

‘High-quality *Baukultur* of the past’ – building research¹ is needed

Building research as *sine qua non* for the ‘high-quality *Baukultur* of the past’

Doris Grandits and Cyrill von Planta

Since the *Davos Declaration* of January 2018, the notion of *Baukultur* and the debate around it have been raised to a European, even global, level. For experts dealing with historical building fabric, the Declaration’s references to the historical cultural heritage are particularly interesting and important. Basically, the Declaration attaches great value to cultural heritage, since the way we deal with it “will be crucial for the future development of a high-quality built environment.”² Although the *Davos Declaration* provides a very clear definition of ‘high-quality *Baukultur*’ in Articles 7³ and 8,⁴ and emphasises cultural heritage and its significance in Article 9,⁵ it is surprisingly silent on the definition of what ‘high-quality *Baukultur*’ means in relation to the historical building fabric. This begs the question of how to define the actual meaning of ‘high-quality *Baukultur* of the past’.

It is an urgent duty for our guild to resolve this question in order to be able to work out how we should “use, maintain and protect our cultural heritage today.”⁶ Traditionally, this has been the task of building research, for which there already are a multitude of descriptions, classifications and definitions. Article 16 of the *Venice Charter*⁷, adopted in 1964, also refers to the indispensability of building research for properly dealing with historical structures. Only by ‘understanding the building’, both physically and figuratively, is it possible to assess its qualities and provide a basis for any further action.⁸ In Austria, the Federal Monuments Authority Austria (BDA)

set a milestone in ongoing developments⁹ with the publication of the *Guidelines for historical architectural analyses*¹⁰ in 2016. This was an attempt to provide a uniform framework for the very heterogeneous range of tasks and building researchers. In addition to a standardised procedure and structure, it calls for an interdisciplinary approach, which until then had not been clearly formulated or defined.

In order to be able to cope with the task set at the beginning so as to meet the requirements of the *Davos Declaration*, and enable the desired “conscious, well-debated”¹¹ handling of the existing building stock, building research must be conceived much more broadly than in the narrow context of monument protection. Not only monuments, but in fact the whole building stock should be considered and evaluated according to different gradations. Such diversification would ideally be reflected in a differentiated conservation/preservation policy that would not only focus on the most outstanding examples. However, this must not lead to a softening up of the notion of ‘monument’, but would have to be introduced as an additional instrument. At this point, a complex mix of challenges becomes apparent. Three spheres are concerned: (1) political and administrative, (2) technical, and (3) economic and practical.

(1) Political and administrative sphere
Austria is organised as a federal state. Official monument protection is handled by the Federal Monuments

Authority (BDA) at the federal level. However, the BDA has to rely on the district administrative authorities to enforce its decisions. Both zoning and building regulations fall within the competence of the state, whereas the definition of conservation areas is the responsibility of the municipalities. This means that there is a strong need for coordination and harmonisation in the practical handling of built cultural heritage. Given the jurisdictional circumstances, this is often difficult to achieve in the current situation. An institutionalised or corporate exchange could provide a remedy in many cases (see Fig. 1).

In reality, conservation policy options are very limited. In addition to protection by decision of the BDA, some state building regulations only offer the setting up of protection zones for particularly outstanding areas or, at the municipal level, the definition of conservation areas for the protection of townscapes. World Heritage Site zones as such have not yet found their way into the legal system.¹² In order to be able to apply the same differentiated approach to ‘high-quality *Baukultur*’, as defined in the *Davos Declaration*, to the ‘high-quality *Baukultur* of the past’, it would be desirable to widen the options for the levels of protection. Building stock that is already under national protection enjoys the highest level of statutory protection. Consequently, it should be possible to create additional tiers of protection in that clearly indicate what a property owner may undertake. These additional tiers would allow the graduated

broadening of the protected building stock and superordinate protection objectives. Conservation areas (*Schutzzonen*), defined at state level, and the protection of townscapes (*Ortsbildschutz*), decided at the municipal level, may continue to protect the character of large groups of buildings, but it should also be possible to clearly characterise the protection of a single building in its interrelationships with its surrounding in these tiers. This leads us to the next point.

(2) Technical sphere

On what basis are decisions about classification and subdivision made? Usually, this is done through building research assessment reports. Currently, however, building research is primarily concerned with the highest level of protected building stock (i.e. buildings under federal protection). BDA guidelines are also very clearly geared towards dealing with this type of building stock and require the involvement of the relevant experts. As mentioned above, a state-of-the-art historical building study that complies with the guidelines can nowadays almost only be performed by an interdisciplinary team.

In order to capture the 'high-quality *Baukultur* of the past', ideally every existing building should be examined, which is considerably more challenging given the large number of properties concerned. In order to expand basic analysis and enable area-wide coverage, a more comprehensive gradation of survey depths would be a feasible approach — in analogy to the further gradation into protection tiers proposed above in consequence of the diverse requirements of the monument stock, from medieval castle to post-war structure. At least a minimal form of (historical) building research would have to be carried out at the beginning of each project in the course of the basic assessment in order to determine the value of the existing building and classify it accordingly. Since it is only possible to protect what one actually knows, this would result in appropriate options for action.

This will require specialists. According to Raabe,¹³ these should be architects who have received an appropriate additional training.¹⁴ Currently, there is no corresponding training in Austria that conveys the required knowledge comprehensively. Efforts to improve this are already in progress.¹⁵ Apart from this, the standard training of planners should include in-depth teaching of architectural and historical contexts, together with sound knowledge in the fields of monument conservation or building research (see Fig. 2). This is not sufficiently the case Neumann¹⁶ explains, because of the concentration of architects on their role as *creative masterminds* who are primarily committed to self-expression through their own projects.

(3) Economic and practical sphere

If a minimal historical and technical building assessment is performed at the beginning of every project, the question arises as to how this effort is to be scheduled and remunerated. An addition to current performance models with regard to the (at least, minimal) historical and technical building assessment requirements is imperative.¹⁷ By interlinking with the above-mentioned additional assessment tiers, an embedding in the standard planning process would be possible and would result in the desired wide-ranging impact. Before every (re)building project, a first or simplest stage of study in the course of a conscientious and, if applicable, slightly extended basic analysis should be feasible (and should be conducted). A positive interplay might result from the fact that, on the one hand, the new requirements would make knowledge about the history of architecture valuable and, on the other hand, also generate scientific added value beyond the planning process.

It is now in the hands of the institutions involved in the construction sector to define minimum requirements and specify intervention guidelines in order to give quality a greater scope. In many cases, it would be advisable, amongst other things, to revise building regulations

and performance models, which are often geared to new constructions, accordingly (see Fig. 3). On the other hand, it is up to educational institutions to train professionals who are qualified for these tasks.

However, it all starts with raising awareness at every level. A basic understanding of *Baukultur* that permeates the whole of society is required. In addition to public campaigns designed to spread the term, it would be necessary to point to the responsibility of each and everyone towards built (architectural) history.¹⁸ Actively addressing the topic of the new, broadly defined 'high-quality *Baukultur*' offers the opportunity to stretch the boundaries of building research and create a larger stage for this discipline — thus 'incidentally' enormously expanding the body of knowledge. On the basis of this data, the debate about what constitutes 'high-quality *Baukultur* of the past' can be conducted in a well-grounded and thorough manner. The debate on who should collect, (scientifically) evaluate and assess this data for application purposes is to be conducted at the political level.

Essentially, the objective must be to preserve and further develop a high-quality living environment that reflects our history and culture. This also includes apparently inconspicuous buildings 'in the second row'.¹⁹ To use an analogy by Luigi Snozzi, the structure of a city may be compared to a *panettone*. First and foremost, it must consist of good dough so that the raisins in it can taste good. If the city is nothing but raisins, everything will fall apart. In order to prevent this, we need to know and follow the recipe for *panettone*.

- 1 The term 'Bauforschung' in German entails more than the literal translation 'building research' would suggest. Besides a technical assessment, research into the history of the building based on its own fabric, construction methods, materials, and other sources is needed to gain the widest possible understanding of a property. Here, the term 'building research' is used in the wider German sense.
- 2 Davos Declaration 2018, p. 11, Article 9.
- 3 Davos Declaration 2018, p. 10, 11, Article 7: "We urgently need a new, adaptive approach to shaping our built environment; one that is rooted in culture, actively builds social cohesion, ensures environmental sustainability, and contributes to the health and well-being of all. This is high-quality *Baukultur*."
- 4 Davos Declaration 2018, p. 11, Article 8: "The design of the built environment, the relationships between objects and their built and natural surroundings, spatial coherence, scale, materiality: these are all factors which have a direct impact on our quality of life. A high-quality *Baukultur* is therefore expressed in the application of conscious, well-debated design to every building and landscaping activity, prioritising cultural values over short-term economic gain. High-quality *Baukultur* thus not only fulfils functional, technical and economic requirements, but also satisfies people's social and psychological needs."
- 5 Davos Declaration 2018, p. 11, Article 9: "Cultural heritage is a crucial component of high-quality *Baukultur*. The way we use, maintain and protect our cultural heritage today will be crucial for the future development of a high-quality built environment."
- 6 Davos Declaration 2018, p. 11, Article 9.
- 7 Venice Charter, 1964, Article 16: "In all works of preservation, restoration or excavation, there should always be precise documentation in the form of analytical and critical reports, illustrated with drawings and photographs. Every stage of the work of clearing, consolidation, rearrangement and integration, as well as technical and formal features identified during the course of the work, should be included. This record should be placed in the archives of a public institution and made available to research workers. It is recommended that the report should be published."
- 8 Dirk Donath, *Bauaufnahme und Planung im Bestand. Grundlagen – Verfahren – Darstellung – Beispiele*, Wiesbaden: Vieweg+Teubner Verlag 2008, pp. 4–5.
- 9 Patrick Schicht, 'Die "bauhistorische Untersuchung" als Denkmal-Wissenschaft', in: *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Kunst und Denkmalpflege* ÖZKD LXXII, 1/2.2018, pp. 13–15.
- 10 Bundesdenkmalamt (ed.): *Richtlinien für Bauhistorische Untersuchungen*, Vienna: Bundesdenkmalamt 2016, 2nd version 2018.
- 11 Davos Declaration 2018, p. 11, Article 8.
- 12 Since 2019, according to the Burgenland Building Act, only building projects that take into consideration UNESCO World Heritage sites may be permitted. This is the only Austrian set of building regulations that has at least included the notion of *World Heritage*.
- 13 Christian Raabe, *Denkmalpflege. Schnelleinstieg für Architekten und Bauingenieure (essentials)*, Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien 2015, p. 29.
- 14 Similarly, archaeologists and art historians who have received the appropriate additional training can work in this field.
- 15 For example, the 'study-integrated qualification' (SIQ – studienintegrierte Qualifikation) at the Technical University of Vienna.
- 16 Dietrich Neumann, 'Teaching the History of Architecture in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Architekturgeschichte vs. Bauforschung', in: *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians (JSAH)* 61, 3.2002, pp. 370–380.
- 17 Institut für Baubetrieb und Bauwirtschaft der Technischen Universität Graz (ed.), *Leistungs- und Vergütungsmodelle für Ziviltechniker*. LM.VM 2014, Graz 2014.
- 18 A sense of responsibility towards the environment is slowly gaining ground, although the extent of the contribution made by the renovation and reuse of existing buildings has not yet been widely recognised.
- 19 Doris Grandits, Agnes Liebsch, 'Denkmal auf den zweiten Blick. New monuments of post-war architecture', in: *JSG Magazin. Internationales Städteforum Graz*, 2.2018, pp. 10–15.

Abstract

« Une culture bâtie de qualité du passé » – le recours aux monuments historiques est indispensable

Les monuments historiques incarnent un passage obligé dans le cas d'« une culture du bâti de qualité du passé »

Doris Grandits et Cyrill von Planta

En raison de la *Déclaration de Davos* de janvier 2018, le concept de *culture du bâti* et le débat qu'il suscite s'est soudain élevé au niveau européen, voire global. Ce document accorde au patrimoine culturel un statut élevé, même si ce qu'incarne cette « culture du bâti de qualité » dans le cadre d'une substance bâtie historique n'est pas défini. Se pose dès lors la question de savoir comment expliciter la signification d'une telle « culture du bâti de qualité du passé ». Cette tâche incombe tout naturellement aux instances en charge des monuments historiques. La Charte de Venise de 1964 soulignait d'ailleurs déjà la nécessité absolue de procéder à des sondages pour garantir un traitement adéquat de la substance bâtie historique.

Afin de maîtriser cette tâche dans toute son ampleur, en réponse aux exigences de la *Déclaration de Davos*, de manière à permettre *in fine* d'aborder et de gérer la substance existante en toute connaissance de cause, l'analyse historique de la substance maintenue doit dépasser le strict concept de la conservation du patrimoine. Non seulement le monument, mais bien la totalité des éléments bâtis doivent être examinés et évalués dans leurs diverses dimensions.

Ce point concentre un mélange complexe d'exigences d'ordre politique et administratif, ainsi que professionnel et économique. C'est notamment le cas de la répartition des compétences et des limites normatives étroites, la formation des experts, la diversification des niveaux de mise sous protection, ainsi que la fixation des honoraires et la diffusion des connaissances ainsi acquises.

Pour pouvoir mener un débat sur la « culture du bâti de qualité du passé » de manière approfondie et fondée, il est indispensable d'élargir le domaine de l'analyse du patrimoine historique. Le débat avec l'histoire et la genèse de la substance existante doit être conduit d'une manière standardisée avant chaque intervention, les résultats étant rendus accessibles à l'ensemble des professionnels du secteur. Tout cela exige de la part de la totalité des institutions participant à cette activité d'intégrer une discipline stricte dans leur travail quotidien. L'objectif fondamental doit être de conserver et de développer un cadre de vie de qualité qui évoque notre histoire et notre culture. Sans une connaissance approfondie de la substance, cela n'est guère possible.