatial relations between streets, urban blocks, tenement buildings, city squares and parks.

I have the impression that over the last hundred years too much emphasis has been placed on designing individual, autonomous buildings. I believe this is one of the causes of many problems in contemporary cities, especially those connected with the weakening of the urban fabric, its continuity and coherence.

In my work I therefore try to draw on that tradition and to use proven models in projects delivered in a range of contexts. At the same time I emphasise how important the European tradition of city planning is, and how many valuable examples we can find both in Europe and in Poland.



Fig. 5.7. Tomasz Konior during Panel Discussion III. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

Today we are returning once more to the achievements of the old masters and to exceptional urban spaces as a source of inspiration for contemporary design.

The Silesian region is changing from day to day. In former industrial districts and in abandoned post-industrial buildings we try to find new functions and a second life for them. It is an extremely interesting and inspiring field of work.

More and more of the projects carried out in our office today involve modernisation, conversion, adaptation and the reuse of existing buildings. I believe this will be a subject of ever greater importance for architects in the future.

dr Bartosz Macikowski

You have raised a very important thread connected with history. A broader question also arises here: what, in fact, have we learned from the history of architecture and urban design, and from the great ideas and concepts that shaped thinking about the city?

One might cite the concept of garden cities, which in essence was never fully realised in a way corresponding to its original premises. The same was true of the idea of the modernist city. In a sense many other fascinating and progressive urban concepts shared that history, such as the ideas of Metabolism.

That is why history seems to me exceptionally important. During the period of postmodern architecture it was perhaps pushed somewhat aside, treated at times ironically, almost as a kind of game with the past. Yet the ideas behind it were far deeper. Perhaps your perspective is something that should remind us of this.

Oliver, perhaps you could address this question in the context of the New European Bauhaus too, from the perspective of your country or from the point of view of an initiator of the Davos Baukultur Alliance. And perhaps you would also like to add something to the earlier remarks, if you think the discussion is worth supplementing.

Oliver Martin

I am often asked about the difference between the Davos process and the New European Bauhaus initiative. Why are there two initiatives that at first glance seem very similar? In my view we need both, because they are complementary and do not serve the same function.

If we want to succeed — and I think the people gathered in this room would largely agree about what changes are needed, what regulation should look like and in which direction policy should develop — then we must remember that the complexity of these matters is enormous.

That is why the ideas of Baukultur — such as beauty, quality and inclusiveness, which largely overlap with the values of the New European Bauhaus — must become part of the mainstream of public policy. A single separate Baukultur policy operating in isolation is not enough. These values must permeate different areas of state activity.

This means that all ministries responsible for planning, construction and spatial development must be involved. We should no longer be wondering whether Baukultur covers spatial planning

or whether architecture is something separate. In reality we are dealing with a single built environment — one coherent whole.

At different levels more and more initiatives are now appearing that attempt to change something. In my view we do not need one great revolution in the built environment. We rather need many smaller changes.

Take, for example, the problem of housing affordability. The housing crisis in many countries is becoming ever more pressing. The response is often a call to build fast and in large quantities while deregulating various provisions.

Such an approach may produce certain effects in the short term. In the longer perspective, however, it may lead to new problems, because such buildings are often designed with a horizon of around thirty years. Yet contemporary buildings should be designed with a perspective of at least a hundred years. Otherwise we will only be deepening the problems connected with the climate crisis. All these policies must therefore be considered together, so that the best possible solutions can be found. Both the New European Bauhaus and the Davos initiative are trying to bring together different communities of experts, politicians and practitioners in order to develop a new way of thinking about the built environment



Fig. 5.8. Oliver Martin during Panel Discussion III. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

We must get out of our "bubbles". It can be tiring, sometimes uncomfortable and occasionally controversial, but it is necessary. At the same time it can be very inspiring and gives a sense of purpose. Personally I am glad to be living at a time when so much can still be changed and when more and more people can see that change is needed.

dr Bartosz Macikowski

You pointed to the word "together", which immediately brings to mind one of the key elements of this initiative — the triad of values: beautiful, sustainable, together.

If, however, we turn to the classical principles of architecture formulated by Vitruvius, the order was different. First comes firmitas — durability, then utilitas — usefulness, and only at the end venustas, that is beauty, understood as a kind of synthesis of the preceding values. Here, by contrast, the starting point is precisely beauty and the idea of community.

Perhaps we are also touching here on the question of people, which I wanted to put especially to you, Marcos. It is for them, after all, that these ideas are created: for societies and for city residents.

How do we convince people of this vision? If we want it to be understood, we must also appeal to emotions. It is worth avoiding formulations such as "Brussels says" or "the European Union has decided…", because they often create distance.

People have to believe in the idea. And if we are speaking of a bottom-up approach rather than solutions imposed from above, then we mean an idea that spreads as widely as possible and reaches the lowest social level, so as then to influence city mayors and, further up, the higher levels of government. How do you see this process from the perspective of Spain?

Marcos Ros Sempere

I fully agree. We do not need the language of the "European bubble". We must engage citizens. From my perspective, both as a representative of Spain and as a Member of the European Parliament, involving residents in participatory processes is absolutely crucial. Politicians, architects, technical experts and residents should act together. We are all in the same boat. If we manage to improve the quality of the built environment in which we live and make it more sustainable, that will of course be a political achievement, but above all a real improvement in people's quality of life.

In Spain, at the moment when the New European Bauhaus initiative was launched, we were running in parallel a broad participatory process connected with the adoption of an architectural quality act — one of the most advanced regulations of this kind among the twenty-seven EU member states. It was a very intensive consultation process. Representatives of local and regional authorities, various organisations and citizens themselves all had their say.

At the same time the New European Bauhaus initiative conducted a broad public consultation. It lasted a year and comprised more than two thousand meetings across Europe. Thousands of proposals were gathered from both individual citizens and large organisations. That is precisely the bottom-up approach: engaging people.

At the same time, this process must begin already at the stage of designing the decision-making mechanism itself. We cannot say to residents: "We have already decided about your neighbourhood or your building — which of these versions do you like better?" That is not genuine participation.

We should be with people from the very beginning, when the basic question arises: what do you need? What are your needs? What can be done in your neighbourhood? How can we improve the quality of this space? Only then can one speak of residents genuinely taking part in the decision-making process. Otherwise it will be another standard consultation process, one of many that have already taken place in history, and it will not produce the effect we need today under the New European Bauhaus initiative.

Catherine Vilquin

I would like to return to the three values of the New European Bauhaus initiative, and especially to the one connected with inclusiveness.

If we speak of participatory processes, the first step consists in involving people in the process. The second stage is co-design. The third and most ambitious consists in the project ultimately being managed by the community itself — that is, an element of self-governance appears.

I have in mind the example of a project in Belgium: the former railway site in Leuven known as Hal 5. It was identified as a good example of a New European Bauhaus project because it was run entirely by the local community. It involved transforming an existing building into a space serving social functions for residents.

In this case the architects and urban planners, who were brought into the process at a later stage, were not the project's principal authors. They acted rather as facilitators — people supporting and moderating the community's efforts. We spoke earlier about the profession of architect and urban planner undergoing a significant transformation today. This is precisely one example of



Fig. 5.9. Catherine Vilquin during Panel Discussion III. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

that change. We must also learn to take on the role of moderators and of partners supporting projects that arise from the bottom up.

Oliver Martin

I would like to respond to this, because participatory governance is of course extremely important and is also one of the criteria we take into account. A certain question arises, however, about how people are engaged.

We often show residents good examples. That is how the Davos Baukultur Alliance works too, presenting innovative practices and positive projects. Sometimes, however, I have the impression that showing bad examples might be just as effective. People have a very good sense of what they like and what they do not. And yet we almost never show unsuccessful projects in order to explain why they are problematic and how they might be improved. That is a pity, because it could be very instructive.

We also conducted research at the London School of Economics to check whether high architectural quality translates into economic value. The results showed that there is indeed evidence for this. The problem, however, lies in the information asymmetry on the buyers' side. When someone buys a flat, they often lack the knowledge to judge whether a building is of high quality or not. If someone buys a flat in a large block, they are usually simply glad to have found an offer at all. In many cases the choice is limited, so people settle for what is available. Most buyers are of course satisfied with their choice, but nobody shows them that the building could have been far better and need not have been any more expensive.

I would therefore like to ask: do you ever show people bad examples in order to consider together why they are problematic?

Catherine Vilquin

I once worked in my city in the south of Belgium on a project to regenerate a very poor neighbourhood. The city authorities asked us to organise workshops with residents.

We began preparing information materials to encourage people to take part in the meetings. The problem, however, was that the leaflet was prepared only in French. We therefore asked for permission to prepare it in other languages as well, because many people speaking various languages lived in that neighbourhood, including Albanian. Local community organisations told us plainly: "if the announcement is only in French, nobody will come." Unfortunately we were unable to obtain these materials in other languages. It was all the more unfortunate given that the city had allocated significant funds to a broad participatory process. And yet this one administrative barrier appeared.

The workshops did eventually take place, but the participants were mainly French-speaking Belgians living in the neighbourhood. They too were of course part of the community and faced their own problems. Around two thirds of the neighbourhood's residents, however, took no part in the process at all, because the information never reached them.

That is why today, working on similar projects, I stress very strongly how important it is to translate information materials and to reach all the groups of residents who actually live in a given place.

Michiel van Driessche

I understand the need for participatory processes and for engaging residents. In Groningen we do a great deal in this area. Every year we organise a "City Makers" congress at which everyone working on the city's development can present their initiatives, and participation is open to all.

I have the impression, however, that we are overlooking a certain group. We usually think in terms of a business–citizen relationship. It is of course important to engage end users, that is the residents of the cities we work on. But communication between institutions and sectors matters just as much.

We are talking about architecture as a cultural act and a participatory practice. From my perspective, as city architect in Groningen but also in other cities, the greatest challenge is to connect architecture and spatial planning with other sectors: energy, the economy, housing and mobility.

All these areas are currently undergoing a profound transformation. Change is happening very fast, and we often react too slowly. We must communicate the spatial value of our work better to other fields, both political and administrative.

In the Netherlands the energy transition is advancing very rapidly. New energy networks have to be built in cities, and within three years practically every street will have been rebuilt. There is no time for long discussions about the quality of space. If we do not keep pace, mediocre streets will be created, whereas this is the ideal moment to redesign them and improve their quality. I would therefore like to see how initiatives such as the New European Bauhaus can support better internal communication between departments in cities, provinces and regions.



Fig. 5.10. Panel Discussion III. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

Borys Czarakcziew

There is a serious problem with persuading people to change and engaging them in such processes, especially in this part of Europe. Hubert Trammer, a member of the New European Bauhaus Round Table, once told me that under the European Green Deal not all stakeholders were identified and it was not understood how the changes would affect their lives. A good example is the farmers' protests against that policy.

Many people simply do not understand why they should pay more for energy if it means a fall in their standard of living. Believe me: during the presidential campaign in Poland the subject of climate practically did not appear in the debate. For many people that problem essentially does not exist. Some people do not understand the concept of a carbon footprint at all. This shows how difficult it is to engage society in initiatives such as the New European Bauhaus. In the European Union one sometimes hears of a "two-speed Europe". For years the countries of this part of the continent were told: you are in that second speed. Why, then, should we now be at the forefront of change?

A year ago I took part in a conversation with Regina Gürtler and Ruth Schagemann. I asked them what the most important message for architects for the coming year was. Both answered in a similar way: rethink our approach to space and return to the roots.

dr Tomasz Konior

In the previous panel Prof. Sławomir Gzell spoke about courage in our role as architects and urban planners. In my view that courage is a response to the enormous number of bad examples in space that have generated many problems. Today we are talking above all about looking for solutions.

The most important aspect of our work, however, is responsibility for the future — for every project, every space and every decision concerning the future. Our role is to create spaces in which people can live well and be happy. That is why, instead of speaking of courage, I would prefer to use the word responsibility in relation to our work and our profession.

Oliver Martin

I agree with what has been said. Technical problems, such as energy, are often based on numbers, standards and objective indicators. For example, when installing a heat pump the permissible noise level may not exceed 45 decibels. If someone argues, "but we have a particular sense of place and quiet here, so the noise should be no more than 22 decibels", they usually lose, because there are no hard data.

Yet today it is possible to measure the physical response of a human being to space. One can check whether it produces positive or negative sensations. One could even introduce a rule: if more than 30% of people react negatively to a space, the investor bears financial consequences. That too is a cost. The trouble is that at present the costs of poor-quality space are shifted onto society. We know, for instance, that in districts with high-quality public space there are fewer emergency visits to first-aid points, which means real savings for the health system.

Such costs are rarely taken into account, however. We must therefore think differently and treat the quality of space as a requirement as important as any other technical parameter..

dr Bartosz Macikowski

I would like to sum up the discussion. To promote the idea of the New European Bauhaus, we must be people who believe in it, dreamers, and even a little utopian.

The New European Bauhaus refers back to an idea that is already a hundred years old and has endured since the creation of the famous school building in Dessau. Perhaps it is worth rewriting, rethinking and dreaming these great ideas anew.

Let me also repeat words that have already been spoken at this conference: we need people. We must engage them. And we must have courage.



RFig. 5.11. The audience during Panel Discussion III. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

New European Bauhaus in the everyday work of an architectural office

Carl Bäckstrand
Vice-President of the Architects' Council of Europe

I would like to share with you the experience of White Arkitekter, the practice where I work day to day. Our main base is the office in Stockholm, located in the very heart of the city.

I listened with great attention to the earlier addresses, and in response to them I would like to present a few case studies. They will show how, in everyday design practice, we implement the principles of the New European Bauhaus and what path brought us to our present way of working.

Sweden is a country with an exceptionally long coastline and enormous forest resources. Interestingly, urbanisation came to us relatively late. One may have the impression that as a society we are still learning how best to function in cities, although each year we make enormous progress in this respect.

About White Arkitekter: shared architecture

White Arkitekter currently employs more than 500 people. What distinguishes us from other large practices, and what we are particularly proud of, is our ownership structure — the firm is wholly owned by its employees. The fact that we are our own owners has a fundamental influence on our organisational culture, our independence in design and the way the practice is run.

The practice's history goes back to the early 1950s. Its founder, Sidney White, began by winning a competition for a housing estate, which was a response to the post-war housing crisis in Sweden. Today we are a modern, interdisciplinary organisation. Although the core of the team consists of architects, we work closely with landscape architects, interior designers, and also with biologists, social anthropologists and data experts.

The pillars of the New European Bauhaus

The New European Bauhaus (NEB) initiative, announced in 2020, became an important point of reference for us, although we were already implementing ideas close to it earlier. A significant role in promoting this approach in Sweden was played by Helena Bjarnegård, the National Architect, who from the outset stressed the initiative's enormous potential.

At White Arkitekter, sustainability has defined what we do for decades. In the 1990s environmental questions joined the deeply rooted social aspects of our work. Today digitalisation provides key support for us. Digital tools not only make design itself more efficient but above all allow reliable data to be gathered, which translates into better design decisions and more transparent participatory processes.

Case study 1: The regeneration of Slussen (Stockholm)

The first example is Slussen — a strategic point in the centre of Stockholm. In the 1930s a gigantic transport interchange oriented towards car traffic was built here. It is also a critical point where the waters of Lake Mälaren meet the Baltic.

In the face of climate change, Slussen required complete reconstruction in order to protect the city from fluctuations in water levels. While Foster and Partners took on the infrastructural side, our practice was entrusted with designing the public spaces and the landscape. It is an exceptionally



Fig. 5.12. Visualisation of the Slussen regeneration project. Source: White Arkitekter.

complex urban task that required reconciling technical aspects with ecological ones (for instance ensuring fish migration between fresh and salt water) and providing comfort for residents within this intensive urban fabric.

Case study 2: Inclusive planning in Barking (London)

In the London borough of Barking we adopted a "public space first" strategy. We believe that building a city is more than putting up residential buildings — it is creating the conditions for a dignified life.

The project rests on three NEB pillars: sustainability, aesthetics and inclusiveness. We placed particular emphasis on public participation. Research by Stockholm University points to a troubling disproportion: public spaces designed for young people are 80% appropriated by boys. To change this, we invited a teenage girls' theatre group and youth leaders to work with us. Such an approach to planning challenges established design conventions.

Case study 3: Stockholm Wood City

Next to the well-known Hammarby Sjöstad district, on the site of the former Atlas Copco factory and a quarry, Wood City is being built. The developer's aim was to transform this post-industrial area into a mixed-use district that will become a global showcase for timber construction. Our aim here is to combine the industrial heritage harmoniously with modern, ecological technology.

Case study 4: Sara Kulturhus (Skellefteå)

The last example is Sara Kulturhus in Skellefteå in northern Sweden — one of the tallest timber buildings in the world. This cultural centre combined with a hotel became a genuine laboratory for cross-laminated timber (CLT) construction. Thanks to the ambitious approach of the client and the contractor, the project became a model for reducing the carbon footprint in architecture on a large scale.

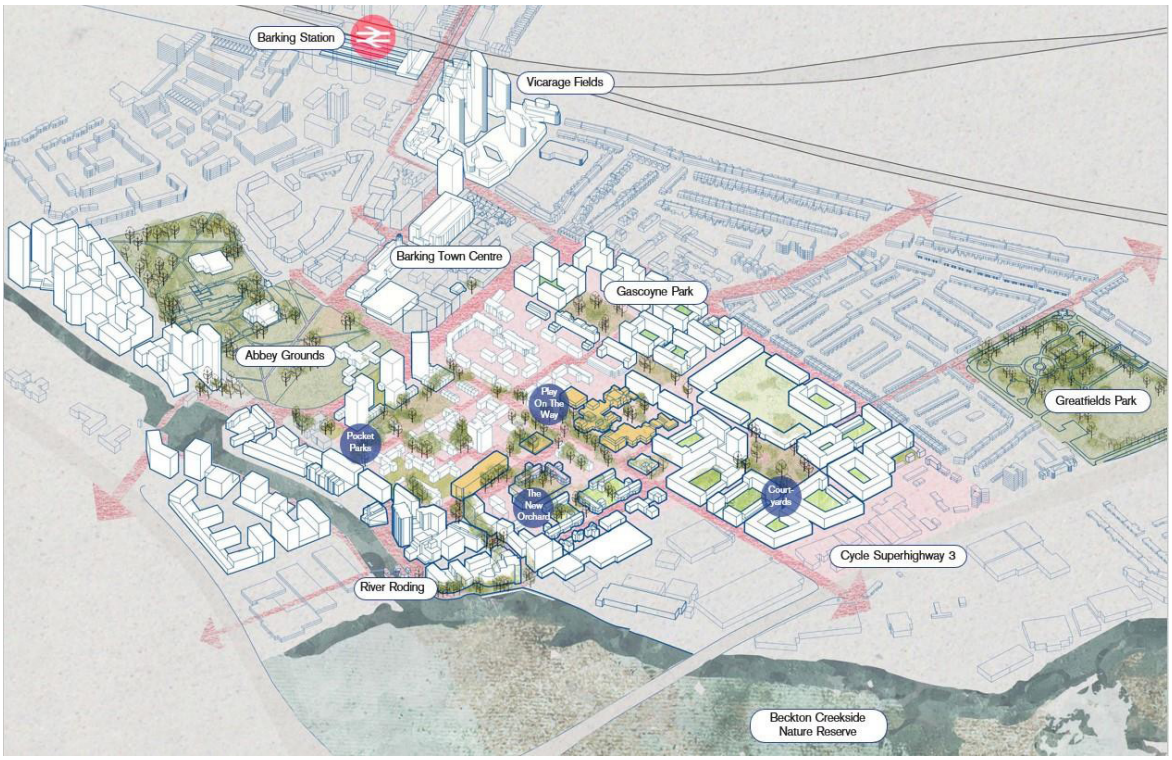

Fig. 5.13. Masterplan of the project in Barking, London. Source: White Arkitekter.

Podsumowanie

The success of all these undertakings would not have been possible without ambitious and well-informed clients. It is their courage that allows us to push the boundaries of architecture. The greatest satisfaction, however, comes at the moment when a building begins to live a life of its own. In Skellefteå, theatre artists began using the timber façade as a natural stage set for their performances. That is the best proof that good architecture is architecture that invites its users to recreate it anew every day.



Fig. 5.14. Sara Kulturhus (Skellefteå). Source: White Arkitekter.



Fig. 5.15. Carl Bäckstrand speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

6 Plenary Session IV
Architectural policy in the context of housing challenges

Borysz Czarakcziew

Member of the Executive Board of the Architects' Council of Europe

Today's meeting is an opportunity to set financial questions aside for a moment and focus on what too often remains in their shadow: the quality of the housing environment.

I would like to invite you to reflect on how architectural policies can become an instrument for building long-term value in social, spatial and environmental terms. It is also a good moment to put forward the thesis that high-quality housing architecture is not a luxury but one of the basic conditions of sustainable development and social cohesion. In some parts of Europe prices already exceed 12,000 euros per square metre — but does a high price go hand in hand with high quality?

Today's session focuses on the question of how we can use the instruments of architectural policy to build new standards of quality in housing, at European, national and local level alike. The key question we should ask ourselves today is not: can we afford quality? The right question is: can we afford the lack of it?



Fig. 6.1. Borys Czarakcziew speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

A European plan for affordable housing

Stefan Moser

Head of the housing unit at the European Commission

I head a unit in the newly established Housing Task Force at the European Commission. It is a coordinating body formally located within the Directorate-General for Energy (DG ENER) but which in practice covers all the key aspects connected with housing.

The team's task is to advise Commissioner Dan Jørgensen, responsible for energy and housing, who at the initiative of President Ursula von der Leyen has been charged with taking action on the mounting housing crisis. The phenomenon affects many member states, particularly urban areas, and has reached a scale requiring a coordinated response.

Responsibility for housing policy lies primarily with the member states, and competences are dispersed across national, regional and local levels. It was recognised, however, that stronger support and coordination at European level were needed.

The European Union has a range of legal instruments at its disposal. Alongside the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive there are regulations on environmental protection, construction products and matters of a social character. Our task is above all to support their efficient and effective implementation, and to identify areas where better cooperation between different actors is possible. Coordination remains one of the key challenges. In this context architects and urban planners have a particularly important role to play. As systemic advisers they can bring together different perspectives and support the process of balancing interests, looking at the problem as a whole.

The importance of this role grows in the face of the need to reconcile many, often competing objectives: housing affordability, sustainability, quality of life, inclusiveness, health and aesthetics, which also has a cultural dimension. The work currently conducted by the European Commission in cooperation with the European Parliament, the Council and a broad range of stakeholders focuses on the search for more inclusive and effective solutions.

Many citizens are today under severe pressure. In numerous cases access to housing — both physical and financial — is severely limited. More and more people cannot afford decent housing conditions. The problem has not only a social but also an economic dimension. The housing crisis limits workers' mobility and makes it harder to move to places where jobs are available, which leads to a growing separation between labour and housing markets. It also affects students and trainees, who often make educational decisions not on the basis of the quality of what is offered but on the availability of housing.

Analysis of these phenomena must be detailed and must take local context into account. Although at European level we see general trends, the situation varies greatly even within a single member state. Here too architects and spatial planning specialists can play an important role by supplying the reliable data and analysis needed for a responsible debate.

It is necessary to move away from discussions based solely on opinions towards an evidence-based approach. This requires precise definition of problems, determining their scale and selecting adequate instruments. From a European perspective the work focuses on both the supply and the demand side.

On the supply side the key is to increase the efficiency of the construction sector and reduce the costs of delivering investments, both new build and refurbishment. On the demand side what matters are the mechanisms by which housing markets function, covering both regulatory and financial instruments. Particular attention is needed for vulnerable groups: people in difficult life situations, young people, students, trainees, older people and people with disabilities. In some regions of Europe we also observe growing tensions between the housing function and tourism — a sector that is economically important but in many cases exceeds the level acceptable to local communities.

Within the Affordable Housing Plan under preparation we are focusing on identifying good practice, defining success criteria and developing principles for responding effectively to these challenges. Financing remains an important element. Our aim is not only to increase its scale but also to improve coordination between different sources. These include cohesion policy funds, European Investment Bank resources, and national instruments including state aid and the activity of development banks. In parallel we are working on creating a European housing finance platform that will support cities and investors through advice on financing and public policy.

Another important area is international cooperation. Strengthening the exchange of experience, both within the European Union and beyond it, can help break entrenched patterns and support more effective learning. We are also working with the European Parliament, which is currently holding hearings on this subject. In the second half of the year, during the Danish presidency of the EU Council, member states will jointly define their expectations of the European level.

In the field of housing we do not have legislative competences as strong as those in energy. Our role consists above all in supporting cooperation rather than imposing solutions. In June 2025 a public consultation on the Affordable Housing Plan is planned, which will make it possible to gather a broad spectrum of opinion.



Fig. 6.2. Stefan Moser speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

We are counting in particular on the involvement of architects and urban planners, both in the public debate and in more in-depth expert consultation. From their perspective, matters such as quality, aesthetics, safety, inclusiveness, sustainability, material efficiency, the circular economy and affordability remain crucial. In doing so we must abandon the belief that these values are in contradiction. The relationship between quality and affordability is not a zero-sum one. What

matters is how quality is defined and how costs are managed effectively. This is not about cheap building but about affordable building. For that reason cost questions must be taken into account at an early stage of the design process. Here the role of architects is fundamental, among other things through the choice of materials, technologies and design solutions. At the same time we must remember the limited availability of public funds. They can act as a catalyst, but they cannot finance all the needs. Engaging the private sector is therefore crucial, and it must operate within an appropriately shaped regulatory and financial environment.

The Affordable Housing Plan will take the form of a strategy and an action plan. Its aim is to identify good practice and to indicate areas requiring further intervention. It will not fully resolve the housing crisis. It may, however, help to improve the situation and ease pressure on housing markets. In the coming years it will be possible to assess the effects of the measures implemented and to decide on any further engagement at European level.

The role of architecture in "soft urbanism"

Frank D'hondt

Secretary General of the International Society of City and Regional Planners

My address in a sense picks up threads raised at the beginning of today's meeting, and is more in the nature of an open reflection than an ordered lecture. I apologise in advance for possible repetitions: some of these ideas have already been voiced today, and some will no doubt reappear tomorrow. It is worth noting, however, that the recurrence of the same themes testifies to their importance and to the fact that they resonate between different speakers and national contexts.

I come from Belgium, live in Athens and work in various parts of the world. One of my main areas of activity is my involvement in ISOCARP, the International Society of City and Regional Planners. The organisation's secretariat is in The Hague, while its activity is global in character. I work, among other places, in Vietnam, Saudi Arabia and many other countries.

ISOCARP operates on a global scale — we are therefore not confined to the European context but look at the world as a network of interconnected cities. Although formally we function within a system of nation states, as reflected for instance in the structure of the UN, in practice it is cities that are becoming the key level of action, closer to residents, to everyday life and to the challenges of sustainable development.

This perspective is illustrated by a kind of "urban map of the world" — a network of connections between the centres in which we work. It covers both the locations of projects and events and areas affected by conflict.

Recently, reflections connected with the war in Ukraine and the question of its future reconstruction have taken on particular significance. Similar challenges also affect other regions of the world, including the Gaza Strip and Sudan. On the other hand, it is worth pointing to positive examples too, such as Riyadh, where the next edition of the ISOCARP World Planning Congress is planned.

Day to day I work in planning practice, from analysing planning systems to working with local communities on development visions. Recently I worked in the city of Bến Tre in the Mekong Delta on a concept for reviving the city centre. It is an example of very concrete, operational planning work.

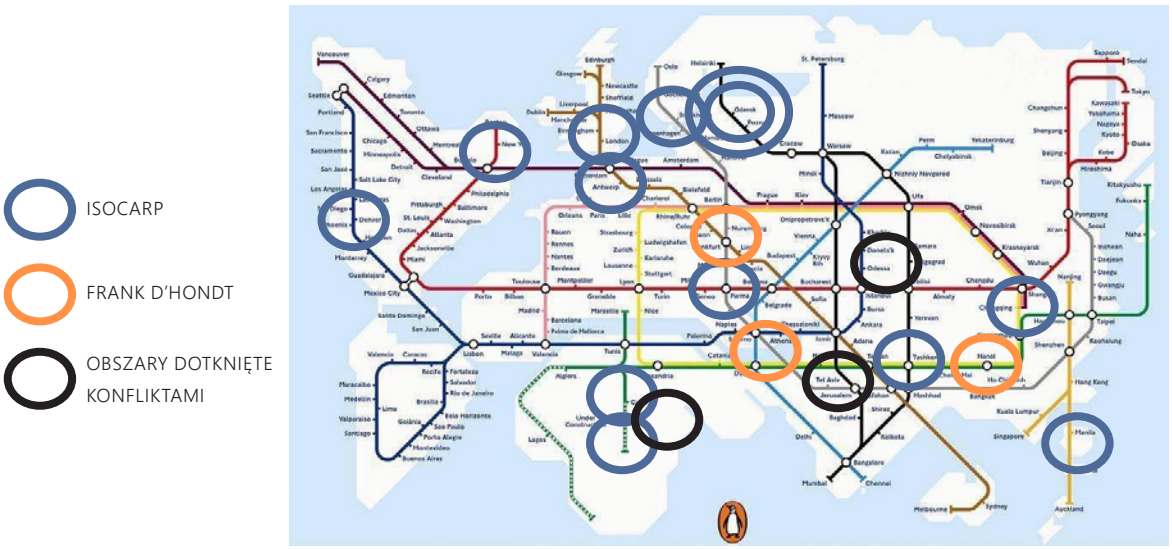

Fig. 6.3. "Urban map of the world". Source: Frank D'hondt.

Although architecture was my passion as a student, it was not a significant part of my formal planning education. This conference has therefore been an impulse for me to ask again about the relationship between planning and architecture and about the possibilities of integrating them.

In this context it is worth noting that contemporary tools such as ChatGPT are able to generate correct definitions and point to potential fields of cooperation, such as the integration of public policies, design and public participation. They will not, however, replace practical experience, which remains crucial for understanding the complexity of these processes. One of the most important conclusions is the need to build greater synergy between architecture and spatial planning. Contemporary challenges — such as density, housing affordability and community engagement — require an integrated approach.

This does not mean there are no tensions. One of the fundamental conflicts remains the relationship between market pressure and the aims of public policy. In many countries housing policy has been strongly subordinated to market mechanisms, which leads to phenomena such as spatial segregation and a narrowing of the diversity of building types.

From a planning perspective one thing must be stated clearly: no architectural or housing policy can be divorced from spatial context. Every action must be embedded in a specific place, taking account of its social, environmental and cultural conditions.

The relationship between architectural policy, spatial planning and housing is crucial for creating sustainable urban environments — inclusive, resilient to climate change and responsive to residents' needs. An integrated approach allows these policies to complement one another, leading to coherent and living urban structures.

Of particular importance in this context is the concept of sustainable urbanism. Architectural design plays an important role here, among other things through the incorporation of green infrastructure and the reduction of environmental impact. Appropriately targeted public policies can reinforce these processes.

More broadly, this fits into the evolution of planning itself: from the classical division into town and country planning, through spatial planning, to contemporary approaches integrating the urban

and regional scales. Whatever the terminology, the common denominator remains the pursuit of sustainable development. This may be expressed through five pillars: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership. In this context the distinction between "hard" and "soft" urbanism is particularly interesting. The concept of soft urbanism, developed among other things in cooperation with the UN, points to the need to create environments that are more adaptable, inclusive and human-oriented. This approach stresses the importance of integrating physical and digital space and of focusing on residents' wellbeing and environmental health. In this sense architecture ceases to be merely a material form and becomes an instrument supporting broader social processes.

In practice this also means the need for greater integration of legal, financial and design instruments. The financial aspect is particularly important, often marginalised in design discussions yet crucial for the real feasibility of an investment. Communication is also gaining in importance. Contemporary planning is a team process based on dialogue and negotiation. In this context the role of architectural visualisation is growing. Caution is needed, however. Attractive images can come to dominate the actual content of a plan. There is therefore a risk that decisions will be taken on the basis of visual representations rather than a real understanding of design assumptions. The development of tools based on artificial intelligence further accelerates this process. Generating images has become extremely easy, which raises questions about control over the quality and credibility of what is communicated.

In closing it is worth recalling the example of the masterplan for Baku, prepared by a German design practice and honoured by ISOCARP with an Award for Planning Excellence in 2022. The project is an attempt to combine a systems approach with elements of architectural visualisation, integrating different scales and disciplines.

This kind of approach, combining analysis, design and communication, is particularly valued at ISOCARP. The final outcome, however, always depends on implementation, since even the best plan remains merely potential if it is not delivered. In 2026 Baku will also host the next World Urban Forum. Other important events will take place in parallel, including the COP climate summit in Belém.



Fig. 6.4. Frank D'hondt speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

Panel Discussion IV

Participants:

1. Borys Czarakcziew – Member of the Executive Board of the Architects' Council of Europe, Coordinator of Area "Creating Quality in the Built Environment" (moderator).
2. Markus Hedorfer – President of the European Council of Spatial Planners (ECTP-CEU).
3. Bahaa Bou Kalfouni – Gdańsk University of Technology.
4. prof. Piotr Lorens – City Architect of Gdańsk.
5. Nicola Matthews – Senior Architect at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, member of the European Conference of Directors of Architectural Policy.
6. Eugen Pănescu – Chair of the ACE working group on urban and housing transformation.
7. Szymon Wojciechowski – APA Wojciechowski Architekci.
8. Frank D'hondt – Secretary General of the International Society of City and Regional Planners (ISOCARP).
9. Stefan Moser – Head of the housing unit at the European Commission.



Fig. 6.5. Participants in Panel Discussion IV, from the left: Borys Czarakcziew, Frank D'hondt, Piotr Lorens, Szymon Wojciechowski, Eugen Pănescu, Bahaa Bou Kalfouni, Markus Hedorfer, Nicola Matthews, Stefan Moser. Source: Mikołaj Wantoch Rekowski.

Borys Czarakcziew

Let me begin with a short, informal question that can be answered yes or no.

Stefan — do you know of a politician who built their political career on the subject of housing?

Stefan Moser

No.

Borys Czarakcziew

Thank you. I expected that answer. The subject of housing can be attractive today and appears ever more often in public debate, yet it rarely forms the real foundation of a political career.

Being an expert working on housing strategy at the level of the European Commission: Please tell us how will the planned measures take account of questions of quality, such as design or residents' wellbeing?

Stefan Moser

That is in fact the starting point. First one must define what quality is, analyse it and subject it to broad public consultation covering residents of both urban and rural areas. It is crucial to define needs over the long term. This is not about stopgap solutions that in future will prove ineffective both in terms of cost and of fit with real social needs. Only on that basis can one move to the delivery stage, while maintaining affordability, which remains one of the basic conditions of an effective housing policy. At the same time quality should not be subject to negotiation. It should be the starting point for a broad public debate, not an element of compromise.



Fig. 6.6. Borys Czarakcziew during Panel Discussion IV. Source: Mikołaj Wantoch Rekowski.

Borys Czarakcziew

We keep our fingers crossed for that. I recall a conference in Madrid in which you took part, when our president Ruth Schagemann was told by developers that quality costs. In reality, however, quality is a long-term investment.

Frank, thank you for your presentation, particularly for the reference to Baku. Perhaps you know that a significant part of that city's architecture from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was designed by Polish architects. What is more, the parliament buildings in both Baku and Warsaw were designed by the same architect.

You presented a very broad range of activity. How would you define the role of the concept of soft urbanism in shaping housing policy, particularly in the area of public housing?

Frank D'hondt

Let me refer to the idea of the New European Bauhaus. Its motto is: beautiful, sustainable, together. Such simple principles act as a kind of signpost. In practice it is very easy to get lost in the crush of topics that seem most important at any given moment. Only distance allows one to judge what really matters.

Spatial planning is an exceptionally complex field, and housing still more so. Importantly, it is not a particularly "popular" subject, despite its fundamental role. It is worth recalling that ISOCARP grew out of the International Federation of Housing and Planning — an organisation with more than a century of history, rooted in the ideas of Ebenezer Howard and the garden city movement, which combined planning, design and housing.

Over time, however, as we focused more on planning and design, we drifted somewhat away from housing itself. Today we are trying to return to it and bring it back into the mainstream of the discussion through greater integration and "hybridisation" of these fields.

We do not have all the answers. What is crucial, however, is to hold to basic values and principles. We should combine existing planning instruments, such as the international guidelines on planning, with objectives relating to affordability, sustainability and the quality of housing architecture.

Borys Czarakcziew

We are therefore at a point where we are gathering various ideas and directions for a future housing policy. There is also a clear need to change our approach to space. Perhaps we should rethink the function of certain areas, for example car parks, and consider converting them to housing. At the same time we have an enormous stock of existing buildings that require adaptation and reuse. Nicola, how do you assess these directions? This is, after all, your field of specialisation.

Nicola Matthews

I would like to refer to Ireland's experience in creating an architectural policy. It was a particular situation for us, because we were simultaneously preparing a national document, "Places for People". A great asset was the ability to look at experience from across Europe, to analyse good practice, case studies and initiatives such as Urban Maestro and the concept of Baukultur.

This significantly influenced our approach to architectural policy. Transferring European ideas to the national level, including the principles of the New European Bauhaus, allowed us to achieve more than in previous strategic documents. We improved cooperation with local authorities and gained a better understanding of the role of so-called soft governance instruments. We also moved to implementing the policy in practice by working with partners and conducting a new kind of dialogue about architecture. A good example is the event in Dublin connected with the EU Mies Award. It created a space for discussion about the quality of housing, engaging public administration, planners, architects, universities and students.

Another example is the Housing Unlocked initiative. In the spirit of the New European Bauhaus we began with a simple question: how do we solve the problem, and how do we gather people capable of thinking outside the box? Working with the Irish Architecture Foundation and the Arts Council, we invited architectural practices to look for solutions making use of vacant and disused buildings. The result was an interesting exhibition showing the possibilities of densification, adaptation and the transformation of existing structures into new spaces to live in.

These are only selected examples, but they illustrate well the direction in which housing policy can be developed.

Borys Czarakcziew

Thank you. Before we move on to Eugen, I would like to recall that last November in Kraków we signed the Kraków Declaration — a document prepared jointly by the Architects' Council of Europe (ACE) and ICOMOS.

The declaration concerns the protection of architectural heritage, particularly twentieth-century buildings that are not covered by formal conservation protection but deserve to be reused and preserved for future generations. I consider this an important element of the debate on housing, especially in the context of adapting existing housing stock.



Fig. 6.7. Nicola Matthews during Panel Discussion IV. Source: Mikołaj Wantoch Rekowski.

Within Area 3 we also prepared a letter to DG Housing at the European Commission, in which we gathered the main challenges connected with housing. Eugen, you led the team working on that document — please tell us which instruments, beyond architectural competitions, you see as useful for public authorities.

Eugen Pănescu

In fact there are few subjects in our work today that are not connected with housing. It is a cross-cutting issue that arouses enormous interest and affects many other areas of how cities function. The key question is how to achieve the quality we spoke of earlier, and how to find solutions adequate to particular situations. We also reflect too rarely on the costs of bad design. Those costs exist — but they reveal themselves only over the longer term.

If we want to avoid those costs, we must consistently pursue good design quality. It can be achieved, among other means, through architectural competitions and appropriately constructed criteria in public procurement. These solutions are not sufficient, however. We cannot stop at the mere postulate of organising competitions and applying procurement procedures. They are only instruments, and they must be based on clearly defined quality criteria.

To define those criteria, we must first understand what quality actually is in a given context. It is a largely subjective concept. It does not come down solely to technical parameters such as insulation, floor area or fit-out standard, although these of course remain important. Quality is also connected with the individual situation of the resident and the way the space is used. Everyone experiences their home differently. What is valuable to one person may be of no significance to another.

In Romania, during the COVID-19 pandemic, we attempted to address this problem. It was a moment conducive to reflection. Within a broad expert team in which architects were a minority, we developed a system of housing quality indicators, focusing on multi-family development. Our aim was to translate the subjective notion of quality into more objective, measurable criteria. It is an important instrument that can serve as a basis for architectural competitions and procurement procedures. It is not enough, after all, to say "let us organise competitions". One must also know by what rules the entries are to be assessed.

It should also be remembered that most construction investment concerns housing, and that the market itself is very diverse and involves many participants: investors, users, developers and financial institutions. It is therefore impossible to regulate the whole system solely through competitions and public procurement, which cover only part of the market. What is more, housing almost never functions in isolation from its urban and climatic context. Buildings are part of neighbourhoods and of a wider urban structure. The quality of a dwelling therefore does not end at its threshold and depends to a large extent on its surroundings. For this reason we have also developed instruments that place housing at the centre of the climate transition and treat it as an integral element of urban space.

Borys Czarakcziew

We are in a beautiful city, and I would like to thank Piotr Lorens and Gdańsk for the hospitality. I think this is a city of a very European character, and I hope you see it that way too.

Piotr, I would like to put a question to you. We have already spoken about instruments and about the future of housing, but now I would ask for more concrete examples. What instruments and measures do you use in Gdańsk to maintain a high quality of housing development? What strategy has been implemented to ensure that quality in the city's urban development processes?

prof. Piotr Lorens

Above all one would have to define what quality actually is. That, in my view, is a fundamental question. On the one hand we have architectural quality; on the other, the structure and composition of the community living in a given place. The notion of quality relates to both aspects at once.

Context must also be taken into account. Private projects delivered by developers for individual buyers must be looked at differently from affordable housing, which usually requires the involvement of public funds. From this perspective it is clear that quality in housing is an exceptionally complex concept. Architectural policy alone is not enough to ensure it. Alongside a design approach, economic instruments are needed, as are individual negotiations with investors on particular projects. All this is essential in order to counteract phenomena such as gentrification, overtourism and other negative processes affecting the city's housing structure.

Given the scale and complexity of these problems, it must honestly be admitted that we are still not coping with them fully. We are, however, becoming better at identifying and locating them, and we are gradually looking for adequate solutions.

One of the key challenges is the fact that dwellings have ceased to be solely places to live and have also become an attractive investment product.

The second important problem is short-term rental, which in Gdańsk has reached significant scale. The Main Town and its immediate surroundings were once home to more than 40,000 people. Today the number of permanent residents is around 12,000. The remaining flats largely function as short-term lets for tourists.



Fig. 6.8. Eugen Pănescu during Panel Discussion IV. Source: Mikołaj Wantoch Rekowski.

If we want to talk seriously about the quality of housing, we cannot confine ourselves to architectural aesthetics. It matters just as much whether neighbouring flats are permanently occupied, stand empty, or are occupied on a rotating basis by tourists. This has a direct effect on residents' daily lives, including for instance the availability of basic services. If the local retail offer is focused exclusively on tourists, residents may find it difficult to meet basic needs such as buying ingredients to cook a meal.

These examples show how complex the housing question is and how far it reaches beyond purely architectural matters. All these aspects require solutions. In Gdańsk's case we already have a good diagnosis of the problems, but we still lack comprehensive instruments for solving them.

Borys Czarakcziew

I can also cite the example of Kraków. In 1990 around 12,000 people lived in the Old Town; today there are only a few hundred permanent residents.

Looking for the shortest possible definition of the New European Bauhaus, I heard from Jutta Kastner that it is above all about genius loci and about the need to be present and to live in a given place. I think that connects in a certain way with what Professor Piotr Lorens was saying.

Markus, as a spatial planner, I would like to ask about your perspective: how can spatial planning and urban design frameworks work together with architectural policy to ensure high quality and economic affordability of housing in European conditions?



Fig. 6.9. Szymon Wojciechowski during Panel Discussion IV. Source: Mikołaj Wantoch Rekowski.

Markus Hedorfer

To answer that question we must move away from a narrowed understanding of spatial planning, which even within part of the profession comes down to drawing plans and creating excessively elaborate legal regulations.

Far more important is to see planning as a participatory process consisting in reconciling the interests of different participants and users of space. On this understanding the planner acts as a moderator, bringing together the knowledge and perspectives of different experts. This allows a more comprehensive, multidisciplinary view of the city.

The principles of the New European Bauhaus are largely consistent with such an approach. To implement them it is necessary to solve the problems that planners and urban designers diagnose in urban space. Phenomena such as gentrification stand in contradiction to the ideas of sustainability, inclusiveness and quality of space.

It is worth pausing on the very notion of sustainability, which in planning has a long tradition and covers different dimensions: ecological, social and economic. The planner's task is to balance these aspects in practice.

An interesting direction for research would be to examine whether there is a relationship between the housing situation and the share of dwellings remaining in public ownership in a given city. The example of Vienna suggests that such a correlation may exist. This is not only about social housing for those on the lowest incomes, but also about provision for different social groups.



Fig. 6.10. Markus Hedorfer during Panel Discussion IV. Source: Mikołaj Wantoch Rekowski.

In Vienna a model of mixing different social classes within a single space has operated for years, which limits segregation and supports social and spatial cohesion.

Spatial planning comprises many elements that must be balanced for the good of the city. One of the key ones is providing affordable, high-quality housing. It is worth emphasising, however, that delivering these aims requires political will. Without the support of decision-makers, even the best-prepared planning concepts have no chance of implementation..

Borys Czarakcziew

This set of issues to be addressed in this discussion is extremely complex, including from the architects' perspective, even at an earlier stage of the process.

I once heard, in an interview with one of the large developers in Italy, a comparison of the architect to a conductor without a baton. The quality and beauty of architecture are, after all, always the result of a compromise between the designer's skills and the investor's budget and expectations. Szymon, how does this look in practice?

Szymon Wojciechowski

As someone running an architectural practice I have to look at this problem above all in its practical dimension. We design specific buildings that shape a particular space, and we try to make it a space conducive to residents' daily lives.

I see this process as a kind of game involving many actors: politicians pursuing their own aims, investors seeking profit, architects striving for quality and recognition for their projects. Each of these groups exerts pressure and has its own expectations.



Fig. 6.11. Bahaa Bou Kalfouni during Panel Discussion IV. Source: Mikołaj Wantoch Rekowski.

Architectural policy can in this context be understood as the set of rules of that game. What is crucial, however, is that it should not be a zero-sum game — one in which some win at others' expense. The optimal situation is one in which each participant in the process gains something but also gives something up. Architecture is then not at the centre as a dominant element, but becomes an equal participant in the whole process. And that is precisely the direction we should be moving in.

Borys Czarakcziew

Bahaa, you are pursuing your doctorate in Gdańsk, so there is a good chance you will stay here longer. You are a direct witness to how architects are educated in this environment. In your view, can we change our approach to education so that future architects are better prepared, in terms of both knowledge and skills, to solve problems connected with housing?

Bahaa Bou Kalfouni

That is without doubt a key subject. It is becoming ever clearer that the ability to design aesthetically pleasing and expensive buildings is no longer sufficient. We must teach students how to respond to global challenges and social needs in a wider context. To that end it is necessary to incorporate the housing crisis into curricula and then to support research and cooperation in this area. It is also important that students come into contact with market realities and confront the real problems a practising architect encounters.

The social aspect cannot be overlooked either. Students should be able to take part in participatory processes on real projects, so that they can feel the social responsibility attached to design decisions.

Since this morning we have also been discussing architectural policy, and I believe that education is another important element of it. Students should be shown what architectural policy is, what its flexibility may consist in and how it can influence the solving of housing problems.

Borys Czarakcziew

I think it is worth trying to bring together the ideas of the New European Bauhaus, high-quality architecture and housing, and asking you for brief recommendations as a kind of guidance for Stefan Moser, who has a real influence on implementing some of these postulates at the level of the European Commission.

Let me begin with a statement that a high-quality housing policy does not mean luxury homes; what is crucial is comfort of living and social cohesion as the foundation of a city's sustainable development.

Frank D'hondt

In the context of tackling the housing crisis we should create instruments covering the scale of the whole city or region. Phenomena such as gentrification cannot be effectively addressed solely at the level of individual neighbourhoods. That is my main recommendation.

prof. Piotr Lorens

Ensuring quality should rest on clearly defined procedures for implementing particular solutions. Quality in architecture and in housing policy does not concern only visual aspects, sustainability or inclusiveness. The process of achieving it matters just as much. If I were to point to a missing element in the New European Bauhaus documents, it would be precisely a clearly defined layer concerning methods of implementation.

Szymon Wojciechowski

We live in times of exceptionally rapid change. Alongside the obvious benefits, this also brings significant risks in the form of sudden crises and so-called "black swans". Some of them we have already experienced, such as the COVID-19 pandemic; others are ongoing, such as the war in Ukraine; and further ones are appearing on the horizon, whether in the context of the development of artificial intelligence or the future coherence of European values.

Faced with such a pace of change, we should also accelerate the process of implementing the housing and spatial quality solutions we are discussing today

Eugen Pănescu

The rise in housing prices across Europe is a fact, confirmed by all the available data. It is not always accompanied, however, by a corresponding level of quality. We should therefore work towards defining a European housing standard and protect it consistently. This also has a cultural dimension. Dwellings differ according to local context, which strengthens the identity and cohesion of communities.

Another important issue is avoiding a dialogue conducted solely between individual housing policy stakeholders. This is an exceptionally dynamic field in which each side sees reality through the prism of its own interests. It is therefore essential to create a system integrating planners, investors, homeowners and tenants within a single, coherent platform for dialogue.

I would also like to respond to Frank D'hondt's remarks. Planning at metropolitan level is without doubt crucial, but we should not overlook the importance of flexible instruments operating at neighbourhood level, which in many cities are already producing measurable results.

A further challenge is defining measurable quality indicators that will allow a more objective approach to this issue. Interesting examples already exist: some financial institutions take housing quality into account when granting mortgages, because their analyses have shown that it translates into greater stability of repayment.

Finally I would like to draw attention to the growing role of prefabrication in construction. Although this is a developing direction, we should approach it with caution so as not to lose diversity and local identity through excessive standardisation of building.

Bahaa Bou Kalfouni

From the perspective of my professional experience in Beirut it is clear that in the design process we too rarely put residents' interests at the centre of attention. Discussions about quality often take place among architects and planners who focus on choosing optimal technical solutions,

forgetting that we are designing for people who are not infrequently excluded from that process. It is therefore worth asking residents directly what housing policy they need, and involving them in decision-making.

Markus Hedorfer

From what I observe, the implementation of European Commission housing policies often takes place through projects financed from EU funds and delivered at the level of municipalities and other local government units. Some cities take part in these programmes very effectively and are able to secure funding, while others struggle. This ultimately deepens disparities and reduces inclusiveness. We should also pay more attention to how funds are distributed, so that they reach where they are genuinely needed and not only already well-developed centres.

I am glad that housing policy has acquired the standing of a European topic. I believe, however, that spatial planning should acquire similar status, since it has a broader scope and could provide a framework for initiatives such as the New European Bauhaus. This would make it possible to give better direction to the national policies and legal systems of the member states, which are currently very diverse. Greater legislative coherence could contribute significantly to achieving shared aims in the fields of planning, architecture and housing.

Nicola Matthews

To a large extent we have already created the stock we need. The true quality of buildings shows in the fact that we do not want to demolish them even when they are old. We are therefore talking not only about new projects but also about existing buildings, places and heritage.



Fig. 6.12. Frank D'hondt during Panel Discussion IV. Source: Mikołaj Wantoch Rekowski.

In the context of Baukultur, the adaptation and reuse of existing buildings, infrastructure and land is of key importance. For this to be possible we need highly qualified architects, which in turn entails the need to raise the quality of an education that does not focus solely on designing new buildings. This approach is also an important step towards achieving climate neutrality.

Borys Czarakcziew

I would also like to draw attention to the need to modernise the public procurement directive, which currently relies too heavily on the cost criterion. The second important issue is the need to encourage states to create legislative frameworks conducive to implementing innovation.

Stefan Moser

Thank you all for the comments you have made. Our work focuses largely on supporting local authorities, whom we see as the level of government closest to residents.

I agree, however, that this should be embedded in a broader context. A multidisciplinary approach allows better use of the available instruments, including links with the digital transition and transport.

In many cases a careful balancing of decisions is necessary. For example, should the situation of the Main Town in Gdańsk be restored to its earlier state, or should a compromise rather be sought between residents' interests and the tourist function? These are political decisions that must take account of both social and economic context. Involving all stakeholders is crucial here. Otherwise there is a risk of losing public acceptance for the measures taken.

The European Union's role is to support the development of appropriate territorial instruments, to review public procurement regulation, and to look for ways of lowering the costs of delivering housing and managing existing stock better.

Our work often focuses on financial support, but the growing number of challenges means that local authorities do not always have sufficient resources. The European Union should therefore strengthen its engagement not only through funding but also through developing knowledge, supporting research, pilot projects and educational initiatives.

Borysz Czarakcziew

Thank you all for this conversation. During this discussion we have heard many perspectives on quality in housing: European, national, municipal, and that arising from everyday design and educational practice. A common thread was the conviction that quality cannot be reduced to aesthetics or technical parameters alone, but must be viewed more broadly, taking account of social, economic and spatial context. Concrete examples were given, from Gdańsk's experience to solutions applied in Ireland, Romania and Vienna, as well as proposals for instruments such as measurable quality indicators, better use of public procurement and greater integration of spatial planning with housing policy. I hope that the voices and recommendations presented today will provide useful material for further work, including at the level of the European Commission. Thank you all very much for taking part in the panel.





Fig. 6.13. Panel Discussion IV. Source: Mikołaj Wantoch Rekowski.

7 Introductory addresses to the second day of the conference

prof. Piotr Lorens
City Architect of Gdańsk

Let me welcome you all at the beginning of the second day of our conference. So far we have dealt with the nature of architectural policy and with a range of contemporary conditions that must be taken into account in shaping it. We also devoted particular attention to European initiatives that influence its content.

In the sessions to come we will turn to the question of building architectural policy at the local scale. The programme includes both introductory addresses and plenary sessions, with panel discussions.

I invite you to take an active part in today's proceedings. At their close we will present a programme declaration, prepared with the participation of the conference co-organisers. I hope it will become a starting point for further work, at both national and local scale.

Soft power in architectural policy

Kristiaan Borret
Bouwmeester–maître architecte (City Architect) of Brussels

The role of the city architect in urban processes is complex and hard to define unambiguously. My presentation is an attempt to describe it through the example of Brussels, where the office of Bouwmeester — chief city architect — has operated for several years.

I studied architecture in Barcelona in the 1990s, at an exceptional historical moment — just before the Olympic Games, as the city was opening up after decades of Francoism. It was a time of profound change, accompanied by a community of outstanding architects. A key role was then played by a tandem: Mayor Pasqual Maragall, keenly interested in architecture and urban design, and Oriol Bohigas — an outstanding city architect and at that time my professor. That cooperation brought about a lasting change in the city's identity. The first Barcelona lesson is therefore: good architecture and intelligent urban policy can fundamentally transform the character of a metropolis.

The second lesson relates to a specific project. For years a dual carriageway of twelve lanes in total cut Barcelona's centre off from the sea. Manuel de Solà-Morales's project for the Moll de la Fusta changed that radically: it put the motorway underground and restored the city's access to the Mediterranean. One strategic project proved sufficient to change the image of the whole city. That is proof that work on a single scheme can — given the right vision — transform urban identity.



Fig. 7.1. Kristiaan Borret speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

Belgium has a system of Bouwmeesters, that is chief city architects. The title has historical roots — every city once had an architect responsible for designing and building public buildings. In time the role disappeared, only to be gradually restored: first in Flanders, then in the Brussels-Capital Region, and also in cities such as Charleroi and Ghent. The Walloon Region is still awaiting a similar arrangement.



Fig. 7.2. Cover of the publication summarising the research project carried out by UN-Habitat, University College London and the Bouwmeester–maître architecte. Source: Capacity4dev.europa.eu.

Defining the role of the Bouwmeester is best begun by negation. In Brussels he is not the head of the planning administration or part of its hierarchy. Nor does he decide on building permits — that is the task of Urban Brussels. He is not an ordinary consultant either, nor a politician: he works closely with decision-makers but himself remains outside the political sphere. The Bouwmeester is appointed by the government yet operates from an independent position. These are apparent contradictions but in fact the key to the role's effectiveness. The Bouwmeester is paid, among other things, to be critical of the government — although of course one cannot afford permanent criticism if one actually wants to get things done. The right balance has to be found. The general task can be stated concisely: improving design quality across all urban projects.

The effectiveness of this role rests on three pillars. The first is independence: a city architect entangled solely in administrative procedures, deprived of freedom of initiative, cannot act effectively. What is needed is room to launch new processes, to comment on the quality of urban decisions and to enter into substantive dialogue with the various actors on the urban scene. The second pillar is a hybrid position — being at once inside and outside the system. Such a position makes it possible to build trust on different sides, to connect people and to act as a mediator. In my phone I have the private numbers of both the largest developer in Brussels and the most radical left-wing urban activist — and I conduct a dialogue with both, though I do not always agree with them. The third pillar is the capacity to work across sectors. Contemporary urban challenges — climate change, social questions, the housing crisis — are so-called wicked problems: complex problems that cannot be solved within a single discipline or a single department. They require cooperation between sectors. Because the Bouwmeester is not formally assigned to any of them, he can work effectively with all of them.

In 2020 I took part in a research project carried out by UN-Habitat and University College London, financed by the European Commission, devoted to so-called soft power mechanisms in urban governance. The results confirmed what Brussels practice seems to demonstrate every day:

alongside "hard" instruments — land-use plans, the permit system, legal regulation — informal mechanisms capable of generating quality and momentum are essential. The city architect is one of the most frequently cited examples of such a mechanism.

The Bouwmeester's office in Brussels employs fifteen people. The term of office lasts five years and funding comes from the budget of the Capital Region. The team's work proceeds in four main areas: the BMA Label programme — an annual call for ideas that can feed into public policy; design reviews, consisting of consultation and assessment of quality at various stages of the design process; research by design, combining research tools with architectural practice; and finally the organisation of architectural competitions. Since 2015 the office has organised around 400 competitions — on average one a week. Belgian competition culture is strong and creates opportunities especially for young architects.

The office has developed competition rules, non-compliance with which amounts to a refusal to cooperate. The key rules include:

- All competitions are in two stages. At the first stage we do not require unpaid design work; at the second stage all participants receive the same fee.
- The lowest-price criterion is not applied. The architect's fee is set in advance, which allows the jury to assess only the quality of the design.
- Formal requirements are deliberately limited: a maximum of three reference projects, no financial turnover threshold. The aim is to admit practices without an extensive portfolio.
- Candidates submit a so-called motivation note — a short text explaining why they are entering the competition and how they understand its subject. This makes it possible to distinguish considered entries from those sent in at random.
- Every procedure ends with a compulsory oral presentation before the jury, which eliminates the risk of interpretative misunderstandings.
- In competitions concerning public space, residents take part in the process as experts.
- Full results are published after each competition, which ensures transparency and creates an opportunity for the whole profession to learn.

The soft power mechanisms described serve not only to refine procedures — they are means of achieving a better quality of life in the city. In Brussels the office actively promotes several directions of urban transformation: the idea of the productive city, which assumes retaining productive

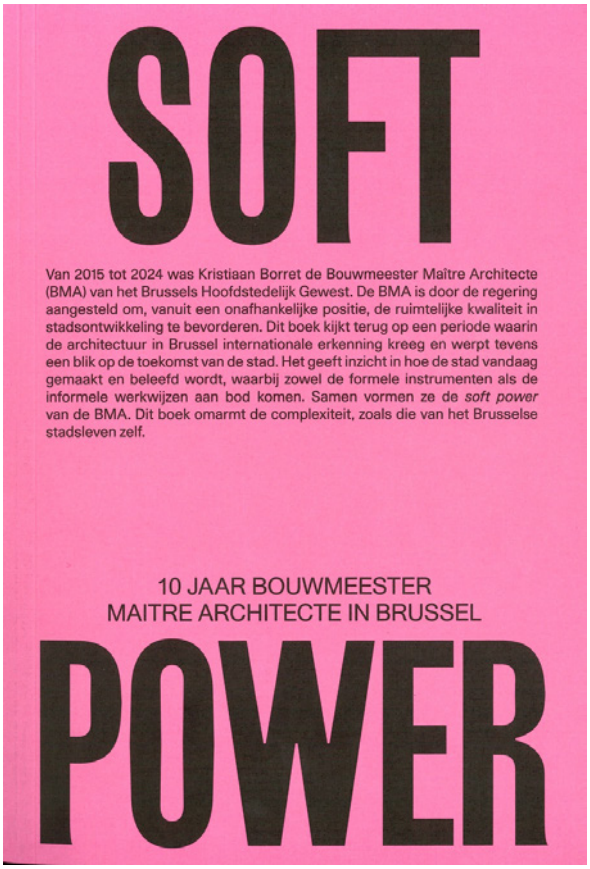

Fig. 7.3. Cover of the publication summarising ten years of the work of the City Architect of Brussels, 2015–2024. Source: Kristiaan Borret.

functions within the urban fabric; the adaptive reuse of existing buildings instead of demolition; broader involvement of local communities in decision-making; and finally cooperative housing as a response to the deepening crisis of housing affordability.

The strength of the Bouwmeester's role is its capacity to act simultaneously at the level of vision and of specific projects — and it is precisely this movement between scales that makes the role exceptional.

Culture in the core: keeping sensitivity to urban memory messages

Elena Dimitrova

University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy in Sofia

My professional path has developed over more than thirty-five years at the intersection of different subjects and roles. Trained as an architect, I took part in creating a new spatial planning programme in Sofia in response to the changing situation in the region and the country. I found myself at the crossing point of urban research, education and methodological support for local authorities, and also at the intersection of urban development and heritage protection — fields often seen as opposed but in reality mutually supportive. Intercultural dialogue at the local, regional and global levels, which allows us to better understand where we stand and how we fit into this broader process, was added to this network of interconnections.

This text concerns several interrelated questions:

- culture as our capacity to conceptualise the world around us and the reason for our existence within it;
- the city as a process in which transformation is not only inevitable but necessary;
- heritage as a message that must be preserved, but also constantly rediscovered and reinterpreted;
- policy as the art of acting in order to transform reality;
- responsibility as the capacity to respond to the needs of people and communities;
- the role of planners and architects as professionals and citizens with a particular capacity to take part in the continuity of the urban process.

I use three examples from Bulgaria — a place that is mine, that I love and know best, and that over the past thirty-five years has undergone very dynamic change in culture, architecture, politics and society as a whole. Why case studies? Why examples? Because situations drawn from life can be considered as a whole and allow one to trace connections, interactions and consequences that are otherwise hard to grasp. I focus on how and when the cultural dimension appeared in public debate, what the role of young architects was, and how this affected the development of professional culture and the understanding of architects' and planners' responsibility.

The first case study concerns Sofia. In the heart of the Bulgarian capital, precisely at the crossing of the ancient axes of the Roman city — Cardo Maximus and Decumanus Maximus — history and the present day meet. What endures: that crossing still forms the living centre of the city and must accommodate contemporary urban processes. The remains of former Roman buildings lie there at depths of between six and sixteen metres. They had long been known about, but funds



Fig. 7.4. Elena Dimitrova speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

were lacking to investigate them and make them accessible. The opportunity came with European Union operational programmes, which made it possible to carry out archaeological research in parallel with the construction of the metro. It was a cultural shock — both in the city's daily functioning and in the way it was thought about. A situation full of contradictions became the arena of heated public debate and one of the factors shaping civil society in Sofia.

The professional community played an important role at that time. A small group of young architects gathered around the so-called Bob Studio publicly raised the question of the relationship between what lies below ground and what stands above it. They spoke as architects but also as citizens, appealing for the political will and imagination needed to keep the archaeological heritage part of the city's living history. The research incidentally revealed clear generational differences: the younger generation showed greater sensitivity to the cultural dimension and stressed that heritage matters above all to Bulgarians themselves, not only to tourists.

The next stage of this story concerned Sveta Nedelya Square — Sofia's central space. In 2012 a need arose to transform it, so an architectural competition was organised, but its results were not met with enthusiasm and were not implemented. In 2018 another attempt was made, again with the involvement of civil society. The administration focused mainly on technical aspects — traffic and infrastructure — while other groups tried to bring questions of priorities and values into the debate. The competition was prepared by an academic team, and the participation of foreign architects was intended to limit criticism. Despite these efforts, the administrative culture of governance proved highly resistant to outside voices: no two-stage approach was introduced and no sufficient public debate was held. The winning design by Studio Fuksas was not a problem in itself — the problem was the lack of sensitivity to the continuity of the urban process.

The second example comes from Plovdiv, from the historic Kapana district. The impulse for action was the competition for the title of European Capital of Culture 2019. Kapana was to be transformed



Fig. 7.5. Visualisations of the winning entry in the competition for the transformation of Sveta Nedelya Square, by Studio Fuksas. Source: Studio Fuksas.

into a creative industries district: four universities involved students and young professionals, and many interesting concepts were produced. Delivery, however, departed considerably from those assumptions. At the same time, in another part of the city, historic tobacco warehouses were being demolished — despite earlier ideas about adapting them. This provoked protests by residents and architects, which led to the demolitions being halted.

The third story takes place in Varna. The impulse here was the title of European Youth Capital 2017. The initiative came from the city architect and the professional community, and its aim was to get architects out onto the streets and involve them in public debate. A series of projects was created — not a single event but a process extended over time. Young architects worked on public spaces, engaging both residents and decision-makers. In time some of them took up important posts in other cities. Initiatives also appeared concerning the protection of housing stock, combining expert knowledge with residents' needs. This gives grounds for moderate optimism — change is happening, though not in a linear way.

From these experiences follow conclusions whose significance reaches beyond the Bulgarian context. Culture is multi-layered, dynamic and changes at varying speeds. Urban memory is not

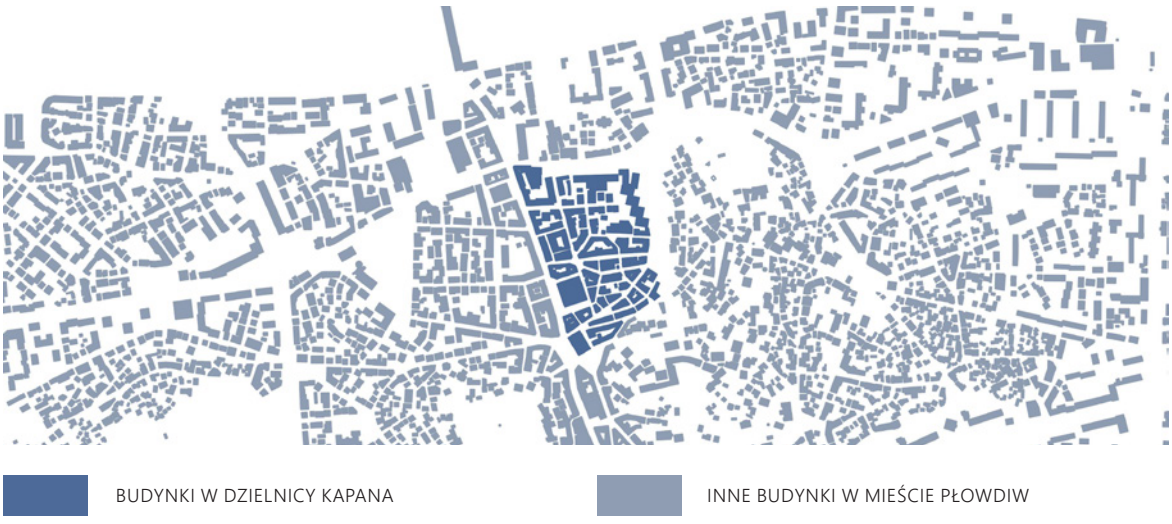

Fig. 7.6. Buildings in the Kapana district of Plovdiv. Source: Mikołaj Wantoch Rekowski.

given once and for all — it is constantly recreated or lost. Heritage must be shared by living communities. Material traces of the past remain in urban space, but there are also processes — discussions, conflicts, attempts — which are often not documented yet are equally important as a source of knowledge. That is why preserving them matters so much.

A separate question is education — understood not only as the training of architects and planners but as mutual learning by all participants in the urban process. It is also the building of a sense of shared responsibility. It is a long-term task, yet one carried out every day. It is the education of young people not only as professionals but above all as citizens responsible for the future.

Multidisciplinary approaches from the outset: collaboration and inclusivity for a sustainable future

Janet Askew

Vice-President of the European Council of Spatial Planners (ECTP-CEU)

My entire address concerns multidisciplinarity, and its main message is: integration from the very beginning.

I took my first professional job at London Transport, where we analysed surplus land along railway lines. I was assigned the Northern line. We examined the possibilities of developing redundant railway land to London Transport's benefit, analysed opportunities for densifying the urban structure around stations, and looked at the use of so-called air rights, that is introducing development above stations. We prepared many proposals. This was in 1974 — fifty-one years ago. Some of them have still not been delivered; others have.

King's Cross and St Pancras, London Bridge Station and The Shard are projects known to everyone who visits London. King's Cross was delivered over at least forty years, which illustrates well that the development of such places is not a quick process. At the outset it was accompanied by numerous public protests; some of the local community's demands were, however, taken into account — a temporary park became a permanent element of the space. Heritage was preserved, and both stations were listed at the highest grade. The most important thing, however, is that everyone was involved in this process of change. That is my first and fundamental argument: no project comes into being without an enormous number of stakeholders. A multidisciplinary approach is unavoidable.

St Pancras is a particularly telling example — the station, the hotel and the new development form a whole that is a success in terms of heritage protection, the economy, education, tourism and design quality. Eleven million tourists a year is an eloquent figure. But the other side of the picture cannot be ignored: mass displacement of population, advancing gentrification, the privatisation of public space and a dramatic rise in housing prices. An apartment above the former gasworks valued at seven million pounds counts there as "cheap". The Shard, designed by Renzo Piano as a "vertical village" and integrated with a billion-pound infrastructure investment, set a precedent for further towers — around six hundred are currently planned.

The building is enormously popular, but access to its "public" viewing platform costs fifty pounds, and flat prices reach fifty million pounds.



Fig. 7.7. Janet Askew speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

When I think about multidisciplinarity, I see all the stakeholders — politicians, planners, investors, users, contractors — with no hierarchy between them. The question is: how do we integrate this? Different projects are initiated and driven by different forces. London's "Walkie Talkie" is a project dominated by development interests — widely unpopular and burdened with serious design problems. The tobacco factory in Bristol grew out of culture and is regarded as a great success. Covent Garden is a public space project, saved thanks to public protest. Selfridges in Birmingham shows that architecture can be an engine of transformation. Numerous new housing estates, by contrast, are schemes subordinated solely to the logic of profit, resulting in poor spatial quality.

The example of Northstowe near Cambridge is particularly instructive in this respect, because it illustrates the consequences of a lack of integration: no public transport, dependence on the car, an absence of spatial quality and of high-quality architecture. A scheme generated almost entirely by computer leaves no room for beauty, community or sustainability. That is precisely the result of leaving stakeholders out at the stage preceding design.

Birmingham and Covent Garden, by contrast, are examples of success. The centre of Birmingham is today largely pedestrianised — the result of many years of cooperation between architects, planners and the city authorities. Covent Garden attracts forty-four million tourists a year, and heritage protection together with the effective use of land values has brought benefits including to the opera house there. Architecture can initiate urban transformation — provided it operates within a coherent institutional environment.

The planner is not always the leader of the process, but is an inseparable part of it. I like to think that the planner "conducts the orchestra" — from beginning to end. Planning works in the public interest, at different scales, covering questions of health, climate and diversity. Within the European Council of Spatial Planners I take part in the Davos Baukultur Alliance, where the concept of

so-called phase zero appears — the stage preceding design proper. It is the moment when all stakeholders engage together, before the key decisions are taken. Such a stage makes it possible to take sustainability, the cultural dimension and the needs of all participants into account from the very beginning. It also requires long-term thinking — including about the end of a building's life and the possibility of reusing materials.

The question of adaptation rather than demolition is gaining in importance. The dispute over the Marks & Spencer building on Oxford Street is a telling example. Recycling construction materials — including concrete — is becoming a real alternative, although it requires changes in both cost structures and legal regulation.

Experiences gathered across many countries lead to conclusions that, despite cultural differences, are universal in character. Education is crucial, but it should begin with children: it is they who must understand space and its quality before they become its users and co-creators. The role of the city architect is also important — a role sorely lacking in the United Kingdom, where most architects now work in the private sector and public design teams have practically disappeared. Commitment to quality is needed — not as a luxury but as an investment. Intelligent regulation is needed too: not an excess of it, but effective enforcement of what matters.

And finally: the exchange of experience. Travelling, meeting, conferences — these are not holidays but learning and the exchange of practice. Meetings such as this one have shaped my thinking about planning and architecture more than I could measure.



Fig. 7.8. View of The Shard in London. Source: Dronepicr, CC BY 2.0.



Fig. 7.9. The audience, and Janet Askew during her address at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

8 Plenary Session V
Shaping architectural policy at the local context

Małgorzata Tomczak

Editor-in-chief of the monthly Architektura & Biznes

What in fact is a local architectural policy, how should it be defined, who should create it and how can it influence the long-term development of cities? What models of shaping local architectural policies exist in different European cities, and what instruments do they use? We are asking about the most important challenges facing contemporary cities, about the relationship between urban design and architecture, and about responsibility for space, which is distributed between public



Ryc. 8.1. Małgorzata Tomczak podczas wypowiedzi na konferencji. Źródło: Grzegorz Mehring.

institutions, experts and practitioners — from ministerial level, through academia, practising architects and urban planners, to local authorities and professional organisations such as SARP and the Society of Polish Town Planners. It is precisely their interpenetration and cooperation that decides whether local architectural policy becomes a real instrument for shaping the quality of space.

Instruments for climate-friendly urban development in Austria

Beate Engelhorn

Federal Ministry of Housing, Arts, Culture, Media and Sport

Vienna is a city that has developed — in my view — one of the more coherent and considered approaches to the climate challenges facing European metropolises today. I work in the Federal Department, not within the city's own structures, but I observe its work closely and consider it a valuable point of reference. In the Department we are convinced that Baukultur — thinking about all the disciplines together — is the answer to most of the problems we face today.

The City of Vienna has developed a kind of roadmap for climate adaptation based on two pillars: on the one hand limiting the causes, that is CO2 emissions, and on the other responding to the effects of climate change. The aims, strategies and measures extend to 2040. A condition of effective action is precise monitoring: the city tracks current processes, anticipates possible scenarios and identifies their causes. The data show a worrying trend: until 2013 emissions fell steadily, after which they began to rise again. Constant readiness to correct course is therefore necessary. It is worth noting that the analyses so far have been dominated by an energy-consumption perspective — what is missing is a full account of buildings' life cycles and of the embodied energy they contain (so-called grey energy). This is an area requiring completion.



Fig. 8.2. Beate Engelhorn speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

One of the key instruments is the Climate Council, numbering around forty people. At its centre are the mayor and the city council, but around them a multi-level, interdisciplinary advisory body has been built, comprising representatives of key institutions and enterprises, academics, representatives of non-governmental organisations and experts from various fields. The council brings together people of different ages and perspectives — and it is precisely this diversity, and the exchange and communication that follow from it, that constitutes its greatest value.

The second instrument is a system of planning guidelines covering social and health aspects, climatological knowledge, and green and blue infrastructure. The guidelines also take architectural quality into account — which is equally important — as well as the question of existing sealed surfaces and their systematic de-paving.

Vienna's climate reality is becoming ever more palpable. Last autumn the city was hit by violent downpours and flooding — the Danube reached levels I do not recall from earlier years. At the same time the problem of overheating is growing. Between 1960 and 1990 the city recorded on average around 9.5 days with temperatures classed as overheating; today there are already around twenty-two a year. To this must be added so-called tropical nights, when the temperature does not fall even after dark. It sounds exotic, but in reality it causes serious health problems and even excess mortality. A particular challenge is the historic city centre, with its heritage character. Stone elevations and traditional materials absorb heat, and conservation protection of the buildings significantly limits the scope for adaptive intervention.

In response to these challenges the city has implemented a range of immediate measures: more than 260 misting showers and additional drinking fountains have been installed. These are, however, short-term measures — a "first-aid kit", as I call them. Systemic thinking is needed. Vienna is working towards creating a green network in which every resident would be no more than 250 metres from green space. Delivery of this aim rests on detailed monitoring of existing greenery and of potential spaces for planting — including building roofs. Green roofs are worth taking seriously: conversations with engineers from Arup confirmed that their presence lowers the temperature of rooftop plant by 5–8°C, which translates directly into reduced energy consumption by air-conditioning systems and brings measurable financial benefits.

Similar systemic thinking applies to stormwater management. The city is gradually opening up sealed pavement and street surfaces, planting trees and linking these measures with the planning of the public transport system and the development of the cycle network. Vienna is already one of the most cycle-friendly cities in Europe. Planning new cycle routes and expanding public transport thus become an opportunity to introduce more greenery where asphalt and concrete previously dominated. That is precisely what Baukultur means in practice: linking and integrating different fields within a single process.

The Federal Ministry also seeks to support smaller regions in this approach, since they do not have the resources of the capital. The aim is to create cross-cutting processes linking different planning disciplines, so that local communities can save money and develop with the future in mind at the same time. The conclusion is clear: there is no single solution answering all climate challenges. What is needed is a holistic strategy, effective governance and policy instruments that engage as broad a range of participants as possible. An interdisciplinary climate council can be one such instrument — provided that its work does not remain merely advisory but translates into real action.

Architectural policy begins with dialogue: local decision-making processes as the foundation for high-quality space in the context of European values

dr Tomasz Majda

President of the Society of Polish Town Planners

This contribution concerns three interrelated elements: dialogue, the quality of space, and European values — and in the background of these considerations legislative processes inevitably appear.

When we speak of European values we most often refer to documents and manifestos: the Leipzig Charters, the Territorial Agenda, the New European Bauhaus. It is worth reaching deeper, however — to the philosophical foundations of European civilisation — in order to view from that wider background the issues we now place at the centre of the debate about space.

What distinguishes Europe, and what allowed it to develop differently from other cultures, has its roots even before Socrates. Pythagoras defined the notion of truth as an unchanging value, which made it possible to shape a dualism of subject and object as independent entities. On this foundation science developed, and the dualism itself — of objectivism and subjectivism — became the basis of traditional methods of urban planning. What was missing from it, however, was the human being.

It was the Sophists, not the natural philosophers, who placed the human being at the centre, and it is from that current that the contemporary participatory approach derives. In its cultural premises it is alien to the scientific approach, because it makes the human being a subject who co-decides what may be true. The road from the Sophists through the Frankfurt School and critical theory to Habermas's theory of communication is long, but it leads directly to participation as today's dominant planning paradigm. It is an indispensable paradigm, because without taking all actors into account no policy can be effectively delivered.

The problem, however, is that this ambivalence between objective truth and participatively constructed knowledge generates serious tensions. A system of values — like urban memory — is not given once and for all. We are witnessing significant political shifts in many countries today, which translate into attitudes towards standards accepted until now. The United States vetoed an UN-Habitat strategic document on the basis of values its current government does not share, rejecting among other things the sustainable development goals. We cannot therefore take for granted values that until recently seemed an obvious basis for common action. This obliges us to look for a system that will allow objective truth to be defended even under conditions of growing uncertainty and political volatility.

Professor Gzell put the problem in the following way: science, in trying to maintain quality measurable in points, increasingly presents sensation and banality instead of reflection and matters of substance. The gulf between the possibilities of science and technology and a civilisation sliding to the level of a supermarket is not narrowing. It is ever harder to distinguish what is true from what is merely effective messaging. This is one reason why education is so important — and why we must look for ways to ensure that it is not bloggers and creators of viral content who dictate what is true in public debate, but that science and sound expert knowledge can once again make themselves heard in it.

Change is happening fast — perhaps too fast to respond to each instance separately. Markus Hedorfer spoke of a paradigm shift in planning, of "nature-based design" incorporating humanistic values — which is a return to the pre-Socratic natural philosophers seeking objective truth. These two schools of thought, opposed to one another since the beginning of European civilisation, still mark out the tension within which we work. Plato tried to reconcile them through the concept of ideas — distinguishing the essential from the accidental. In this context a question arises: are we able to define what that "essence" of architecture and architectural policy is? If we keep extending the concept of architectural policy, adding to it further elements from other policies and fields, and then want to consult on all of it at local level, we risk it becoming too blurred for residents — and decision-makers — to be able to distinguish it from other policies and understand its point.

The practical consequences of this blurring are clearly visible in everyday planning work. During one public discussion of a local plan in which we prohibited development on 90% of undeveloped land, I spent two hours presenting arguments based on physical phenomena. I expected a sharp reaction — yet at the end of the meeting the participants were almost offering congratulations. And yet on returning home some of them hired lawyers. Not because they did not believe the arguments presented — when I spoke with those same people after the discussion, they did believe them. The problem lay elsewhere: in the weakness of a sense of community as a value capable of outweighing individual interest. That value is written into the constitution, but in practice — at least in Polish conditions — it is not yet highly regarded.



Fig. 8.3. Tomasz Majda speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

Architectural policy at local level has great potential. It should not, however, be a sectoral approach separated from other policies, because then we are unable to explain it effectively to residents. The Polish legislative system is already disintegrated at larger scale: in the National Recovery Plan funds for development and for protection were split into two separate streams, and in the structure of the provisions of the newly introduced planning instrument — the municipal general plan — no room was found for cultural values. Culture is therefore simply absent from the general plan. Architectural policy could fill that gap — and in that sense a degree of sectoralism is acceptable as a transitional stage. Ultimately, however, a fully integrated approach covering all planning scales, from national to local, would be a decidedly better solution.

Urban Change. On the politics of implementing accessibility in the city

Kamil Kowalski
Integracja Association

When I think about accessibility policy in the city, two starting points come to mind. The first is the scale of the phenomenon: around 30% of people experience limitations of various kinds at any given moment. These may result from disability, age, illness, injury or life circumstances, for example moving about with children. If we include the people accompanying them, the number of those needing accessibility grows significantly. The second point is complexity: accessibility must be built at many levels simultaneously.

The first level — historically the earliest — covers basic solutions: lowering kerbs, building ramps, installing lifts and automatic doors, ensuring adequate widths of circulation routes. This approach focused mainly on people with mobility impairments. In Poland, as early as 1994, the Building Act introduced a requirement to adapt public buildings to the needs of wheelchair users.

It quickly became clear, however, that this was not enough. Accessibility also concerns people with visual impairments, who need solutions enabling orientation and the reception of information. Examples include tactile interpretations of works of art — present, among other places, in the Centre Pompidou and the Alhambra complex — and tactile paths used in urban space, as in Milan, which help blind people move about independently. Accessibility, however, covers a far broader group of users: people with hearing difficulties, people in mental health crisis, people with intellectual disabilities, children, older people. Each of these groups perceives and interprets space differently, which leads to the need to create standards.

Many such systems exist around the world — from the Americans with Disabilities Act, through the German DIN norms, to British accessibility standards. In Poland numerous documents have also been created: municipal standards developed by Warsaw and Gdańsk among others, as well as guidance for particular building types such as hospitals, sports facilities and public spaces. This development is unquestionably positive, although it also creates a problem of inconsistency: a building meeting the standards in one city will not necessarily meet them in another. Similar difficulties occur at European scale — attempts to create a single standard have so far produced no result because of local differences.

This leads to an important conclusion: accessibility does not come down solely to technical parameters and is not an end in itself. A building may be formally accessible, but if it does not

answer users' needs, does not invite people to spend time there and does not create good space, its accessibility loses meaning.

In this context, it is worth returning to the idea of universal design developed by Ronald Mace, whose basic premise speaks of designing products and environments so that they are usable by everyone. Universal design is above all a lesson in humility. Its creators did not treat it as a discovery but as a synthesis of many years of research and experience in ergonomics. They also stressed that it is not the sole criterion of good architecture — economic, technical and environmental aspects matter just as much, and the seven principles of universal design do not guarantee a good project but are one of its elements. The most important change this idea brought, however, was a move away from designing for the "average user" towards recognising that people differ — in age, ability, body shape and how they function.

Accessibility can, however, be understood more broadly still: as an instrument for improving comfort of life and changing habits. A good illustration is Valencia. The city repeatedly suffered floods caused by the river Turia. After the catastrophic flood of 1957, which destroyed a significant part of the built fabric and claimed almost a hundred lives, the decision was taken to divert the river. The former riverbed was transformed into a park that today forms the backbone of the whole city. Pedestrian and cycle paths and numerous recreational spaces were created there, which changed how residents move about and reduced dependence on the car. One element of this scheme is a playground in the form of Gulliver — a space engaging not only children but adults too. Parents do not remain passive observers here but become participants in the play. It is an example of design that builds social relations and changes how space is used.

Similar work can be observed in Barcelona. A less well-known project — the transformation of a stretch of elevated metro line into the Jardins de la Rambla de Sants — consists in covering the infrastructure and creating a park above it. The result is improved acoustic comfort and a change



Fig. 8.4. Kamil Kowalski speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

in how the space is used: an encouragement to walk and cycle rather than use public transport. Such examples show that design has a real influence on how people function: it improves comfort of life, affects health and shapes daily habits.

This does not mean that other levels of accessibility can be neglected. All are important: from the strategic scale, through standards and an understanding of users' diversity, to the level of detail. A good example of work at that last level is a programme run in Warsaw consisting in the progressive removal of minor barriers in urban space. Residents can report problems via an app or by telephone, and the city eliminates them within a dedicated budget. Although these measures are less spectacular than major urban projects, they are an indispensable element of the whole accessibility system.

Panel Discussion V

Participants:

1. Małgorzata Tomczak – editor-in-chief of the monthly Architektura i Biznes (moderator).
2. Dr Natalia Balcerzak – Association of Polish Architects (SARP), President of the Wybrzeże Branch.
3. Piotr Lewicki – Lewicki Łatak Architekci.
4. Michał Młyńczak – Deputy Mayor of the City of Wrocław.
5. César Reyes Nájera – postdoctoral researcher in urban regeneration at the University of Luxembourg.
6. Małgorzata Peters – Head of the Public Space Aesthetics Division, Ministry of Culture.
7. Dr hab. Michał Domińczak – Lodz University of Technology.



Fig. 8.5. Participants in Panel Discussion V, from the left: Małgorzata Tomczak, Natalia Balcerzak, Michał Domińczak, Piotr Lewicki, Michał Młyńczak, Małgorzata Peters, César Reyes Nájera. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

Małgorzata Tomczak

What role should the state play in supporting local authorities in creating a local architectural policy that combines cultural heritage with the need for contemporary cities to develop?

Małgorzata Peters

The simplest answer would be that the ministry should draft regulations. But of course it is not that simple, because enforcing regulations alone will not ensure the implementation of any policy. Educational work, about which much has already been said, should play a key role.

As for concrete instruments of cultural policy, the minister of culture administers various programmes that cover architecture, construction and urban planning only to a small degree — but that could be reconsidered. A programme dedicated to architecture and to implementing architectural policy would still have to be created.

Małgorzata Tomczak

What is SARP doing to support local authorities and local communities in creating a coherent, high-quality architectural policy?



Ryc. 8.6. Małgorzata Peters podczas V Panelu dyskusyjnego. Źródło: Grzegorz Mehring.

dr Natalia Balcerzak

SARP consists of twenty-four branches, each of which runs its own activity and shapes its own policy of cooperation with local government. As president of the Wybrzeże Branch I can speak above all from that perspective. A key area of our work is supporting architectural creativity in cooperation with local government, and our main instrument is the organisation of architectural competitions. I regret that at local scale there are still too few of these competitions, although there are branches that organise a great many, and I would like the national average to rise.

We also work with local government by taking part in urban planning and architecture commissions — municipal and voivodeship — and with the academic and professional communities. On Tuesday the second term of the Gdańsk Architecture Council was inaugurated, to which I have the honour of belonging. SARP grants patronage to local initiatives, including competitions for the best architectural project and the best space in the voivodeship. There is a great deal of this activity, but I must honestly say that I feel it falls short, and I hope there will be still more of it.

Małgorzata Tomczak

What role do you see for SARP in shaping standards and guidance for local architectural policies?

Natalia Balcerzak

SARP's role should be a key one, and I think it is, though a sense of shortfall remains. Co-creating and commenting on local plans and development strategies is precisely our role, because we have considerable substantive potential and we also work within a network of national and international organisations.



Fig. 8.7. Natalia Balcerzak during Panel Discussion V. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

Promoting architecture among the youngest also matters. Together with the Chamber of Architects, SARP runs an educational programme, "Shaping Space", whose aim is to promote architecture and urban design among children. Another important activity is persuading local authorities to appoint city architects. Recently we managed to persuade the mayor of Zielona Góra to establish the post of city architect — an open recruitment is under way. There are, however, cities in Poland where mayors declare they will never agree to it. One of our tasks as an association is therefore to demonstrate that the city architect is indispensable, and to build a community — made up of the association, the professional chamber and the academic world — that can create good architectural policy.

Małgorzata Tomczak

How can architects engage in politics and influence decision-making processes so that they do not produce spatial chaos and preserve the city's aesthetic coherence?

Piotr Lewicki

My generation has witnessed the enormous leap Poland has made as a country and a society on the road to prosperity. At the same time, as an architect, I observe that one of the costs of that success is space. It is a cost that is hard to be covered — if it can be covered at all — and if so, over decades if not centuries. One of the reasons for this is that urban planning as a discipline and a field of concern has been marginalised in Poland; one might say it effectively does not exist. We have spatial planning embedded in statute, we have local plans and general plans, we have architectural and construction design. But between these two spheres there is an enormous gap in which a kind of game takes place: architects working on commission for clients — most often



Fig. 8.8. Piotr Lewicki during Panel Discussion V. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

developers — try, within their own field, to obtain the maximum of what is possible. In the case of commercial housing that is of course the maximum usable floor area. And urban planning as a higher instance simply does not exist. As a profession we must ensure that urban planning, within the legislation in force, returns to the game. Without that there can be no question of repairing, or even limiting, the spatial losses already incurred. Anyone who has driven to Zakopane knows what I am talking about: billboards, inflatable castles, chaos. That is the result of the brilliant entrepreneurship of Poles, who within a single generation achieved prosperity — but at the cost of space and spatial order. If we have no support in the form of binding procedures and rules, then profit will always win, especially in commercial undertakings. I would therefore appeal: let us talk about urban planning at every possible opportunity, because it is there that hope lies that local policy will find reflection in the space of our cities.

dr hab. Michał Domińczak

I agree that we must look at how we educate architects. In the 1990s we were all brought up in a cult of individual creativity, in the conviction that an architect should be original at any price. This caused the disappearance of a culture of architectural continuity and of sensitivity to context. Yet it was architects — qualified, often members of the Chamber of Architecture and of SARP — who designed what was built along Poland's coast and roads. The responsibility therefore lies on our side.

The second problem is language — underdeveloped when it comes to describing and assessing architecture. Even within the profession a rational, comprehensible language of description is lacking. And if we do not have that language, then the provisions of legal acts will struggle with the same problem. Circumventing the law is as old as human civilisation, and our task is to create provisions that really encode something — for what is a local plan if not the encoding of a spatial



Fig. 8.9. Michał Domińczak during Panel Discussion V. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.



Fig. 8.10. César Reyes Nájera during Panel Discussion V. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

vision that architects must then decode through their designs? I therefore propose that we focus on developing a precise language, both in legal provisions and in the description of architecture.

From my own experience in Zgierz I know that at local level — understood as a neighbourhood, a district, a particular community — it is possible to build certain unwritten but accepted principles for shaping space. In 2003 Poland's first cultural park was created there, which shows how a local community can approach its heritage and its space. I see a large role here for locally active architects — anonymous, without a star's billing, but with a real influence on what happens around them. And one more thing: architectural policy should have a clearly defined aim. I am glad that words have been spoken here about beauty as a value of architecture — for years it was mentioned as if in passing, as though it would arrive of its own accord alongside the delivery of other values. If it is to be a shared aim, it must be named explicitly. And what can serve as such an aim at local level is a culture of continuity — architectural, urban and spatial. This is not about copying the past, but about understanding tradition as a starting point for thinking about the future.

Małgorzata Tomczak

How can academic and teaching work influence a practical approach to creating and implementing local architectural policies?

César Reyes Nájera

Architects are very well trained to think about formal and static situations. We are not, however, prepared to understand incremental change — and it is precisely dynamics that define cities. That is why, besides developing a language that enables us to communicate with neighbours and citizens, we must learn to listen better. We must incorporate tools for understanding urban dynamics instead of merely declaring that we understand residents' needs. At the university we are working to narrow this gap. We operate in a space that might be called "soft power": we create tools that help us understand and communicate better with local communities. We are working on the concept of support structures that enrich the city's democratic infrastructure — that make civic participation a real engagement rather than merely a formality. Participation does not happen spontaneously and very often becomes an organisational nightmare — which is precisely why the question of language and communication is absolutely crucial here. That language must also help us translate residents' needs and aspirations to the decision-makers who can make them real.

Małgorzata Tomczak

What are the greatest challenges for urban democracy in decision-making processes concerning regeneration and the shaping of local architectural policy?

César Reyes Nájera

We observe — and I think this is a phenomenon common to the whole of Europe — extreme polarisation combined with ever shorter public attention. This draws the debate away from what is really needed: the search for common ground. We work with a concept we call imperfect solidarities: we may not agree on everything, but there is a certain area of consensus that must be identified and built upon. If we waste time on extreme polarisation, we lose valuable opportunities to introduce real change. The emotional dimension of this work also matters — I think that alongside intellectualisation we must make contact with residents on an emotional level. In our agency in Esch-sur-Alzette, on the outskirts of Luxembourg, we regard ourselves first and foremost as neighbours — and only then as architects and urban planners. That is a position from which it is easier to build genuine dialogue and work together across divides.

Małgorzata Tomczak

Are cities today institutionally ready for greater democratisation of spatial decisions, especially in the context of the housing crisis?

Michał Młyńczak

As a lawyer with twenty years' experience at the bar, specialising in procedure, I have a certain comfort in observing this process from the outside — I am neither an architect nor an urban planner. I supervise architecture, spatial planning and property in Wrocław, and from that perspective I would like to draw a precise distinction between two spheres: the planning sphere and the architectural one.

Spatial planning is regulated by statute, and under the amended act the element of public participation has been significantly strengthened. Architectural assessment, however — the question of whether we like something or not — has no basis in provisions of statutory rank. Since its introduction, the Building Act has contained no evaluative element; aesthetics is not a ground for granting or refusing a building permit. Is that good or bad? That is debatable. Responsibility for the quality of architecture created within local plans, however, lies largely with architects themselves.

From the level of municipal government we must reconcile two aims: maximising the benefits of delivering investment and maximising residents' participation in shaping space. That middle ground must constantly be found anew. In Wrocław we created a procedure under the so-called special housing act that obliges investors to carry out broad public consultation before submitting their schemes and to present a report on that consultation. It works — though not always to investors' satisfaction. We also run information campaigns, for example about the possibility of submitting applications to the general plan, which will redefine the functions and space of whole city blocks. These are precisely the soft instruments — "soft power" — through which one must educate and engage. It must be remembered, however, that the road from properly understood consultation to anarchy is very short. The participatory process can be overturned if the voice of a few people begins to shape space for whole communities with no framework or rules.

Małgorzata Tomczak

The addresses presented and the debate devoted to local architectural policy have shown that what contemporary cities need above all today is long-term, interdisciplinary thinking that brings together climate challenges, accessibility, cultural heritage, healthy urbanism and public participation.



Fig. 8.11. Michał Młyńczak during Panel Discussion V. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

The individual addresses differed in perspective, but the common denominator was the need to move away from fragmentary action towards integrated strategies based on cooperation between many communities.

The examples of Vienna, Valencia and Barcelona showed that effective urban policy requires not so much ambitious strategic documents, which serve their obvious purposes, as above all the consistent implementation of appropriately chosen instruments — from increasing the area of green space providing ecosystem services in the city and developing integrated public transport, to creating accessibility systems and building resilience to the effects of climate change. At the same time it was stressed that even the best technological solutions cannot replace social dialogue and a sense of shared responsibility for space. As was emphasised: "Architectural policy begins with dialogue. Local decision-making processes are the foundation for building high-quality space in the context of European values" (Beate Engelhorn).

The panel discussion also made clear how much depends on the quality of cooperation between local authorities, the architectural community, academic centres and state institutions. Questions arose about the role of urban planning, the need for spatial education, the effectiveness of public consultation and the necessity of developing a shared language for describing and assessing architecture. All these voices lead to a common conclusion: architectural policy today is not a separate, sectoral field but an instrument for integrating different public policies and building a responsible vision of the city's development.



Fig. 8.12. Panel Discussion V. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.



Fig. 8.13. The audience during Panel Discussion V. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

9 Plenary Session VI
Roles and tasks of City Architects

prof. Piotr Lorens
City Architect of Gdańsk

The institution of the City Architect and the scope of its contemporary tasks are something of a novelty in Polish local-government practice. Historically the holder of this office dealt with somewhat different matters — for example, they were responsible for designing public buildings in a given city. Today the role of the City Architect, in Poland and across Europe alike, is being redefined.

In this last conference session we will look at the solutions taking shape today regarding the role and tasks of the City Architect. I hope that the conclusions of this session will become a basis both for establishing institutions of this kind in an ever greater number of cities and for a broader discussion about the role and the tasks that lie before it.



Fig. 9.1. Piotr Lorens speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

Who is the City Architect?

Agata Twardoch
City Urban Designer of Gliwice

Since September 2024 I have been serving as the Municipal Urban Designer in Gliwice. That city is an important point of reference for this whole story. Gliwice has around 170,000–180,000 inhabitants, medieval origins, and lies in the deeply industrial region of Upper Silesia. What distinguishes it from neighbouring cities is the metropolitan character it acquired in the first half of the twentieth century — and for which one man is responsible: Karl Schabik, city building councillor from 1919 to 1945.

Schabik was a Berlin-trained professional employed over several terms. He led a thirty-strong office producing both urban and architectural designs. He personally reviewed every project delivered in the centre by private investors and kept a firm hand on their quality. He was also responsible for the creation of new districts in the spirit of the garden city. It is to him that Gliwice owes its character. In 1945 Soviet troops entered the city. Schabik was taken to a camp, where he died. And from that time Gliwice has had no City Architect or anyone performing that role.



Fig. 9.2. Karl Schabik. Source: Gliwicki Leksykon Historyczny.

For the following decades design decisions were taken first by committees and anointed architects, to whom we owe numerous examples of so-called parachute architecture — the kind that looks as though it landed in a given place by accident. After 1989

decisions were taken over by politicians and traffic engineers. One result is a four-carriageway road — the Drogowa Trasa Średnicowa — cutting across the historic axis linking the market square with the railway station, the same axis Schabik once reinforced. Right beside it stretches a one-and-a-half-hectare empty plot, half road and half car park, on which — as it turned out after I took up the post — nothing can be built, because someone changed the design in the meantime and the load-bearing capacity does not allow it. In recent years, in turn, the shape of the city has increasingly been decided by the free market. The result is strip development, following the fine-grained historic division of fields and resembling slices of salami rather than urban fabric.

Into all of this my position has been introduced. The hopes attached to my appearance in this post are enormous — and of course unrealisable. Not because I do not want to meet them, but because I do not and cannot have the plenipotentiary powers Schabik had. If I did have them, in today's pluralistic world I would quickly be carted out in a wheelbarrow before I managed to do anything. I therefore have to manage with entirely different instruments.

Before I began work, I wrote down my understanding of the role. The post is called Municipal Urban Designer — and that name is not accidental: I see the function as more closely related to the "urban designer" than to the "urban planner", because I do not deal with spatial planning in the strict sense but with defining a vision. To that vision I assigned four main tasks: reviewing and approving projects — all public ones, and in large part private investments, location decisions and aesthetic questions; initiating and running architectural competitions and public consultations, of which until now there were effectively none in the city; audits and studies of public space, answering the question of what else needs improving; and finally cooperation — internal, with the departments of the city administration, and external, falling within what we call "soft power".



Fig. 9.3. Agata Twardoch speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

I entered a municipal organism that has functioned for decades with an established structure. My appearance and my interference in the work of all the departments naturally provokes varied reactions. It helps that I report directly to the mayor and have her full support — I bypass the level of deputy mayors and have the possibility of vetoing various decisions when necessary. But above all I work through agreement and persuasion.

I see my main role in this organism as sketching a vision that will make officials who have worked in the city for many years willing to step outside their comfort zone. They follow well-worn paths — often without ill will, and even with a great deal of good will — and they cannot always find reasons or instruments to act differently than before. That is where my strongest role lies. I also fight for the quality of public space — with private investors and with residents themselves, in order to rebuild trust lost through years of top-down measures that took no account of real urban needs.

For this reason I do not use instruments typical of spatial planning or of architecture in the strict sense. Local plans and polished visualisations do not sell what I want to convey. Instead I look for forms of communication that will convey a vision of the city in a legible and relatable way. One recent result: the director of the Roads Authority informed me that prototyping has just begun on Zwycięstwa Avenue — the main street between the market square and the station. The carriageway will be narrowed and pedestrian spaces, benches and café terraces will be created. Something that for thirty years could not be achieved. Ultimately we want to rebuild this street, but in line with good practice we first test and talk with residents.

Who, then, is a City Architect in 2025? Certainly not a demiurge of Karl Schabik's kind. We must also break with the tradition of Corbusian thinking, which still runs through approaches to urban planning. The City Architect today must be a good specialist — perhaps simply an engineer — who is able to hand over control of what they do to the imagination. Because whatever we call this role and whatever instruments we use, what matters most is belief in the possibility of change and imagination about how that change can and must be carried through.

The Flemish Government Architect: building an architectural culture

Eva Amelynck

Team of the Flemish Government Architect

The mission of the Flemish Government Architect is to improve and promote the architectural quality of the built environment through exemplary architectural policy and responsible public procurement practice. We pursue it by advising governments and other public authorities on raising the quality of their projects, creating opportunities for young and international designers, and taking an active part in the debate about architecture, urban design and landscape.

The Flemish Government Architect has a purely advisory role — no decision-making power. We sometimes use a formulation that captures the character of this position well: the government architect can speak about everything, because he has nothing to say about any particular matter. He is appointed by the Flemish government for five years and is supported by a permanent team of fifteen architects, urban planners and landscape architects. The government architect's term changes, but the team endures — and it is there that expert knowledge accumulates. The office works directly under the prime minister rather than under any ministry of culture or the environment, which makes cross-cutting work for all ministers possible.



Fig. 9.4. Eva Amelynck speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

One of the main instruments is the Open Call programme, running since 2000 — that is, for twenty-five years. Its idea is to guide public and semi-public authorities through the process of defining a project's scope and ambitions and to advise them in selecting a design team. To date more than 350 projects have been delivered under the Open Call, and many young and less young architects have gained through it an opportunity for public commissions. The result is a strong architectural culture in Flanders. Public procurement has the potential to be a model of innovation and to set the tone — including for private investors.

Responsible commissioning comprises several elements we consider key. The first is a precise definition of the project: who the client is, what their needs are and what ambitions they set — understood both culturally and socially. These ambitions become a guideline throughout the procedure and throughout the project's life. We also commit to responsible use of space, materials and resources. We are keen to publicise public commissions widely within the design community and to involve diverse approaches. Dialogue between client and designer is crucial — conducted during the procedure and continued after it ends. For this reason we select a designer with a design vision rather than a finished design: we believe that only cooperation after the team is chosen allows a project to be developed in the way that best answers the client's needs. We also apply an integrated approach to assessment — instead of judging a project against separate criteria, we focus on quality and ambition as a whole. We publish all commissions and design proposals on our website, ensuring full transparency and an opportunity for the whole profession to learn.

The Open Call procedure proceeds in several stages. It begins with so-called phase zero: any public or semi-public client can come to us with a project. We then invest considerable effort in understanding their needs and ambitions, formulate them jointly and set them down in a memorandum, which serves as a point of reference throughout the procedure. All the project's preliminary conditions are thus established and documented before the selection of the team properly begins.

In the first stage — selection — design teams must demonstrate through their references that they understand the project's ambitions, and also present an initial statement of what they would like to propose and what they consider the essence of the task. Projects are grouped and published twice a year, in October and in March. This allows designers to choose deliberately which commission they want to apply for. On this basis the government architect prepares a shortlist, from which the client selects the teams invited to tender. Briefings are then organised: the client presents their ambitions and the designers have the chance to ask questions in open dialogue. This is also the moment at which designers — now knowing the project better — form their final team, choosing competences appropriate to the particular task. Presentations of the tenders are open to all the invited teams.

After a team has been chosen, the Flemish Government Architect remains involved and monitors the course of the design process, checking whether the ambitions defined at the outset are still present in the final design. Accompanying the project therefore lasts from phase zero right through to delivery.

What can the City Architect do?

dr Jacek Barski

City Architect of Wrocław

What can a City Architect do? It is a general question which — if one looks at it through the prism of legal acts — remains unanswered. The role of City Architect is legally undefined in Poland. I was appointed City Architect of Wrocław by an ordinance of the mayor in January this year, after a break of several years during which the post was unfilled. I was appointed not on my own but at the head of an advisory team comprising: the dean of the Faculty of Architecture, the chair of the Lower Silesian Regional Chamber of Architects, the chair of the Regional Chamber of Civil Engineers, the chair of the Association of Polish Architects in Wrocław, a conservation-specialist architect nominated by the profession, and representatives of the administration: the director of the Planning Department and the director of the Architecture Department.

It is worth noting that the organisation of the City Architect's work differs in every Polish city. The team I am describing is an advisory and reviewing body attached to the mayor of Wrocław. Its tasks are: analysing design solutions in urban space; formulating conclusions and comments helpful in conducting investment policy; reviewing architectural concepts; taking part in architectural and urban design competitions; issuing formal and spatial recommendations; and formulating proposals supporting the development of high-quality solutions responding to socio-cultural and environmental challenges while preserving cultural continuity and respect for the city's spatial identity. This is a set of soft measures — they may be described by a single phrase that we decline in every case: this is architectural policy. A thing exceptionally needed.

Wrocław has a long history in this field. There has always been a City Architect in Wrocław, apart from a short recent interruption. I need not mention the period a hundred years ago when — as in Gliwice — the city had a municipal architect in the person of Max Berg. But in later decades too the City Architect was always present. The role was never anchored in statute, and its competences were never described in law. And yet — using only soft instruments, personal conviction and authority — it proved possible to translate architecture from theory into practice.

I myself have worked for the municipal government of Wrocław since 2001, and for more than fifteen years as a department director — variously named, but always covering three divisions I regard as key: Spatial Planning, Architecture and Construction, and Heritage Conservation. Each was headed by a person with a formally defined title: City Urban Planner, City Architect and Municipal Heritage Conservator. The task I considered most important from the moment I took up the director's post was apparently obvious: to create a platform on which these three people and their colleagues could inform one another about their work and discuss the shaping of space together. I know that this was not how things were done everywhere in Polish cities at that time. Colleagues from other cities came to Wrocław and asked: how do you do it? We did it precisely like this — putting into practice nothing but soft policies and our own convictions. And it worked.

One expression of this way of working was architectural competitions. Among the Wrocław projects I consider iconic, let me mention the National Forum of Music, the airport, the municipal stadium and the Capitol Music Theatre — all of them the result of competitions. Wrocław also has a competition tradition of more than sixty years — today called Beautiful Wrocław — in which the Society of Wrocław Enthusiasts and the mayor annually or biennially award the best architectural projects in various categories. In 2016, when Wrocław was European Capital of Culture, it was the first city in that cycle to introduce architecture as a fully fledged field of culture. And in the city's strategy — both the one with a 2030 horizon and the one now being prepared for 2050 — beauty, understood in many aspects including the spatial, is one of the fundamental values.

I say all this in order to stress: I am convinced of the need for architectural programmes and policies, at national and local level alike. But please note that such measures — though unnamed and lacking statutory anchoring — we always undertook. Bottom-up initiatives and local strategies have enormous value. They are not, however, sufficient in one key area.



Fig. 9.5. Jacek Barski speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

All the good examples I have spoken of concern public investment. Over these we exercise control: a competition gives us influence over the outcome. Meanwhile in Wrocław — and, I suspect, in most Polish cities — the number of private investments exceeds public ones many times over. And we do not have a single instrument that would allow us to guard against buildings of unacceptable architecture appearing in our city. The director of the architecture department, faced with thousands of building permit applications, is powerless against a private investor who does not want to cooperate. Therefore, while fully agreeing on the need for architectural policies, I also appeal for something else: that we as a profession — city architects and architects in general — should demand that parliamentarians create legal instruments enabling effective care for spatial order. Not everything can be achieved through bottom-up action. History teaches that its effectiveness has its limits.

Panel Discussion VI

Participants:

1. prof. Piotr Lorens – City Architect of Gdańsk (moderator).
2. Konstantina Chrysostomou – Estel Cooperative.
3. Laura Kairiene – City Architect of Vilnius.
4. prof. Magdalena Kozień-Woźniak – Cracow University of Technology.
5. Janusz Sepioł – City Architect of Kraków.
6. Björn Siesjö – City Architect of Gothenburg.
7. Małgorzata Tomczak – editor-in-chief of the monthly „Architektura i Biznes".



Ryc. 9.6. Participants in Panel Discussion VI, from the left: Piotr Lorens, Janusz Sepioł, Magdalena Kozień-Woźniak, Małgorzata Tomczak, Björn Siesjö, Laura Kairienė, Konstantina Chrysostomou. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

prof. Piotr Lorens

Who should the City Architect be? An adviser, a consultant, a masterplanner, a creator, an organiser — or someone else again?

Janusz Sepioł

Once the matter was clear: the City Architect existed in order to deliver municipal undertakings. In Kraków there was Moraczewski, who — from the moment local government came into being — built the municipal slaughterhouse, the Academy of Fine Arts, the waterworks and schools. He was also an excellent architect. I think that tradition indicates the essence of the task: the City Architect supplies projects. This has two aspects. First, he chooses the subject, the place, the idea. Just as Agata Twardoch decided she would work on the avenue from the market square towards the station, because no one had thought of it before. The architect is thus the creative director of local government. Second, he looks after quality: he is the officer responsible for ensuring that a project is done by the best person in the best possible way.

prof. Magdalena Kozień-Woźniak

Whatever the scale of activity, we should not separate architecture, urban design and planning. The city is a changing organism subject to various processes, and understanding those processes is a key attribute of the architect who tries to communicate to stakeholders the need for the quality of space as a common good. Developers and various social groups are not opposing sides but participants striving towards a single goal. Somewhere here the architect's role should be rooted.



Fig. 9.7. Piotr Lorens during Panel Discussion VI. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.



Fig. 9.8. Janusz Sepioł during Panel Discussion VI. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

Małgorzata Tomczak

I would add the role of negotiator. But above all I want to stress: the City Architect must be treated as indispensable. We are at such a point in the development of Polish cities that every large and medium-sized city should have an architect who will look after space and not allow the chaos to deepen. That is one reason why Kraków's Pact for Space came into being. The City Architect should stand guard over quality and possess the competences of a politician, a negotiator, a creator, an architect and a researcher.

Björn Siesjö

I would say it is about curating quality. The City Architect — neither in Gothenburg nor in many other places — does not decide on everything. But they can make it possible to make good choices and to build the right cities. Over thirteen years in Gothenburg, having no predecessor, I had to define my own role — which was in a sense an advantage, because I could avoid some of the traps. I negotiated with contractors and developers and looked for compromises. I think one has to be versatile and use every available means in order to curate and enable quality.

Laura Kairienė

Having an architecture act in which it is officially written down what the Chief City Architect is obliged to do, I have clearly defined daily work. Architectural law obliges me to implement quality solutions in the city across eight dimensions: urban integration, sustainability, beauty, economy and other features close to the idea of the New European Bauhaus. I can use this directly in working with

architects and developers, because I am required to review every project in Vilnius — from small to very large — and also to create local plans and strategies and to carry out education. I do see a certain paradox here, however: the architects I work with do not need education — they know perfectly well what good architecture is. But they face enormous pressure from developers. The architect is a leader promoting good architecture — and that struggle is a daily reality.

prof. Piotr Lorens

We may say that an additional role of the City Architect is restoring dreams and reminding people of them. We also have the voice of civil society at the table — Konstantina, what is your perspective?

Konstantina Chrysostomou

From that side I would say above all: architects do not know everything. That is an important thing to deconstruct. To understand a situation we must talk to the community and understand real needs. Time and again we have seen a gulf between local authorities' projects and residents' actual needs. That is why what we do is not so much participation as cooperation — between the administration and the community, but often also within the administration itself, because departments sometimes do not talk to one another and deliver parallel, similar projects. The City Architect should act as part of a team, bring in different disciplines and open the decision-making process to the community.



Fig. 9.9. Magdalena Kozień-Woźniak during Panel Discussion VI. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

prof. Piotr Lorens

I would now like to put two questions to each of you. First: how do we look after the quality of public space? Second: what defines that quality — is it a matter of architectural design and beauty, or perhaps of inclusiveness, of balancing social, environmental and economic aspects? And a third question: where are the limits of the City Architect's competence?

Konstantina Chrysostomou

In thinking about public spaces we should think about the people who use them. I do not like the word "users" — let us speak about people: children, carers, passers-by, those who are here permanently. The quality of public space must take all these perspectives into account and implement them through a process of cooperation. In Barcelona we do not make projects — we make processes. The assessment criterion concerns methodology, not a finished document. We work with communities, among others with children in schools, because we do not treat them as citizens of the future — they are citizens of the present, with needs adults cannot anticipate. It is remarkable what one can learn from them. A city that is good for children is good for everyone — a sentence I owe to Francesco Nucci and regard as one of the key ones.

Laura Kairienė

Let me start with the definition of public space. If we include streets as the urban fabric of the whole city, then we must understand what kind of street we are creating and what problem we are solving. The soft urbanism mentioned earlier is not only street design — it is socio-economic questions, location, context.



Fig. 9.10. Björn Siesjö during Panel Discussion VI. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

I agree that this is multidisciplinary work: architects must engage many stakeholders, specialists and universities. Good public space is a large, complex management process.

Björn Siesjö

One has to work with people who know about different things. In Gothenburg we have a city gardener who is a landscape architect with competences equivalent to mine — and in shaping public spaces we work very closely together. If you want to be a mediator or a curator, you must above all listen and be an advocate for others. You can be a generalist, listen and try to make different ideas converge in a certain way. As for the limits of competence: when we work with quality, we must remember that quality is a Latin concept meaning "what" — and it cannot be measured. You cannot write "beauty: 5.2". That is why we assess it together, different people around one table — like the jury of an architectural competition. It is a judgement, not a measurement.

Małgorzata Tomczak

As for limits: I do not know whether we should define them for ourselves. Everything depends on the needs of a particular city, and these vary. The broader the City Architect's competences, the better — although they need not be concentrated in one person. Sociologists, economists, city gardeners should at least be advisers, because the city is not only what we draw and transpose into the third dimension, but a complex of social, economic and political processes. The City Architect should also be a lobbyist — on behalf of residents, of architects, and above all of quality.



Fig. 9.11. Laura Kairienė during Panel Discussion VI. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.



Fig. 9.12. Konstantina Chrysostomou during Panel Discussion VI. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

As for the quality of public spaces — my favourite definition is Jan Gehl's: a good urban space is one in which there are people and to which, for some reason, they come. We already know certain things: we like spaces that are shaded, varied, with urban pockets. We like social diversity and the possibility of meeting. During a visit to Oslo I was shown the Deichman library and told that its more important function than storing books is being a public space where one can meet around a round table, but also draw a curtain and be alone among people — because sometimes we experience that need too.

prof. Magdalena Kozień-Woźniak

More important than marking out limits is defining the possibilities of working together and sharing responsibility. Residents, users, children are not passive recipients of our visions but co-participants. As architects we must move to thinking in terms of collaboration and learn to share that responsibility. Let me also speak from an academic perspective: the university as an institution can become a participant in the process of shaping space, and not merely a supplier of qualified staff. We are witnessing a paradigm shift towards holistic thinking about place, its uniqueness and its complexity — which requires talking to everyone already at phase zero. As professors we increasingly do not "teach" students but "learn" together with them.

Janusz Sepioł

The basic limit on a City Architect's work is the level of architectural culture in the city where they operate. One can be a great innovator, but if the ice is too thick the icebreaker will not get through it. Working to raise architectural culture is at once the task and the limit. We only like the songs we have already heard — and here one sometimes has to sing a new one.



Fig. 9.13. Małgorzata Tomczak during Panel Discussion VI. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

Let me also draw attention to something that surprised me at this conference: the concept of beauty comes up very often. It is worth recalling that the concepts of art and beauty parted ways somewhere in the 1920s, and no contemporary artist uses that criterion — they would be surprised to be told they were creating beauty. The values of beauty are subjective and subject-oriented; artistic values are objective in character. This too is a barrier to the architect's work: the expectation that they will create beauty, whereas their task is to propose artistic values and to raise the level of awareness and architectural culture within their community.

prof. Piotr Lorens

Let me ask in closing: how should we define the role of the City Architect today in creating a vision for the city's development? Historically it happened that the City Architect simply sat down, drew, and ordered construction in accordance with that drawing. How is the role to be understood now?

Janusz Sepioł

Architects who cared for cities or other places over a long period created their image. I do not think that is a bad model. I also think the City Architect should have the instinct of a good public developer of projects — that sixth sense that makes one walk down a street and see: there should be a fountain here, an avenue there, and here a nursery school would make the city better. That instinct of a creator of space is irreplaceable.

prof. Magdalena Kozień-Woźniak

What Janusz is describing is the ability to seek out sensitive places — from the smallest scale to whole districts — and to match the right instruments to them: an architectural competition, planning, research at phase zero. Here too I see great potential in universities: students, with their "irresponsible" inventiveness, can supply visions impossible to anticipate from the position of an experienced practitioner.

Małgorzata Tomczak

An architect without a vision of the city does not fulfil their role. This is not, however, about a modernist vision or about demolishing and designing from scratch. It is about diagnosing the city well and attempting to answer its real problems, both short-term and long-term. Such work creates the city's narrative and stimulates its development. Some of these answers must be bold and far-reaching, and we should not be afraid of them.

Björn Siesjö

The vision I carry is this: it is possible to transform and rebuild. Gothenburg, home of Volvo, is full of urban motorways cutting through the urban fabric. But we are changing that right now. We made our cities into an excellent machine — except that it no longer works, because mobility is unsustainable. We must not only develop cities but also transform them. And to do that one has to work on architectural culture — with ordinary people and with decision-makers, constantly and systematically.

Laura Kairienė

The Chief Architect should be a dreamer, a leader and a listener. This is not a one-person show — it is teamwork. Before the vision there must be ambition: something that wakes you every morning to defend the idea of the city. When daily routine sets in and someone forgets where we are heading, the leader points to the summit we are aiming for. That idea must be worked out jointly with citizens, stakeholders and academics — but someone has to lead it.

Konstantina Chrysostomou

The City Architect should above all be a good team member. Promote cooperation. Listen. Design with empathy and understand people's needs — including those who are invisible. Architecture is an excellent instrument for democratising the city and we should use it as widely as possible. A design is not only lines on paper — it is relationships. We should imagine what relationships will arise as a result of our decisions and what impact they will have on people's daily lives.

prof. Piotr Lorens

We are only beginning this discussion. We are using this conference as an opportunity to launch an informal network of city architects. I hope we will develop it — perhaps as soon as next year, in Gdańsk, we will return to the question of an urban vision, taking a richer shared practice as our starting point.





Fig. 9.14. Panel Discussion VI. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

10 Conclusions

prof. Piotr Lorens
City Architect of Gdańsk

As we close the proceedings of our conference, we may formulate a number of conclusions and observations — relating both to the formation of architectural policies and to the process of implementing them.

First, it seems necessary to bring about the preparation of national architectural policies in every country of the European Union. A particular challenge in this respect faces Poland.

Second, those national policies should translate into documents prepared at local level — above all by cities. It is there, after all, that the most important decisions about the shape of our space are taken.

Third, in the process of developing a policy we should take into account a very broad spectrum of issues — including those arising from the New European Bauhaus and the Davos Process. It is also necessary to take account of the voice of all stakeholders — including, and perhaps above all, civil society.

Fourth, we must realise that sometimes more important than the final wording of one document or another is the process of its creation. For it is precisely at the stage of drafting a document that a real discussion about our expectations takes place.

Fifth, for all this work to make any sense, it is necessary to create institutions responsible for implementing these policies. At local level this role can be performed by the City Architect. It is necessary, however, to define in law the competences of the person holding this office and to promote the idea of appointing city architects on a wide scale.

Sixth, for all the above points to be achievable, it is necessary to raise the awareness of society at large as to the essence and importance of the quality of the space around us, the role of all of us in shaping it, and the possibility of translating it into concrete design solutions.

The above conclusions of course do not exhaust the whole spectrum of ideas and views formulated during the conference. A somewhat more ordered form of them is the Conference Declaration appended to this publication. I encourage everyone interested to read it carefully.

Apart from considerations concerning architectural policies, it also seems necessary to continue the discussions begun during our meeting. There will no doubt be an opportunity for this at the Congress of Polish Architecture and the Congress of Polish Urbanism planned for 2026.

Independently of those events, however, I already invite you to Gdańsk again, in December 2026. We plan to organise another conference then, this time devoted to questions of creating a vision for the city's development. I hope it will become an interesting platform for continuing the threads considered during our proceedings.

My warmest thanks to all of you for taking part in our event. On this occasion I would like once again to express my gratitude to all the co-organisers, moderators, speakers and panellists. It is solely thanks to your commitment that we managed to organise this debate.



Fig. 10.1. Piotr Lorens speaking at the conference. Source: Grzegorz Mehring.











Fig. 10.2. The conference "Architectural Policies as a European Standard". Source: Grzegorz Mehring.

11 The Gdańsk Declaration on the shaping of architectural policies

Architectural policies as a European standard. Investing in a high-quality living environment for all

Twenty-first-century Europe stands at a crossroads — facing growing geopolitical instability, intensifying climate change and the transformation of urban spaces into areas of social inequality, vanishing cultural and architectural identity, spatial degradation and a lack of access to decent housing conditions. In the face of these challenges, only an ambitious, integrated and quality-oriented architectural policy can ensure the effective implementation of European Union objectives at local level.

Europe's built environment and the architecture of tomorrow should be of high quality and should benefit everyone. Leaving no one behind, European multidisciplinary and participatory models of urban governance and innovative action must foster social inclusion, adapt to climate change, and promote the sustainable development of neighbourhoods in cities and rural areas through an integrated and sustainable approach. The field of architecture continues to play a key role in promoting standards of quality.

Context / Introduction

In recent years, European policy has seen growing awareness of the positive contribution that a high-quality built environment can make to the common good. Several recent policy initiatives have placed strong emphasis on the need to adopt a holistic approach to the built environment and have raised awareness of architecture's key role to a higher political level. These initiatives help to increase awareness of the fact that a high-quality built environment is a driver of economic growth, social cohesion, climate resilience and cultural revival. They create an impulse for a change in the thinking of political and economic actors, provide a strong incentive for market

participants, and ultimately help to create the framework needed to achieve higher quality in our built environment.

The role of architects and of architectural policy

If architects, urban designers, planners, landscape architects and other built environment professionals are to make their contribution through their particular professional expertise, a holistic, inclusive, transdisciplinary and long-term vision of architecture and the built environment based on a quality-oriented approach is essential. This comprehensive approach must be adopted by politicians and incorporated into architectural policy at national and local level. Such an approach has already been expressed in the document "Towards a Shared Culture of Architecture", whose authors advocate investing in a high-quality living environment for all.

Architecture is no longer solely a matter of aesthetics — it has become an instrument of social security, economic renewal and civic cohesion. It also plays a key role in shaping and preserving local identity, and in creating and maintaining the distinctive cultural landscapes of European cities. It is therefore necessary to move away from a policy focused solely on the Green Deal towards a model combining climate resilience with energy, social and economic security, and with the cultural dimension of development.

Architectural policy, as an instrument integrating cultural, spatial, housing, environmental and social strategies, must now respond to new challenges — not only adaptation to climate change but also preparing urban infrastructure for crisis situations: migration, war, the housing crisis and digital transformation. The overriding aim must be the quality of life of Europe's citizens.

Architects — an open, interdisciplinary and socially responsible profession — are ready to take on the role of leaders of change. Thanks to their education they are able to incorporate environmental, social and economic perspectives into urban design, creating spaces that deliver lasting value and support the democratic character of local communities.

We therefore call for architectural policy to be recognised as a European standard by national, regional and local governments — it should become a key element of urban and investment strategies, linking the values of the New European Bauhaus with Europe's urgent need for stability and security.

The European perspective: the leading role of the public sector

Over the past thirty years many European countries and regions have developed public policy supporting high-quality architecture and promoting design excellence. Today most administrations in the EU, and in addition in Iceland, Norway and Switzerland, have an official architectural policy at national or regional level. That number has been growing since the early 1990s and is expected to continue growing in the years ahead, meaning that Europe will soon be largely covered by national and regional architectural policies. Most of them adopt a "comprehensive strategic policy" approach, in which the design of the built environment is seen as a cross-cutting issue capable of generating many benefits and values across different fields and of defining a set of initiatives and actions — namely, promoting public awareness of the importance of a high-quality built environment.

The local perspective: the key role of local authorities and local communities

Independently of national perspectives, the European policy of subsidiarity and the empowerment of local communities points to the leading role of municipal governments in shaping the built environment. This role carries great responsibility for the architecture of shared space, but also

for embedding it in local identity and respecting heritage. All these aspects are an important complement to challenges of a European and global character, but they must be grounded in local contexts. Therefore — independently of national policies — it is necessary to develop local policies providing the basis for a considered and consistent shaping of the cultural landscape of European cities.

City Architects: the engine of change

To shape and implement these policies at local level — which appears to be the most important area of intervention — an "engine of change" must be identified. This role can be performed by the City Architect: a professional acting on behalf of the community, a guardian of local identity, but also recognised as a driver of the implementation of European values.

The impact of architectural policy

Architectural policy — comprising a comprehensive vision for the long-term integration of all significant aspects of quality, including aesthetics, sustainability and affordability, into all the processes that shape our living environment — has a significant impact on design governance processes: it improves policy coordination, facilitates cross-sectoral cooperation within public administration and beyond it, and enables a diversity of initiatives promoting best practice and supporting a culture of placemaking. Bearing in mind that the built environment is a reflection of the community, and that responsibility for its overall quality rests largely with the public sector, public authorities should promote the value of spatial design as a public policy fostering a culture of quality and placemaking. In Europe the public sector already has a significant influence on the shaping of the built environment, whether through planning policy, the development of control systems, the provision of funds for investment in infrastructure and the built environment, or simply through its role as owner or user of property. One of the main benefits of architectural policy is the development of a new set of informal instruments of urban design governance that previously did not exist in some countries, such as new awareness-raising and educational initiatives, as well as wider use of award schemes, design review panels, architectural competitions and so on.

National legislation and policy are essential for defining ambitions as well as the key principles and actions a government intends to take in order to improve the quality of the built environment. Architectural policy can have a positive impact only if it is effectively implemented and adequately financed; otherwise it will remain merely a lofty intention and will be unable to play any role in design governance in the absence of sustained coordination and resources for implementation.



Fig. 11.1. Kunszt Wodny — the venue where the conference was held. Source: Jerzy Pinkas.





GDAŃSK

STUDIES
MATERIALS
ANALYSES

ISBN 978-83-973708-8-3