



New European Bauhaus
beautiful | sustainable | together



ESTONIAN SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE NEW EUROPEAN BAUHAUS

Our environment carries our culture. The quality of the living environment affects the quality of life of each individual. High-quality living environment is part of the general well-being, and public buildings and public spaces play a particularly important role in this respect. This is why we need to work together to make our environment more cultural, friendly, secure and inspiring.

Anneli Ott, Minister for Culture

Creating a living environment that takes into account the interests of all is a major challenge. Our construction must be sustainable in the light of the green and digital transitions. The key is cooperation between public authorities, businesses, municipalities and higher education institutions, as construction in our cities and municipalities takes place primarily with the support of well-trained informed professionals. Joint discussions play an important role in finding ideas on how to guide the development of the living environment and the construction sector.

Taavi Aas, Minister for Economic Affairs

We all want to live in warm homes that are safe and close to the services we need. At the same time, we want us to be surrounded by nature, clean air and hear the birds sing instead of traffic at our doorstep. These needs do not have to be mutually exclusive. In order to trigger a green revolution in the economy and society, we need to strike a balance between these needs in urban planning and one option is to use nature-based solutions. Together with the local population, we will find the right solutions.

Tõnis Mölder, Minister for the Environment

On 15 June 2021, the Estonian ministries in cooperation with municipalities and partners from private sector and NGOs organized an online seminar on New European Bauhaus initiative to present the European Commission's vision for a more inclusive, beautiful and sustainable environment.

Following the welcome remarks by the Minister for Economic Affairs, the Minister for the Environment and the Minister of Culture, and the representative of the European Commission, Ruth Reichstein (IDEA), gave an overview of the initiative and the idea behind it. Katri Raik spoke about local examples of community building, based on Narva's experience.

Discussions in thematic workshops:

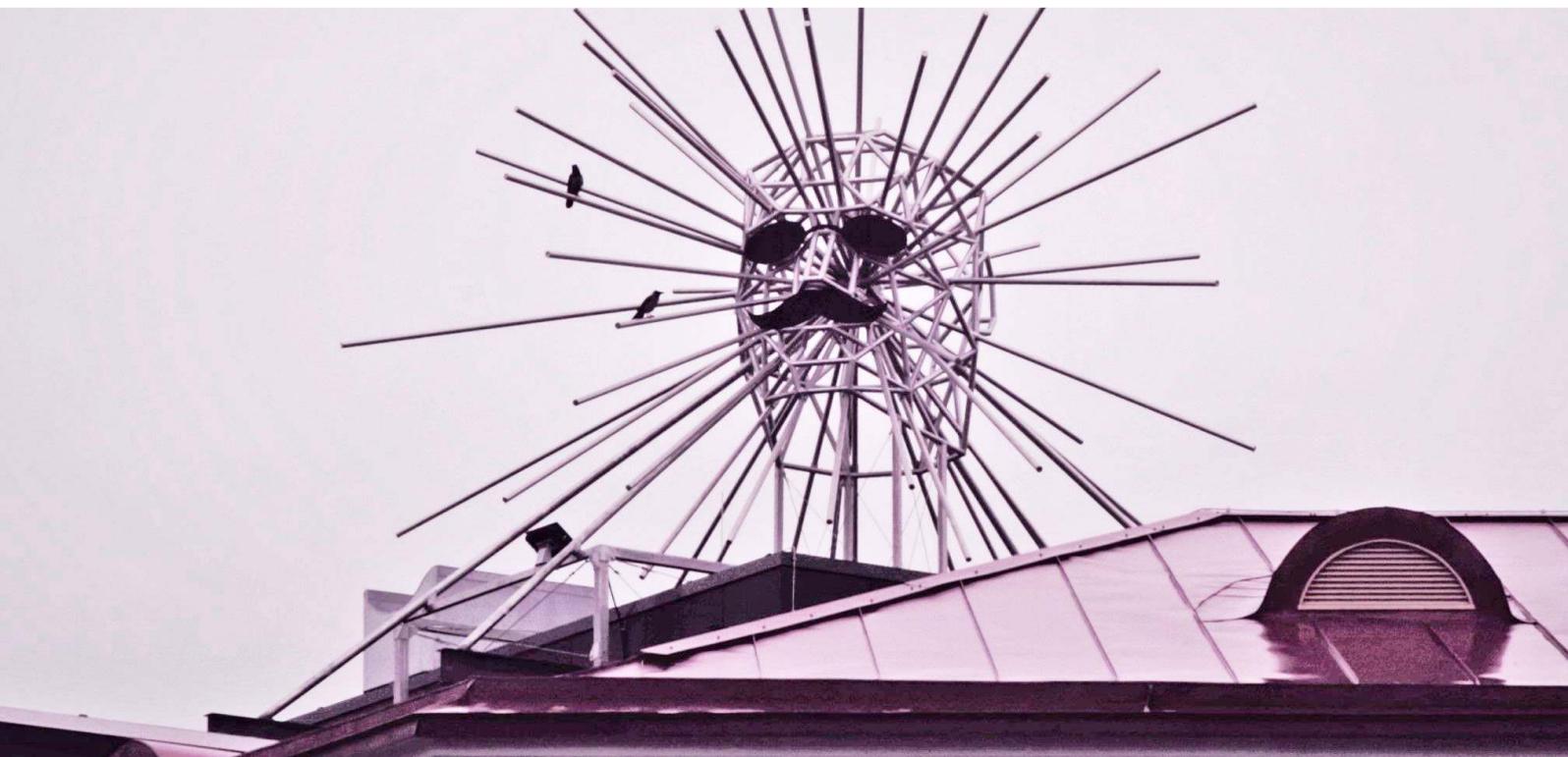
- **inclusive spatial creation** — how co-creation works in urban spatial planning, how mobility would look like in such an urban area (moderator Madle Lippus);
- **beautiful living environment** — how to create a beautiful space and what is meant by beauty (moderators Veronika Valk-Siska and Maria-Kristiina Soomre);
- **sustainable living environment** — how to build buildings that contribute to the achievement of environmental and climate objectives and how to value heritage in renovation (moderators Raiko Puustusmaa and Siim Raie);
- **shrinking population and revitalization of areas** where property prices for depopulated housing do not support their reconstruction (moderators Andres Levald and Jiri Tintera);
- **industrial heritage in spatial creation** — how to bring life to a former industrial area and make it an attractive part of the city (moderators Ivan Sergejev and Liis Serk).

¹ For details, see <https://envir.ee/uudised/uus-euroopa-bauhaus-ilus-kaasav-ja-kestlik-elukeskkond-eestis>

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

INCLUSIVE SPATIAL CREATION is a multifaceted process where citizens' opportunities and skills to have a say in spatial decision-making play an important role. In some cities (e.g. Tartu), the inclusion of residents is better addressed, while in others (e.g. Tallinn) spatial creation processes are complex and opaque. At the same time, it is clear that the knowledge and skills of Estonian residents to contribute to spatial creation have grown over decades, and that tools and techniques have evolved to create a better urban space, which unfortunately public authorities rarely use. Among the factors hampering co-creation processes are that decision-makers (politicians) change too often – each new politician tends to only start to shape his/her views in the area. This is a question of “political engagement”, how to show them the different ways and opportunities to reach a more human-friendly space. It was also recognized that development and action plans often do not go hand in hand with fast-changing lives. This creates tedium for those who feel they know what should be done and have had to explain it repeatedly to the different decision-makers. The involvement of citizens is also closely linked to the dilemma of more general spatial awareness and spatial education. Sometimes authorities already have experience-based or professional knowledge of how spatial creation could be organized in a more inclusive way. However, residents may not be familiar with recent spatial creation practices, or be used to experimentation and ad hoc solutions, which in turn slows down the take up of innovations. However, more use could be made of practices where the solution is developed in parallel with the understanding of the problem.

'Säde' sculpture on the roof of Tallinn European School – an artwork born by implementation of the Commissioning of Artworks Act. Authors Taavi Kuningas, Argo Männik, Mihkel Urmet, 2019.
© Argo Männik



An artwork born by implementation of the Commissioning of Artworks Act for the European Union IT Agency headquarters in Tallinn: 'Jäämägi' ('Iceberg') by Maret Sarapu, 2019.
© Terje Ugandi



There is a need to embrace the apolitical urban activists and citizens' initiatives who have drawn public attention to spatial problems – most recently the 'Living Street' initiative, which is active in making streets alive. The initiative with diverse founders hopes to make car-centred urban space better and friendlier so that it supports an active and healthy lifestyle.

Good examples are the work of the Task Force on Spatial Creation at the Government Office (2017-2018)² and the Task Force on Accessibility (2019-2020). In order to continue the work of the Spatial Creation Expert Group, an inter-ministerial working group was in place between 2019 and 2020 to examine the possibilities of setting up a centre of competence for trans-national spatial creation (Spatial Office). The Working Group developed basic principles of a high-quality space³, which is a good basis to be followed in different spatial creation projects.

A DEVELOPMENT LEAP OPPORTUNITY: creating rapid intervention opportunities where citizens can change their urban space and test new space solutions

The so-called Davos system⁴ can help in defining the **BEAUTY OF THE LIVING ENVIRONMENT**, which helps to assess the quality of the space in a holistic way. It is clear that architecture has a certain artistic dimension and that the aesthetic aspect of our (semi-)public space is particularly important from the point of view of society. However, the aesthetic aspect must always be assessed in conjunction with other aspects of the quality of the space. The Davos Baukultur quality system, created in 2021, identifies eight criteria (dimensions) that must be taken into account and evaluated in parallel when developing the living environment: governan-

² The final report and annexes can be found at <https://kul.ee/uuringud#arhitektuur>.

³ For details, see <https://kul.ee/kunstid-ja-loomemajandus/arhitektuur>.

⁴ For details, see <https://davosdeclaration2018.ch>.



Võru town centre renewal, designed by Stúdio Tallinn. 'Hea avalik ruum' programme in Estonia, 2019. © Villem Tomiste

ce, functionality, economy, environment, diversity, context, sense of place and beauty. None of these aspects can be excluded from any of the spatial solutions. The Davos Baukultur quality system is now well established and used internationally and should also be implemented in Estonia. The principles of the Davos system are fully in line with both the ICOMOS 2020 evaluation checklist, and the basic principles of the quality spatial development elaborated in Estonia.

Each spatial solution should provide generosity and bring 'delight' in terms of spatial impact, in addition to being functional, environmentally friendly (e.g. reducing mobility demand), etc. Beauty is one of the most subjective things, although it has been tried to define it objectively throughout history. Environmental psychologists have often helped to understand how people perceive beauty. Considering the current practice of 'percent for arts' measure, the art of public spaces is often the art of compromises. By making bold choices in public spaces, it is also possible to broaden people's understanding of what is perceived as beautiful. The perception can vary depending on people's past experience, spatial context, etc. The perception of the living environment as beautiful is often also linked to the experience of nature. Examples of a beautiful urban space with nature are, for instance, the multilaterally curated Highline in New York as a cultural railway through the city, and the old riverbed of Valencia, converted into a linear park, to name a few.

The Commissioning of Artworks Act — a law on ordering works of art — has produced hundreds of works over 10 years. This so-called Percentage Act could also be extended to, for example, the private sector, municipalities, but also infrastructure (roads and landscape architecture). Public spaces are not only parks in the city centre, but also the wider space between the buildings, including the 'grey area' and 'strolling space', which has an equally impact on people's perceptions of space in everyday life. A beautiful space creates more sense of ownership than ugly space. The question is about people's expectations of what is beautiful to them — more broadly, it is about people's spatial awareness, and their space-trained minds. The beauty of the (semi-)public space is growing with experience, in other words it is a question of how to make wise choices in favor of things that increase people's quality of life in the long term.

A DEVELOPMENT LEAP OPPORTUNITY: Increased spatial awareness, spatial education from primary education onwards, expansion of the so-called Percentage Act, (curated) biodiversity, opportunities for an augmented reality – the spatial experience of the future may be much broader than today

One of the major challenges for **A SUSTAINABLE LIVING ENVIRONMENT** is that some 700 000 dwellings need to be reconstructed in Estonia and, according to the Green Deal, a double increase in reconstruction is planned over the next 10 years, leading to heavier environmental burden. One important issue here is, for example, the diversification of the functionality of our Soviet-era multistorey apartment buildings. Estonia has a long-term reconstruction strategy aimed at improving the conditions at homes and workspaces of almost 80% of Estonians over the next 30 years. Achieving these objectives requires substantial investment, with the expectation that the largest possible part of the reconstruction work will also be carried out on the initiative and funding of the building owners themselves.

There is no doubt that citizens – communities – have a strong interest in shaping their own environment. The question is often how to involve communities in a meaningful way to discuss the living environment (e.g. in areas of Soviet-era multistorey apartment buildings). Cultural impact and cultural heritage should play a much more important role in assessing the environmental impact of spatial projects. The community, as the identifier of the heritage (the heritage belongs to someone – and not to the civil servants) requires a continuous dialogue between the parties – it is perfectly possible to preserve and develop it together. A good example here is the city of Viljandi, where residents are willing to address the city and to have a say on how to shape it.

It is important to adopt a value-based approach, where it is often necessary to decide whether to dismantle or maintain the built stock. In a situation where we want to make the best possible use of existing values, it is often difficult to find new uses for old buildings. Changes in attitudes in society (including e.g. valorisation of wooden construction) and transversal implementation of the basic principles of high-quality space are necessary. In this context, the state and municipalities can drive the change of attitude. The aim is to develop a holistic environment, yet it is often hampered by plot-based decision-making, while the whole neighbourhood or urban area should be considered.

A DEVELOPMENT LEAP OPPORTUNITY: waiving plot-based decision-making, developing an integrated view of the country's spatial development, area-based holistic reconstruction, taking account of the role of cultural influences and intangible heritage in spatial planning and assessing environmental impacts, seeing the community as a heritage identifier

THE PROBLEM OF A SHRINKING POPULATION is nothing new for Estonia – Estonia's habitat system is very old and the changes in the population, including depopulation, have already occurred well before the last 10 to 20 years. The broader question is how to make a green revolution where the market does not support it or how to use scarce resources wisely. Also, how to meet the main development objective of the national plan 'Estonia 2030+' to ensure access to housing in every populated location in Estonia. The latest Estonian Human Development Report lists well the challenges of our spatial development as well as possible solutions. In the light of the development scenarios outlined therein, the question is how to keep the trend towards '1 hour Estonia' balancing the development of a 'voluntary concentration of Estonia in cities'.

The health crisis has showed that people do not always have to work in an office but can do so at home. However, at present, the living opportunities specific to the dispersed city are not guaranteed in every inhabited location in Estonia. The world is open to teleworkers where there is a more pleasant environment or an opportunity to improve its quality. In this way, the issue of how distances would be crossed at the shortest possible time has come on the agenda.

Europe as a whole is also ageing and its population decreasing – shrinking is not necessarily bad and growth is not always good. As an example of the development of the city of Valga, we should rather make sure that changes are not too rapid. If we think what we can do in depopulating regions, the first rule is to accept the situation. For Valga, this means, for example, that the city must no longer shape its policies for the 6000 people who have left but should focus on the 12 000 people still there – Valga is the best place to live for them.

We must not only speak of investing in energy efficiency in houses but should support the quality of the living environment as a whole. We need



Art in public space: wall painting at Malmi 3, Tallinn. Edgar Tedresaar, 2013



Spatial education from early on: 'Gazillion Houses' training kit by Arhitektuurikool, 2015. © NGO Ruumiharidus

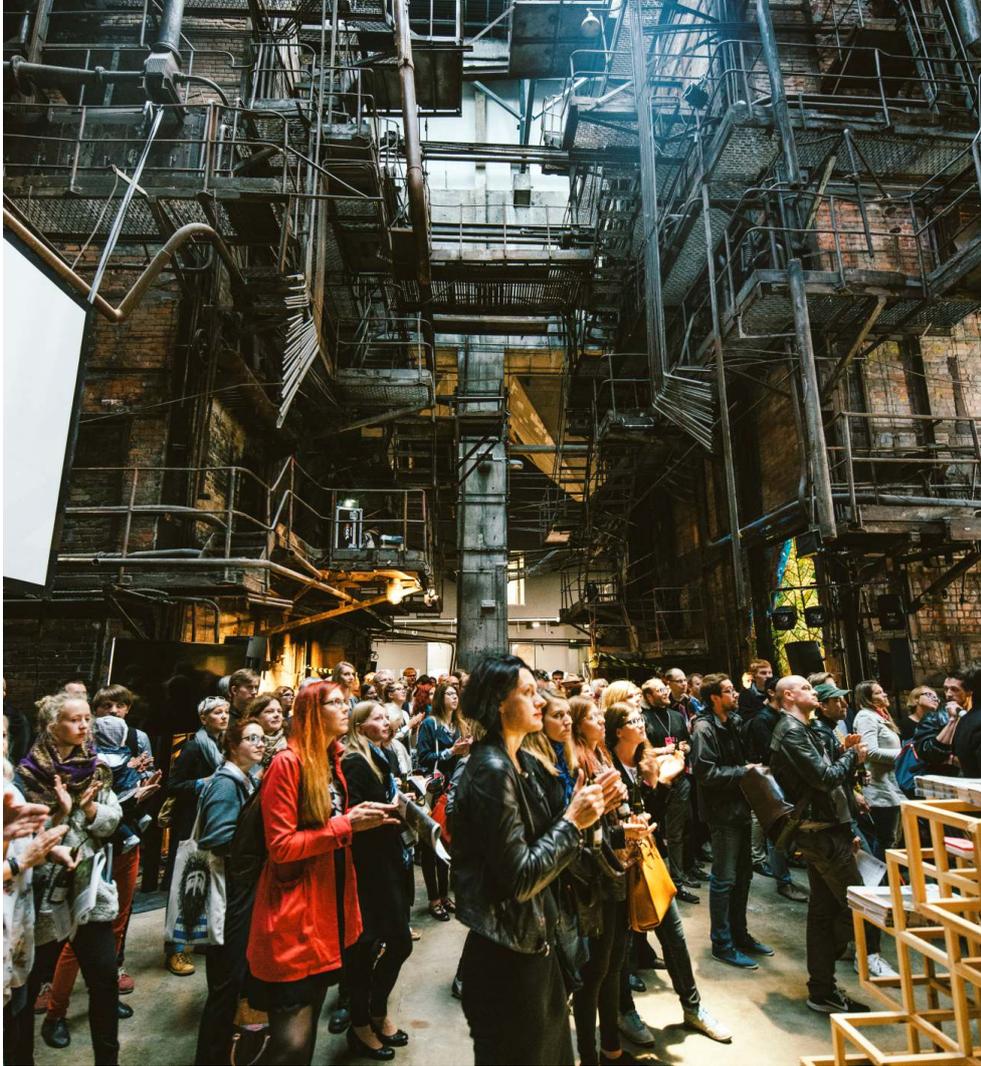
to focus on those who have stayed, not on those who have left, and to ensure them good living conditions in these houses, in these settlements, even if this means that the building uses more energy. In addition to carbon neutrality, the biodiversity is important and a human as its protector. Reorganizing energy production and promoting local solar plants, wind turbines, etc. are also closely linked to the green transition. Looking at the economy from an environmentally friendly perspective could encourage the creation of new jobs away from the county centres.

As the environmental crisis worsens, there is an increasing need for all parties to work together and agree to work towards a common goal. As also the Human Development Report pointed out, the role of the public sector is to create, maintain and develop discussions on spatial creation.

A DEVELOPMENT LEAP OPPORTUNITY: biodiversity culture in the broadest sense, attention to loss of diversity, spatial creation that supports biodiversity, teleworking opportunities for eco-communities, support to communities, examples of self-development, moving from real estate developments towards value-based living environments, learning from pandemic experience, changes must not be too fast, acceptability, focus on those who stay, quality of living environment.

In the context of spatial **CREATION** of industrial **HERITAGE**, the 'Cultural Quarters' – Põhjala factory and Telliskivi creative area in Tallinn or Aparaat factory in Tartu – are the best examples. However, there are many abandoned industrial parks in Estonia, which are very large. Narva has the well-known complex of Kreenholm, once employing more than 10 000 workers. Since 2009, that protected heritage (25 000 square meters) is empty. A development vision and detailed plan have been developed, including plans to exploit existing buildings and build new (high) buildings. Expectations were very high, but it was difficult to find funding. Therefore, it was necessary to change the concept and use the area for offering spatial experience. A plan was set up that could be implemented gradually and would involve more and more people. Changing the identity of Kreenholm is a challenge in itself – organizing events can help, different activities can help to create new breathing. The same was Kultuurikatel (2005–2006) which started with smaller events. The experience of re-creating the Põhjala area shows that people can be attracted by providing new space experience and (environmental) housing. As regards premises, their maintaining and renting should be carefully curated and build on the initial concept.

Industrial heritage can also be seen as an important positive factor in the diversification of single purpose (Soviet-era multistorey apartment buildings) regions (including university campuses). The Estonian Academy of Arts has created a series of workshops dealing with abandoned landscapes and revival plans for abandoned industrial landscapes (Kohtla-Järve Oil Tower, Pärисpea War Order, etc.). Their



2015 Tallinn Architecture Biennale symposium in the Kultuurikatel creative hub in a former industrial site in Tallinn, Estonia — conversion initiated ten years earlier by local architects and activists. © Tõnu Tunnel

experience shows that it is necessary to assess how a space can be re-used — what could be the value of the space/area and how to give it a new life. Not everything can be done everywhere; the vision has to be built on the specificities of the place, preserving the originality of the heritage.

The re-creation of the industrial heritage has also been linked to many environmental problems (asbestos in Kultuurikatel, soil pollution in Põhjala, etc.). Problems exist, but can be solved (see e.g. Horizon Europe's strands, including nature-based solutions). It is also important to address the issues of accessibility, heritage, energy use, etc. in an integrated way. When dealing with issues, it has to begin with healthy discussions between the parties, where the municipality is a very important link. One must always assess how the development of a derelict area affects the surroundings, what it does to the real-estate prices and how a person living nearby adapts to these changes.

A DEVELOPMENT LEAP OPPORTUNITY: citizen engagement, step-by-step solutions, space (room) experience creation, nature-based solutions, continuous curation throughout development, awareness of spatial values, constant discussion between parties, seeing a bigger picture