

Looking for vanished *Baukultur* – a tale of disillusion

Jürgen Tietz

Some sentences sound like a thunderclap: monumental, intimidating, whereas other sentences are neither intimidating nor monumental – rather, they move the soul. The *Davos Declaration* contains such wise sentences. One of them reads: “There is an urgent need for a holistic, culture-centred approach to the built environment and for a humanistic view of the way we collectively shape the places we live in and the legacy we leave behind.”¹

Why did this sentence move me so much? This leads us back to the beginnings of the European Year of Cultural Heritage. The initiative behind this originated in a working group of the German National Committee for Monument Protection. At a time that was marked by conflicting European interests, we asked ourselves: shouldn't we make it clear once more that our common European heritage harbours an unbelievable potential? Wouldn't it be high time to assimilate the perspective of the European Architectural Heritage Year of 1975 and, at last, magnify it? Time to convey this European heritage of ours in all its diversity and beauty – from Greek and Roman antiquity to the varieties of Gothic, Baroque and modern – to appreciate it, and put it to use for the future development of the community? As I wrote at the time in the book: *Monument Europe*, “The closeness of these cultural entanglements and references within Europe are visible in its built heritage. To this day, in every single column the 2000-year old Greco-Roman antiquity winks at us. In every one of them, the European motto of diversity in unity takes concrete form”²

The idea for a European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 thus grew out of the initiative for a new European Architectural Heritage Year winding its way through national and European institutions. Was it successful? Has it made any difference either within or outside the monument preservation sector?

Looking back is a sobering experience. In the context of the Year, many institutions took up the cause of European and cultural heritage. But what does it amount to in practice in city councils, in architectural offices, on construction sites and in historic monuments offices? As far as Germany is concerned, the European Year did not create any impetus – unfortunately. My enthusiasm for what unites us in Europe's cultural heritage, for this ‘European monument’ as potential for the future, crumbled down in everyday business. No way out of the filter bubble of the profession could be found. Indeed, an incestuous conflicting discourse amongst monument preservation professionals has eroded good ideas and the approach neither fell on fertile ground within the architectural community nor amongst building contractors. It did not even reach most of them.

Yet ... there is the *Davos Declaration*: smart and differentiated – just like the Swiss guidelines on monument preservation. Unfortunately, neither has enjoyed much fame up to this day. Why is that? Why is it not possible to achieve an effect other than in seemingly homeopathic doses?

Is it perhaps because the *Davos Declaration* speaks of ‘high-level *Baukultur*’

whereas, as a matter of fact, it should surely speak of every form of *Baukultur*? For *Baukultur* is not just about an episodic viewing of a single building that, on top of foundations, statics and façade, is dusted with a quarter of a gram of *Baukultur*. *Baukultur* is not the cream on the espresso. It is the cup of coffee itself, including the cup, table, café and all the guests. *Baukultur* is about the big picture: about dealing with existing stock in a sustainable way; about the preservation of Creation; about collaborative interaction in the design of house and farmhouse, of town and country. But that has not even begun to reach the European bodies that should deal with *Baukultur*. The “humanistic view of the way we collectively shape the places we live in and the legacy we leave behind” is still out in the cold.

Recently, nowhere has this become as clear as in the context of the EU's *Green Deal*. At the end of last year, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, announced the initiative for a new European Bauhaus to match “sustainability with style, to bring the European Green Deal closer to people's minds and homes”. Ideas were to be collected in order to display the new fruits of this new European Bauhaus throughout Europe from January 2023.³ How nice that the Commission – albeit at quite a late stage – is jumping on the bandwagon of sustainability, *Baukultur* and community. ‘New European Bauhaus’ sounds wonderfully consensus-oriented. Is that really so? By needlessly referring to the Bauhaus, it disregards the entire traditional architecture that has

worked with regionally-sourced materials and forms for centuries. In addition, self-loving Bauhaus represented only a fairly thin thread of modern architecture and art.

A really ‘green’ new *Baukultur*, however, would need precisely the truly sustainable, integrated thinking and planning proposed by the *Davos Declaration*. The fact that the European Commission did not draw on its own preparatory work speaks volumes about the incompetence of European institutions. In the *Davos Declaration*, Europe had already stated three years ago that “it is high time to take measures which will ensure that present and future social, economic, environmental and climatic developments and trends do not further diminish the quality of the built environment, but are instead used as opportunities for improvement”.⁴ Instead, through a

new European Bauhaus, another label with juicy project funding will be created. This has nothing to do with sustainability or *Baukultur*. So what consequences may we draw from this? As absurd as it may seem, the designed environment – that is all around us every day in the sense in which the *Davos Declaration* conceives it – still constitutes a complete niche topic for mainstream society in Europe.

Should we become resigned? Definitely not! Instead, the ideas of the *Davos Declaration* have to be fed, Sisyphus-like, at universities and on construction sites, within the sector of monument preservation, and within national political institutions as well as at EU level. Above all, however, it will be important to forge alliances. In my opinion, the impetus from Davos stands for a holistic cultural education, that is to say, beyond the

levelling down (instead of qualifying) of education formalised through the Pisa and Bologna reforms in schools and universities, which is a failure. In addition, it is important to work out the good examples at the interface with the real-estate industry and to demonstrate the added value that can be achieved for everyone through an everyday *Baukultur*. To this end, *Baukultur* must be freed from its image as a (supposed) cost factor and needs to be presented as what it is, a lived “view of the way we collectively shape the places we live in”.

- 1 *Davos Declaration 2018*, p. 10, Article 3.
- 2 Jürgen Tietz, *Monument Europa: Wie Baukultur europäische Identität stiftet*, Zurich 2017, p. 52.
- 3 European Commission, ‘New European Bauhaus: Commission launches design phase’, press release 18 January 2021 (ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/de/ip_21_111, accessed 08.09.21).
- 4 *Davos Declaration 2018*, p. 9.

Abstract

À la recherche d’une culture du bâti disparue – une désillusion

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Après *L’Année européenne du patrimoine architectural 1975*, *L’Année européenne du patrimoine culturel 2018* offrit une nouvelle chance de sensibiliser au sein d’un large public européen le potentiel considérable qu’incarne le patrimoine bâti. L’évènement sans doute le plus important de cette année sera l’adoption de la *Déclaration de Davos*.

Il est vrai que l’on y parle d’une culture du bâti « de qualité », et non d’une culture du bâti en général. Quoi qu’il en soit, elle véhicule néanmoins la signification fondamentale de l’existence d’une culture du bâti. En l’occurrence, la culture du bâti ne joue pas le rôle de la crème dans un express. Elle englobe le café tout entier, tasse, table, établissement et clients compris. La culture du bâti englobe le tout, du respect du développement durable dans le traitement du tissu existant, de la

sauvegarde de la création de l’œuvre, de la synergie au niveau de la conception de la maison et de ses dépendances à la ville et à la campagne.

Ces préoccupations centrales n’ont pas encore atteint les institutions européennes. Ainsi, l’initiative lancée par la présidente de la commission Ursula von der Leyen en 2020 pour *Un nouveau Bauhaus européen* se réfère au Bauhaus historique de 1919. De ce fait, et sans nécessité, l’ensemble de l’architecture traditionnelle est écarté, alors que, durant un siècle entier, ce mouvement a mis en œuvre des matériaux et des formes inspirées des mouvements régionaux. En parallèle, l’initiative renonça dès le départ à se référer à la *Déclaration de Davos*, qui revendiquait une réflexion et une planification véritablement *écologique*, parce que respectueuse du développement durable et intégrée.

L’impulsion centrale issue de Davos transcende en effet la construction et la planification. A mon humble avis, elle revendique une formation culturelle totale, en deçà de la formation nivélatrice et non qualifiante introduite par les réformes de Pise et de Bologne dans le domaine de l’école et de l’université (d’où son échec).

Dans l’avenir, il s’agit de dégager à la frontière du secteur immobilier les bons exemples et de souligner la plus-value pour l’ensemble des acteurs obtenue par une culture du bâti quotidienne. A cet effet, la culture du bâti doit être libérée de l’image du (soi-disant) facteur économique et se présenter pour ce qu’elle est, c’est-à-dire une « vision humaniste de la manière dont nous façonnons collectivement les lieux où nous vivons », comme cela figure dans la *Déclaration de Davos*.