

Words from the ACE President

23 December 2021

At the time of the last season's greetings of my term as ACE President I take the opportunity to recall what has happened and been achieved during the last 4 years. And I do not take into account the impact of the pandemic; while this didn't ease the work, it didn't hinder it either. Even some quite important results were achieved this year. Let's start chronologically.

2018 was declared as European Year of Cultural Heritage. Many events took place, including a number with the ACE's participation.

Our main contribution was the conference on re-use in Leeuwarden with the keynote speaker Xavier Vermeulen Windsant from XVW presenting his project in Amsterdam - a refurbishment of a housing estate from the seventies, which was supposed to be demolished before he intervened. The project was the winner of the 2017 European Prize for Architecture, the Mies van der Rohe Prize. As in all our conferences we produced a Declaration, which contained contributions of all speakers and was confirmed in its final form.

One other very important event was the signature of the Davos declaration at a conference in Davos in January 2018. This was the start for a strong move towards Baukultur or high-quality built environment.

My focus always has been the cultural, societal and political dimension of architecture. The built environment is an issue of common interest as stated in the Councils' 2019-22 work programme for culture: "The focus will be put on architecture as a discipline that encompasses the right balance between cultural, social, economic, environmental and technical aspects for the common good."

We were involved in the drafting of this (during the Austrian EU Presidency in the second half of 2018) and one has to know, that in Austria we have had a vibrant debate on Baukultur for almost 20 years and have found great supporters in the relevant ministry. Through this work programme the term "architecture" was introduced at EU-level and in this field the first time.

In 2019 we had two conferences, the first in [Innsbruck on "quality assurance systems"](#) and the second was the ["young architects forum" in Barcelona](#), by invitation of our Spanish friends.

In September 2020 Ursula von der Leyen made her first speech to the Parliament about the State of the Union and there she introduced the idea of the "new European Bauhaus."

"But this is not just an environmental or economic project: it needs to be a new cultural project for Europe... This is why we will set up a new European Bauhaus - a co-creation space where architects, artists, students, engineers, designers work together to make that happen."

This challenge of the President of the European Union had to be taken up. We invited various European sister organisations to join forces and got very positive feedback. Engineers, interior designers, landscape architects, space planners, the European Schools of Architecture and the European art schools, the European researchers as well as the European solar association all joined. Actually, this was made easier, in a way, by the fact that nobody might have joined an inaugural meeting for such an initiative in person, but as we all have been accustomed to web meetings, it happened like this.

For a year this group met every second week, concluded a [manifesto](#), gave ourselves the name NEBC (New European Bauhaus Collective), became one of the first partners of the NEB (together with the ACE itself) and arranged a web conference at the end of April with over 800 participants. Besides the success achieved by joining forces, it is the first time such cooperation has happened at European level in a formal way. After the conference a [report](#) was drafted, we had a first "live" meeting in the summer and the work is ongoing.

Also of note on the fringes of the conference preparations - and at the request of Ruth Reichstein from IDEA we formulated a [paper concerning the Public Procurement Directive](#) which might undergo a revision in the near future. The paper has been worked out by a small ad-hoc work group and the main wish is to have a separate chapter for the procurement of intellectual services. The paper was well received, even by the President of the European Commission in [her speech at our Conference](#).

The OMC work-group also held 2 years of intensive debate which resulted in an excellent report. I strongly recommend that it be read and enjoyed. It places architecture and the connected professions at the core of many issues concerning the built environment and the raising of its quality. Of course, the need to achieve excellence in the work is a fundamental criteria for getting involved in this discussion. The report was presented in a Conference in Graz and in Maribor. I want to underline a certain aspect of the report which concerns the issue of public procurement. In my personal comment on a draft of the report I proposed to include some more concrete points concerning this topic, by using the public procurement paper mentioned above. So, the wish for a separate chapter, in the public procurement directive for intellectual services can be found in an official document of a Council work group. This is a good start on which to build for the work on the new directive in the coming 2 years.

This autumn the ACE had one more conference, on the topic of "Climate change & Built Heritage". We had 2 excellent key-note speakers, Anna Heringer and Martin Rauch, both winners of the New European Bauhaus Prize, with eye-opening interventions and several panels on relevant topics. We were especially happy to have Ruth Reichstein from the EU Commission's IDEA service with us. You can still find parts of the Conference as it has been recorded.

Finally, at the end of this year the Council adopted the Conclusions on culture, high-quality architecture and built environment as key elements of the New European Bauhaus initiative. The main goals and results of the work on his field are well summarised and put on the table at European level as a good reference point and basis on which to develop our future work.

The New European Bauhaus offers a unique chance for European entities to adopt a different mind-set in the future by including the cultural dimension in their work, initiating stronger co-creation and holistic views. But the work has only started, and our further contribution is needed and those who initiated the work as well as other institutions working on the topic, need our support. All this fosters the importance of high-quality architecture and the quality of the built environment, and thereby also helps the profession to secure an important place within these developments.

At this point I want to thank Eugen Panescu, Jacques Timmerman, Carl Bäckstrand as well as the whole ACE office for their efforts and constructive contributions in the recent years.

With my best wishes for the coming year,

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