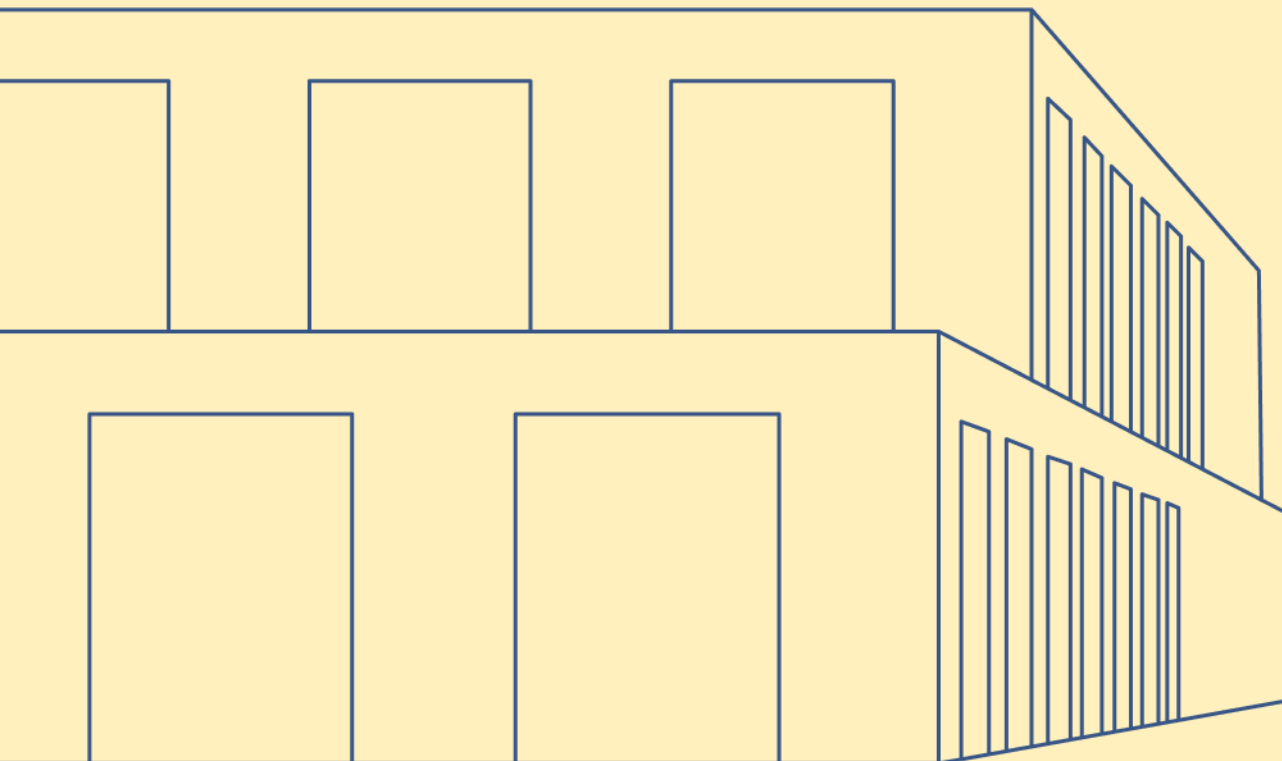


New European Bauhaus across the Nordics



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Preface

When Ursula von der Leyen introduced the idea of the New European Bauhaus (NEB) in 2020, it was only a matter of time before the Nordic countries adopted the initiative and began developing their own interpretation of NEB. Sharing a long, intertwined history, a common climate, and a strong building culture, we Nordics also have a long tradition of governmental collaboration, with the Nordic Council of Ministers serving as the administrative structure. These factors, combined with a shared ambition and leadership in climate action, formed the foundation of the Nordic Carbon Neutral Bauhaus.

Collaboration among the Nordic countries based on NEB began as early as 2021, and in the spring of 2022, the Nordic Bauhaus was launched as a NEB Hub at the NEB Festival. That same autumn, the *Into the Woods* event in Espoo, Finland, brought the Nordics into the very core of NEB. The project shared a strong environmental focus, with significant connections to two other Nordic collaboration projects: *Nordic Sustainable Construction (2022–2024)* and *Nordic Networks for Circular Construction (2022–2024)*. The work has been coordinated by the Finnish Ministry of the Environment, co-chaired by Boverket from Sweden, and has included representatives from all Nordic countries as well as Estonia.

“Using Nordic solutions in low-carbon and circular construction – results of our front-running policies and climate ambition – as a benchmark for the Bauhaus community.” This is how the Nordic Carbon Neutral Bauhaus target was described in the project plan. How did we succeed? Despite remaining somewhat fragmented throughout its duration, the project still managed to embody the NEB spirit with a distinctly Nordic flavor on many levels and in various aspects.

Its foremost achievements – the *Design Challenge* architectural student competition and the *Beyond Zero* exhibition – clearly illustrate the high level and maturity of Nordic architectural and environmental thinking. However, perhaps the biggest impact of the project lies in the many discussions held at different levels during all NCNB activities, aiming to identify the true essence of Nordic NEB while striving for the optimal integration of low-carbon circularity, architecture, and social inclusion. In the end, the final interpretation of Nordic NEB will likely vary significantly between Nordic countries and even among individuals.

One of the key findings of the project was the recognition of the existing building stock as a major area of interest. Since most of the buildings that will exist in Europe in 2050 have already been built, we must increasingly focus on how we utilize, maintain, and repair them. Extending their service life through conversions and ensuring that their components are properly circulated at the end of their lifespan will significantly reduce the need for new buildings and the carbon peaks associated with their construction. This also has a profound impact on the people living in and using these buildings, as well as on the visual quality of our neighborhoods. We need feasible processes to guide us through this challenge – architecture is an essential part of the solution.

The legacy of the Nordic Carbon Neutral Bauhaus will continue, at the very least, through the New European Bauhaus Academy Alliance and its hubs, which aim to establish a European-wide network of NEB capacity-building academic centers. NEBA Alliance North Hub has already been established in the Nordics. Even stronger potential actors in implementing NEB's heritage are the Nordic architectural policies, which share a similarly holistic approach, have permanent organizational structures, and maintain strong linkages to national policies.

As the project coordinator and representative of the leading country, Finland, I warmly thank all collaborators of the Nordic Carbon Neutral Bauhaus project. Special thanks go to Sweden's Boverket and RISE for preventing crises at critical phases of the project. Another key contributor has been Archinfo – The Information Centre for Finnish Architecture which also made this final report possible.

Harri Hakaste

Senior Architect, chair of NCNB steering group
Ministry of the Environment Finland

OVERVIEW

A Nordic Lens on the New European Bauhaus

The New European Bauhaus (NEB) is a creative and interdisciplinary initiative that connects the European Green Deal to our living spaces and experiences. Launched by President **Ursula von der Leyen** in 2020 and adopted by the European Commission in 2021, the NEB was established to foster the cultural dimension of the European Green Deal by promoting the power of a collective movement to redefine our daily lives – whether in architecture, public spaces, fashion, or bio-based products.

NEB empowers citizens and communities to lead in advancing the green transition within their local areas. Having grown into a dynamic movement with an expanding community spanning all EU Member States and beyond, NEB aims to create a sustainable lifestyle that combines excellent design with low carbon use, inclusivity, and affordability.

NEB is not limited to environmental project. Instead, it has been conceived as a new cultural project for Europe, in line with the original Bauhaus movement, which believed that societal challenges could be solved through design, architecture, and art. In the spirit of the historic Bauhaus a century ago, NEB has evolved into a driving force for society's ecological reconstruction while fostering social inclusion and participation.

Launched at the New European Bauhaus Festival in 2022, the Nordic Carbon Neutral Bauhaus (NCNB) has explored how the NEB's guiding principles—making the green transition beautiful, inclusive, and sustainable—can be interpreted and implemented in Nordic societies.

At its core, both NEB and the NCNB seek to address the intersection of ecological, cultural, and social challenges, emphasizing the need for a broad cultural shift in the built environment. By envisioning carbon-neutral buildings and lifestyles through arts, design, architecture, and culture, the Nordic Bauhaus has encouraged Nordic stakeholders to advance towards carbon neutrality targets while upholding other NEB values as well. This has been achieved by sharing exemplary cases of New European Bauhaus practices across the Nordic and Baltic regions.

This report reviews and summarizes key Nordic Carbon Neutral Bauhaus activities and concludes with further recommendations based on insights gained during NCNB activities and events.

CO-DESIGN	PROJECT BEGINS	DELIVERY	CLOSING EVENTS	NEBA ALLIANCE NORTH HUB
2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Nordic co-design events	Breaking Barriers - Cross-sectorial Cooperation for Climate, Construction and Culture	New European Bauhaus Goes into the Woods	Nordic Democracy Festival Tour	Aligning Nordic Architectural Policies with the New European Bauhaus
Reflections from the co-design	Sustainable building saga podcast		NEB Design challenge	Beyond Zero exhibition

Figure 1 Project timetable

OVERVIEW

Carbon-neutral Building Culture across the Nordics

From its early days, the multifaceted NEB Labs have been integral to implementing the New European Bauhaus initiative, supporting its cross-sectoral nature. The NEB Labs function as the initiative's "think and do tank," dedicated to co-developing, prototyping, and testing tools, solutions, and policy measures to drive desired transformations in practice.

The Nordic Carbon Neutral Bauhaus (NCNB) was one of the first community-led NEB Labs, alongside initiatives such as "NEB Goes South" and "New European Bauhaus of the Mountains." The NCNB Lab was established to explore how the New European Bauhaus could be interpreted in the Nordic context.

NCNB Lab has served as an open forum for discussing how architecture, design, and art can contribute to achieving carbon-neutral and inclusive building and living. It has brought together stakeholders from the construction, culture, and environmental sectors across the Nordic region. NCNB was initiated by the governments of five Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Iceland, and Norway. In November 2022, Estonia joined the Nordic Bauhaus.

Coordinated by the Ministry of the Environment (Finland) and supported by the Nordic Council of Ministers, the NCNB has become part of a broader Nordic cooperation on sustainable building. This collaboration is reflected in key declarations, such as the "Nordic Declaration on Low Carbon Construction and Circular Principles in the Construction Sector".

Nordic Carbon Neutral Bauhaus also aligns with broader efforts outlined in the Nordic Vision 2030, which was adopted by the Nordic Prime Ministers in 2019. This vision aims to make the Nordic Region the world's most sustainable and integrated area by 2030.



Figure 2 The Nordic Vision 2030

The Nordic Carbon Neutral Bauhaus largely embodies the goals of Nordic Vision 2030, emphasizing the need for simultaneous advancement in carbon neutrality, sustainability, social well-being, and innovation.

In this regard, the Nordic Carbon Neutral Bauhaus can be seen as a movement to blend internationally renowned Nordic democratic design values with modern climate-conscious solutions, thereby creating future-proof living environments that align with the broader Nordic vision.

Related initiatives include the *Nordic Networks for Circular Construction* (NNCC) from 2022 to 2024 and the *Nordic Sustainable Construction programme* from 2021 to 2024 and SUSTAINORDIC, a Nordic platform managed by NEB-partner Form/Design Center, dedicated to advancing sustainable urban development, communities, and responsible consumption and production, in alignment with the UN's Agenda 2030 goals 11 and 12.

OVERVIEW

Reflections from the Nordic Co-design

The project was planned in co-design workshops in the spring 2021 that aimed to identify the most important Nordic elements of the New European Bauhaus. Based on the discussions and consultations of various stakeholders and experts across the Nordics, the carbon neutrality and sustainable construction were considered to be the most important aspects of the Nordic articulations of the Bauhaus.

The co-design activities were organized and facilitated by Finland in collaboration with other Nordic partners. The co-design phase successfully engaged a wide range of Nordic stakeholders. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, most co-design events were held online.

By May 2021, over 1,600 participants from more than 20 countries had attended the co-design webinar workshops. These workshops introduced the new NEB initiative, gathered Nordic ideas, identified challenges, and showcased regional examples.

The outcomes of the workshops were analyzed and organized into 22 thematic areas, highlighting key themes such as equality, participation, nature, and sustainable building solutions. The discussions also addressed the societal and value shifts necessary to align with planetary boundaries. While sustainability emerged as a central focus, inclusion and aesthetics were also important areas of exploration.

The Nordic perspective adopted a comprehensive and integrated approach, recognizing sustainability, inclusion, and aesthetics as interconnected and complementary pillars—fully reflecting the holistic vision of the New European Bauhaus.

Nordic co-design events

23/4/2021	Nordic Co-design Kick-off
28/4/2021	Sustainable Aesthetics
5/5/2021	Beyond sustainability-as-usual: Co-creating Transformative Change in Sustainable Living
6/5/2021	Carbon-smart Urban Landscape
19/5/2021	Wood Architecture and Design in Bauhaus

NORDIC BAUHAUS EVENTS

Frontiers of Circular Architecture

The Nordic Carbon Neutral Bauhaus was officially launched at the first New European Bauhaus Festival as part of a broader seminar on Nordic perspectives on circular architecture.

The event, "Frontiers of Circular Architecture," was held on 9 June 2022 and hosted by Nordic Sustainable Construction in collaboration with other Nordic initiatives on sustainable building. The event focused on how design and architecture can be leveraged to combat climate change and promote sustainable, circular construction.



Photo 1 Launch of the project at the New European Bauhaus festival, © SUSTAINORDIC

The programme featured a diverse lineup of speakers, including **Sinus Lyngø** from EFFEKT, **Iines Karkulahti** from Vapaa Collective, **Maya Faerch** from Laudes Foundation, **Matti Kuittinen** from Aalto University & Ministry of the Environment (Finland), and **Louise Kjellerup Roper** from Volans.

The "Frontiers of Circular Architecture" event contributed to the ongoing dialogue and action toward a more sustainable and circular construction industry in the Nordic region, setting the path forward within the New European Bauhaus (NEB) framework.

Since 2015, the European Union has been advancing circular business models, as reflected in EU's *Circular Economy Action Plan*. Contemporary solutions range from biodegradable packaging to restructured materials in the building sector. However, actual progress requires not only technological advancements but also a fundamental shift in systems and mindsets.

In this context the New European Bauhaus presents Europe with a unique opportunity to showcase the potential of a circular economy and take the lead in this transformation.

Aligned with NEB principles, what is needed is a redefinition of value creation through a circular economy—one that is regenerative by design, eliminating waste and pollution, keeping materials in circulation, and restoring natural systems. This redefines the circular economy beyond technical and economic discussions, transforming it into an aspirational cultural movement.

Watch the online recording of the event [here](#).

New European Bauhaus goes into the Woods

”

You all know the old saying when people sometimes miss the obvious. We say: You lose sight of the forest for the trees. Here today, we do the exact opposite. We are zooming out and it is about the big picture that we want to discuss. It is about embracing the importance of forests for our lives and our livelihoods. It is about forests as our home, forests as our economic foundation and of course forests as our best allies to fight climate change.

— Ursula von der Leyen

In November 2022, the Government of Finland, in collaboration with the European Commission, the Government of Sweden, and the Government of Estonia, organized the high-level event “New European Bauhaus goes into the Woods” in Espoo, Finland. Broadcasted live from Haltia – the Finnish Nature Centre, located in the heart of a forest near Helsinki – the event emphasized the critical role of forest conservation and restoration in planetary health and economic resilience while exploring the intersection of sustainable forestry and green construction.

The event raised key questions about sustainable forest management in the context of climate change and the green transition:

- **How can forests serve as both inspiration and material sources for sustainable architecture?**
- **How can we integrate natural ecosystems into the built environment to enhance biodiversity and carbon sequestration?**
- **How can we balance competing expectations when considering forests as a resource for future generations?**

The event was attended by prominent political leaders, including Finnish Prime Minister **Sanna Marin**, European Commission President **Ursula von der Leyen**, Estonian Prime Minister **Kaja Kallas** and Swedish Deputy Prime Minister **Ebba Busch**. Finland's Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, **Maria Ohisalo**, and Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, **Antti Kurvinen**, also participated in the discussions.



Photo 2 The Nordic prime ministers and the President Ursula von der Leyen at Into the Woods event, © Lauri Heikkinen

The event also brought together leading researchers and industry professionals in architecture and construction. A keynote address was delivered by Professor **Hans Joachim Schellnhuber**, founding director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and a member of the New European Bauhaus steering group.

The event featured an opening plenary and three parallel panel discussions: *The Future of Forests*, *Building a Carbon-Neutral Europe with Wood*, and *Architecture Inspired by Nature*.

Discussions centered among other things on sustainable forest management and the application of bio-based materials to propel the construction industry toward carbon neutrality.

Discussions explored sustainable forest management and the application of bio-based materials to accelerate the construction industry's transition toward carbon neutrality. A concluding dialogue brought together diverse stakeholders to outline strategies for leveraging forests as a resource for sustainable construction while enhancing biodiversity and carbon sequestration.

Recognizing the scale of contemporary environmental challenges, discussions stressed the need for multi-scale solutions, balancing historical knowledge - with forward-looking innovation.

Overall, it was acknowledged the New European Bauhaus provides a valuable framework for navigating these complex challenges. During the event, President Ursula von der Leyen reinforced this perspective, emphasizing that wood-based products have immense potential to replace fossil-based materials. Von der Leyen also highlighted the deep cultural and scientific significance of forests, acknowledging their role in traditional knowledge, wellbeing, and ecological balance. She noted that sustainable timber construction could reduce carbon emissions by up to 40% compared to concrete, reinforcing the EU's commitment to upskilling workers in green construction.

To advance these objectives, von der Leyen announced the launch of the *New European Bauhaus Academy* in alignment with the 2023 European Year of Skills. NEB academy aims to:

1. Foster expertise in green and digital construction techniques,
2. Drive research and innovation in sustainable materials and architecture, and
3. Provide online education in sustainable forestry, design, and wood-based construction.

Ultimately, the Into the Woods event underscored the urgent need for interdisciplinary collaboration in building a sustainable future. By integrating architectural ingenuity, material science, and ecological stewardship, the New European Bauhaus seeks to drive systemic transformation toward a climate-resilient built environment—not only in Nordic forests but across Europe and beyond.

The event was moderated by Matti Kuittinen from the Ministry of the Environment (Finland).

Breaking Barriers – Cross-sectoral Cooperation for Climate, Construction and Culture

The first policy debate organized by the Nordic Carbon Neutral Bauhaus (NCNB) examined how cultural dimensions can be integrated into sustainable building initiatives. Held at Nordens Hus in Copenhagen on 16 December 2022, the debate staged a dialogue between Nordic sustainable building guidelines and Nordic cultural policies.

The urgent need for systemic action against climate change was the central theme of the event. Discussions emphasized the importance of integrating cultural values into sustainability policies and fostering cross-sector partnerships. Recognizing that technical solutions alone are insufficient; the event underscored the role of cultural shifts in attitudes and lifestyles in driving innovative and sustainable solutions.

Here there emerges multiple synergies between the New European Bauhaus (NEB) and Nordic cultural policy. For example, the “Nordic Co-operation Programme for Culture” serves as a catalyst for sustainability, economic competitiveness, and social inclusion. It emphasizes the role of art, culture, and media in achieving the Nordic Vision 2030, which aims to make the Nordic region the most sustainable and integrated in the world by 2030.

The policy debate invited several experts across the field to elaborate this common ground. **Holger Wallbaum** (Professor in Sustainable building, Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering, Chalmers University of Technology, Sweden) addressed the opportunities and challenges in sustainable construction, emphasizing the need for innovation and systemic solutions in architecture and civil engineering. **Sanna Lehtinen** (PhD, Research Fellow, School of Arts, Design and Architecture, Aalto University, Finland) discussed the aesthetic sustainability of the built environment and how cultural and design considerations enhance livability and sustainability. **Malin Kock Hansen** (Senior Advisor and Project Manager, Design and Architecture Norway – DOGA) shared insights on Nordic cooperation in design and architecture, stressing the importance of collaborative projects to accelerate green transitions. **Nikolaj Sveistrup** (Associated Partner, SUSTAINORDIC) presented findings from SUSTAINORDIC, envisioning the future of architecture as a key enabler for sustainable societies.

Participants including experts, policymakers and advisors across the Nordic countries were invited to consider the introduced themes further in a joint discussion on the cultural dimension of sustainable construction.

The key findings of the discussion can be summarized:

- 1. Central role of the built environment in climate action**
The built environment contributes significantly to global CO₂ emissions and raw material consumption. Half of all raw materials consumed annually are used in construction, with 90% of biodiversity loss linked to raw material extraction. As highlighted for example in the IPCC report (March 2022), addressing not only construction efficiency but also sufficiency is essential for achieving sustainability goals. This calls for a paradigm shift toward circular economy solutions and low-carbon alternatives in construction.
- 2. Cultural dimensions of sustainability**
The systemic integration of culture in public policies was highlighted as a critical driver for sustainability. Initiatives such as the Davos declaration advocate for high-quality architecture and sustainable urban planning. These efforts aim to promote cultural heritage, aesthetic sustainability, and vibrant rural landscapes.
- 3. Art and culture as driving forces of sustainability**
The Nordic Cultural Policy program (2021-2024) positions art and culture as driving forces for sustainable development. Small-scale cultural enterprises and traditional knowledge play pivotal roles in preserving cultural landscapes and fostering sustainable communities.
- 4. Potential Benefits of Cross-Sector Cooperation**
Despite growing awareness, cross-sectoral collaboration remains a challenge across Europe and the Nordic region. Cross-sector cooperation was seen as vital for fostering innovation and leveraging synergies in the Nordic context.

The event concluded with a call for enhanced Nordic cooperation to embed cultural values and innovative practices into sustainability efforts. To achieve this, integrating Nordic cultural policy cooperation into sustainable construction initiatives is essential.

The policy debate was moderated by Matti Kuittinen from the Ministry of the Environment (Finland) and **Emma Harju** from the Ministry of Education and Culture (Finland).

Nordic Democracy Festival Tour 2023

Nordic Carbon Neutral Bauhaus participated in the Nordic democracy festivals in the summer of 2023, inviting diverse stakeholders to envision and drive a cultural shift towards a climate-neutral Nordic way of life. Throughout the festival a central question emerged: what defines "the good Nordic life" in a CO₂-neutral future?

The discussions took place at:

Almedalsveckan in Sweden (28 June 2023)

The event at Almedalsveckan presented a panel including artists and architects **Joanna Henje** (architect), **Anna Danell** (architect), **Madeleine Nobis** (architect) and **Liljewall and Birthe Jørgensen** (artists). The panel focused on architecture, urban and rural and arts and culture.

Arendalsuka in Norway (17 August 2023)

The event at Arendalsuka presented a panel including **Tormod Lien** (Miljømerking Norge), **Christian Prip** (Fridtjof Nansen Institute), **Eirik Lohne Ruud** and **Mona Simers Mehus** (Kahos – the climate student association at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design) and **Christian Pagh** (Oslo Architecture Triennale). The panel focused on architecture and design, eco-labeling and biodiversity.

Kulturmødet in Denmark (25 August 2023)

The event at Kulturmødet included **Linea Fonfara** (copyrighter and communications consultant), **Gitte Wille** (Nordic Culture Point) and **Graves Simonsen** (Danish Association of Construction Clients). The panel focused on architecture, community development, and arts and culture.

Nordic Circular Construction and New Nordic Bauhaus seminar in Finland (13 September 2023)

The event in Helsinki presented a panel including **Charlotte Nyholm** (Vapaa Collective), **Gitte Grønfeld Wille** (Nordic Culture Point), **Matti Kuittinen** (Aalto University), and **Antti Lehto** (Aalto University). The panel focused on architecture, legislation, nature, and arts and culture.

Fundur Folksins in Iceland (16 September 2023)

The event in Iceland presented a panel including **Arnhildur Palmadóttir** (SAP architects), **Anna María Bogadóttir** (Úrbanistan), **Björn Karlsson** (University of Iceland) and **Halla Helgadóttir** (Iceland Design and Architecture). The panel focused on architecture, innovation, legislation, nature, and arts and culture.

The debates at the democracy festivals were led by **Nikolaj Sveistrup** (Urban Agenda) and **Mads Randbøll Wolff** (Sustainability 2030).

Recommendations from the democracy festival tour

Throughout these panels, several common themes in developing sustainable construction surfaced:

1. Future construction must be deeply rooted in local context: sustainable building practices should be shaped by regional conditions, available materials, energy sources, traditions, skills, and cultural habits. This highlights the need for place-based sustainable development, ensuring solutions align with the unique challenges of different locations.
2. Sustainable practices need to include multiple voices: In addition, there was a broad recognition that shaping the future cannot be left solely to construction professionals. To truly move forward, voices from culture, the arts, biodiversity, future generations, and local communities must be actively involved in planning and design.
3. We need more debate: The debate format during the festival encouraged open-ended, exploratory discussions, prompting both panelists and participants to think beyond conventional solutions. This method, designed for situations where predetermined answers are inadequate, will inform future research and policy development. Such an experimental approach holds excellent promise also beyond the temporary festival events.

Read the full report of the democracy tour [here](#).

Aligning Nordic Architectural Policies with the New European Bauhaus

The Nordic Carbon Neutral Bauhaus celebrated its culmination in a two-day event at the Form/Design Center in Malmö, Sweden, on November 20–21, 2024. The gathering brought together policymakers, architects, and sustainability experts from across the Nordic and Baltic regions to discuss the future of sustainable design and highlight the Nordic contribution to the New European Bauhaus.

The policy debate organized on the first day of the closing event, addressed NEB's alignment with Nordic architectural policies, which similarly prioritize integrated solutions to societal issues, harnessing the transformative power of architecture and design.

Recent architectural and design policies across these nations, such as Finland's *Toward a sustainable architecture* and Sweden's *Gestaltad livsmiljö* (Designed Living Environment), demonstrate a shared commitment to human-centered, sustainable, and inclusive environments. Despite national variations, several key themes emerge across these policies.

A fundamental aspect of Nordic architectural policies is a strong emphasis on holistic ecological, social and cultural sustainability.

Sweden's *Gestaltad livsmiljö* and Finland's *Towards a Sustainable Architecture* emphasize amongst others reducing emissions in the built environment, while Norway's *National Strategy for Architecture* promotes the use of local, renewable materials. Similarly, Denmark's *Architecture Policy* encourages adaptive reuse and life cycle thinking to minimize environmental impact. Similar way Iceland's recent *Design and Architecture Policy until 2030* reflects a strategic commitment to embedding design and architecture into the fabric of its economic, cultural, and sustainable environmental development.

Another defining feature is their commitment to human-centered development. The built environment is seen as a crucial determinant of wellbeing, with an emphasis on accessibility, inclusivity, and social sustainability. Finnish and Swedish policies prioritize the creation of spaces that enhance public wellbeing, inclusivity, and democratic participation, while Denmark's policy highlights the role of architecture in fostering social cohesion. Norway's strategies focus on creating adaptable and inclusive spaces that cater to diverse user needs, particularly in response to demographic shifts and aging populations.

To summarize, these policies position architecture and design as key drivers of a sustainable, inclusive, and high-quality built environment, reinforcing the Nordic model of socially and environmentally responsible development. Implementing these policies requires heightened awareness and a strong commitment from all

decision-makers, as it plays a vital role in driving social progress. The ecological transformation needs to be also a cultural transformation – as proposed by NEB as well.

The need for broad cultural change in our building culture was also highlighted during the policy debate by invited keynote speakers **Anna María Bogadóttir** (Úrbanistan) and **Lone-Pia Bach** (Kunsthögskolan). Both emphasized the role of art and creativity in exploring the deeper values of the existing buildings and the medium of architecture as way of both representing existing societal values and changing them.

Showcasing her biographical novel *Jarðsetning* on the demolition of a modernist bank building in Reykjavik city center, Bogadóttir put out a powerful and emotionally charged argument on simultaneously fostering social, ecological and cultural aspects of existing building stock.

Similarly, Lone-Pia Bach challenged not only the direct ecological shortsightedness of demolishing the existing building stock but, more broadly, fundamental societal and epistemological values behind it, calling for a new understanding of the relationship between the built environment, nature and the human condition.

The lectures were followed by a comparative panel discussion on architectural policies moderated by **Mika Savela** (Arts Promotion Center, Finland). Savela took the panelists, including **Harri Hakaste** (Ministry of the Environment, Finland), **Suzanne Pluntke** (Boverket), Anna María Bogadóttir (Úrbanistan), **Helle Søholt** (Gehl Architects), **Hilde Sponheim** (Doga) and **Regina Viljasaar-Frenzel** (Ministry of Climate, Estonia) to share their insights on the national policies and discuss the connections of them to NEB.



Photo 3 Panelists discussing Nordic architectural policies and NEB. © Daniel Engvall, Form/Design Center

The panelists highlighted many implicitly shared themes across Nordic architectural policies and the role of NEB as both a cultural transformation tool and a supplementary framework to existing regulations. Panelists further advocated Nordic architectural policy collaboration for sharing best examples, breaking down silos, improving procurement practices, and integrating social and cultural values into sustainable strategies.

Throughout the discussion it was illuminated how architecture, design, and infrastructure development are intertwined with social and environmental goals in all the existing architectural policies and policies in the preparation.

Nordic policies already embrace this perspective, but there is a significant opportunity to elaborate these policies through the NEB framework further. By integrating Nordic architectural policies into the New European Bauhaus initiative, these nations can reinforce their leadership in sustainable and inclusive design while benefiting from European cooperation. NEB, together with the national policies, offers a unique platform to advance shared goals.

Nordic Carbon Neutral Bauhaus Closing Event

A closing seminar and an exhibition at Form/Design Centre in Malmö, Sweden, gathered stakeholders to celebrate the shared journey and consider the possible steps towards the future in the spirit of Nordic NEB. Held in Malmö alongside the policy debate, the closing event shifted focus from policy framework to reflections on the initiative's achievements and discussions about its integration into sustainable practices. The event was also streamed for broader audience.

During the event **Helena Bjarnegård** from Boverket offered a comprehensive overview and contextualization of the two-year journey of the NEB in a Nordic context from the preliminary stages onwards.

Looking back, one of the main achievements of Nordic Bauhaus has been its ability to provide a broad platform simultaneously for decision makers, policy makers, professionals, students and citizens to understand the built environment both as an integral element of current challenges related to sustainability and a medium in which it is possible to envision alternative trajectories for the future: "Architectural solutions are already here, everywhere, contributing to sustainable communities and quality of life", as Bjarnegård concluded.

Taking NEB values into practice was further addressed in the panel discussion on the history and future steps of the Nordic Carbon Neutral Bauhaus. Guided by **Harri Hakaste**, the panelists **Anders Vestergaard** from The Nordic Council of Ministers, Helena Bjarnegård, **Malin Kock Hansen** from Doga, and **Ólavur Jóannesarson Hansen** from Landsverk provided insights on the Nordic dimension of NEB to reach climate neutrality, engage with people and lead the good life.



Photo 4 Harri Hakaste moderating the panel. © Daniel Engvall, Form/Design Center

The main takeaway from the panel was that while NEB values provide essential guidance, their actual impact lies in practical implementation. To achieve this, it is crucial to acknowledge the role of NEB in broader Nordic collaboration: existing networks already offer a basis for cooperation, but we must continue dismantling the barriers, foster new modes of collaboration, and recognize NEB values within Nordic sustainable building culture.

Nordic countries are fond of presenting themselves as forerunners for welfare, quality of life, down to earth happiness and sustainable architecture and design. Yet the number of resources consumed is far above the average on a global scale. As was highlighted by many of the speakers during the day, with the Nordic NEB we are also obliged to walk the talk about how Nordic is the leader's beautiful, inclusive and sustainable way of life.

The discussion during the day offered an honest reflection of the very challenge. "How can we not build" has become the most critical common challenge for us, as Anders Vestergaard Jensen from The Nordic Council of Ministers stated in his contextualization of NEB to broader Nordic sustainable goals.

The event also reflected on Nordic Bauhaus and other NEB initiatives such as NEB-Star (NEB in Stavanger Region) and Designing the Irresistible Circular Society–Desire.

Malin Kock Hansen highlighted how [NEB-Star](#) has sought to transform and catalyze collaboration among municipalities, businesses, citizens, and other stakeholders to develop equitable and practical solutions to our climate and social challenges.

Henriette Thuen, in a similar way, shared the lessons learned from the NEB-project Desire. The most crucial element for circularity relies first and foremost on citizen involvement. Embracing innovative, interdisciplinary strategies that engage everyone is essential for a regenerative urban future. Desire's recently launched policy recommendations can be read [here](#).

NEB Design Challenge



Photo 5 NEB Design challenge award ceremony took place on 30 May 2024 at Umeå School of Architecture © Malin Grönborg, RISE

In the spring of 2024, the Nordic Carbon Neutral Bauhaus project in the lead of RISE organized a student competition seeking creative solutions for the innovative re-use of existing building stock. Student teams from across the Nordic region took on the challenge of developing innovative and creative solutions for the adaptive reuse of four sites: Kvarteret Hammaren in Umeå (Sweden), Verksgata 54 in Stavanger (Norway), an old military area in Kuopio (Finland), and Gadehavegaard in Høje-Taastrup (Denmark).

The property owners of these sites shared a common goal: exploring transformation possibilities rather than opting for demolition and redevelopment.

The competition unfolded in two phases. In the first phase, all student teams were invited to submit design proposals for one of the four sites. Nearly 100 students from Nordic universities contributed a total of 29 proposals. From these, 12 were selected to advance to the second phase, where they were further refined based on the jury's feedback.

Kvarteret Hammaren in Umeå, Sweden

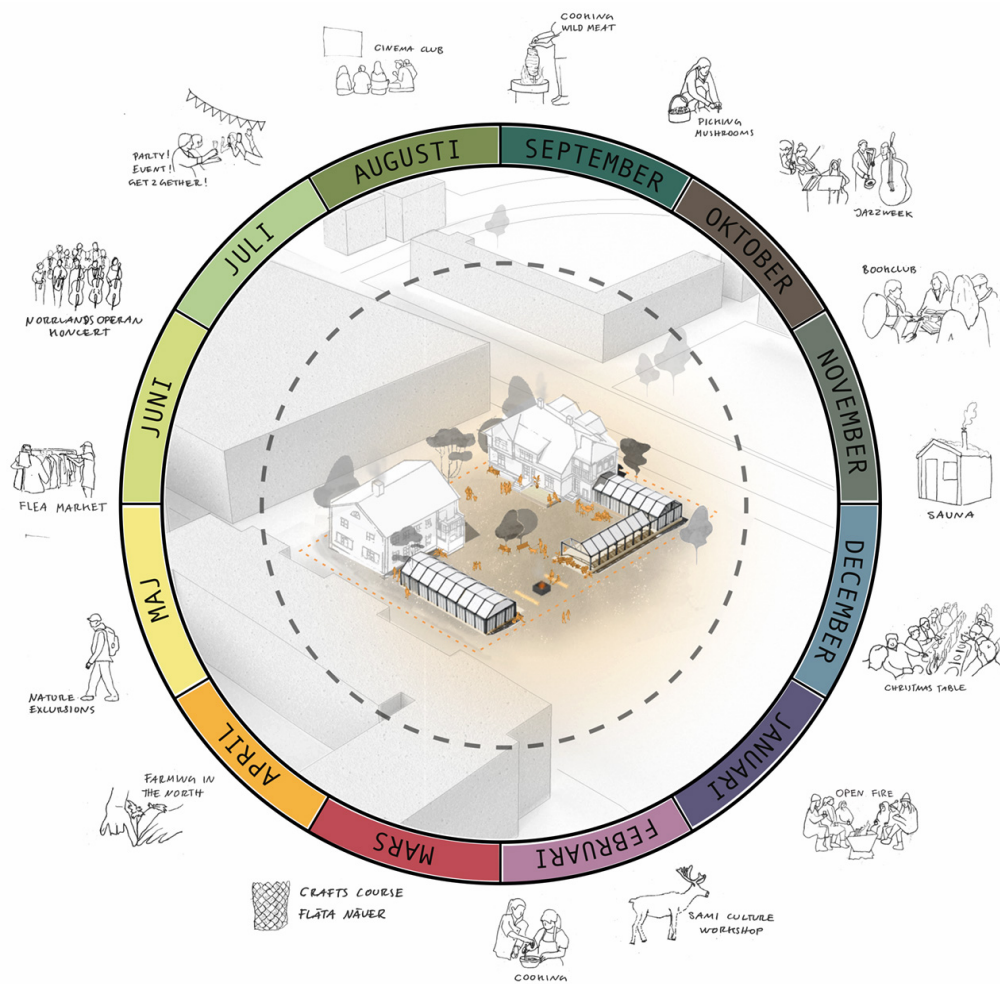


Photo 6 Intertwining Narratives © competition material

The winner *Intertwining narratives* by **Malin Dybeck**, **Molly Myrsten**, and **Sophie Sjöberg** from Lund University, Sweden presents a well-crafted and persuasive vision for bringing Kvarteret Hammaren to life year-round, drawing a diverse range of visitors. The historic buildings will be preserved, while the area will be animated with activities like sauna bathing, flea markets, and jazz festivals. The design for the new pavilions takes inspiration from traditional Västerbotten craftsmanship, particularly the weaving of birch bark, seamlessly blending local heritage with contemporary uses. The proposal recognizes the importance of cultural life in shaping Umeå's future.

Military area in Kuopio, Finland



Photo 7 Resilience of Togetherness © competition material

The Kuopio design competition was won by **Veera Annala** and **Annika Annala**. Veera Annala is studying architecture at Aalto University, while Annika Annala studies architecture at Tampere University. Their winning project, *Resilience of Togetherness*, explores the possibilities of community living in a culturally and historically valuable environment.

The adaptation of the buildings begins with minimizing changes as much as possible. The well-preserved barracks remain externally untouched while their interiors are redesigned to accommodate new housing layouts. In the park, a more diverse landscape is introduced, featuring gardens, meadows, and trees. The proposal's strength lies in its precise analysis of the negative effects of loneliness. *Resilience of Togetherness* effectively illustrates how community can reinforce society, demonstrating that architecture can help tackle significant social challenges of our time.

Verkgata 54 in Stavanger, Norway

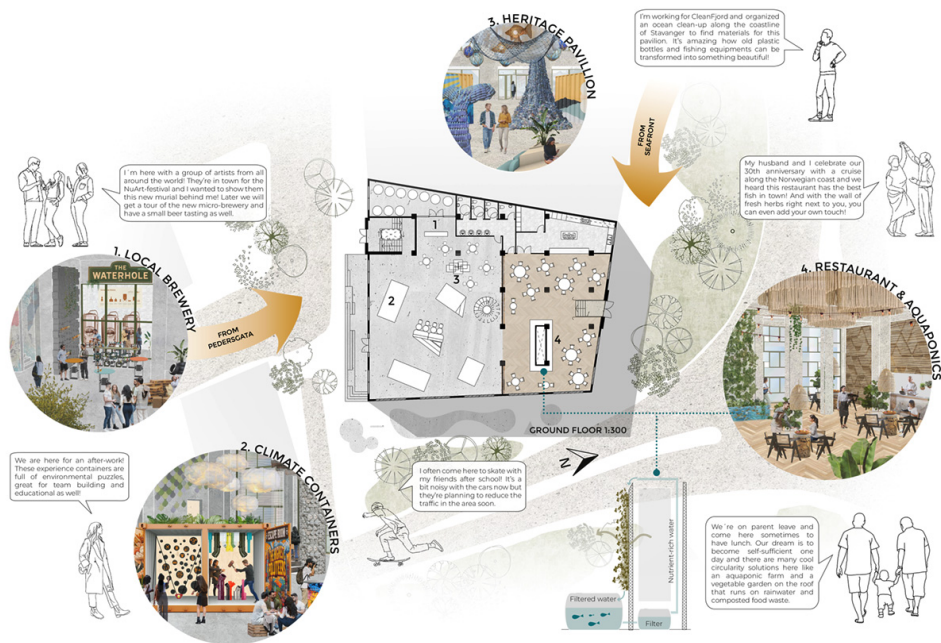


Photo 8 Fjordnest – Bringing Nature to the City © competition material

Stavanger project was won by **Albina Lampa** and **Isabelle Olsson** studying in Chalmers Institute of Technology, Sweden. Their winning proposal *Fjordnest – Bringing Nature to the City* is a vibrant and imaginative proposal that brings various creative reuse ideas together under one roof. By demonstrating how the aging warehouse at Verkgata 54 can be revitalized into a dynamic meeting place, the team showcases the building's vast potential. Visitors can stay at an eco-hostel with rooftop camping, enjoy a fish restaurant that serves homegrown vegetables and house-brewed beer, or explore exhibitions on Stavanger's maritime heritage.

Sustainability is a central theme, with practical solutions for material recycling, food production, and composting. The interior design embraces these concepts with thoughtfully crafted and visually striking proposals that reflect Stavanger's identity as a lively port city. Repurposed oil barrels serve as washbasin stands, while broken concrete is gathered in gabion columns supporting staircases. Natural systems are cleverly integrated, such as an aquaponic setup that uses rainwater to irrigate vegetables for the restaurant Oasen.

Gadehavegaard in Høje Taastrup, Denmark



Photo 9 Again and Again © competition material

Gadehavegaard is to some extent socially vulnerable area from the 1970s. The task for students was to design a new campus and community center to the area. The winning team by **Nils Österberg** and **Adam Sävhage** from KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden is building on what already exists. *Again and Again*-proposal focuses on repurposing demolition materials, adaptable floor plans, and enhanced park spaces. To minimize disruption to existing residential buildings, the team carefully analyzed how the extensive campus program could be integrated. They then proposed customized solutions at different scales based on the buildings' conditions. Functions that cannot be accommodated within existing structures are housed in a new campus building with a flexible interior that can be adjusted as needed.

Reused materials are creatively incorporated throughout the project. In the proposed campus building – which includes a library and lecture hall—recycled concrete, insulation, and balcony slabs are repurposed. Demolition materials also contribute to the outdoor spaces, with reused concrete in plazas and crushed roof tiles on pathways. While the design presents a strong vision, further refinement will be necessary in later stages. Given the many vulnerable residential areas undergoing renovation or facing demolition, the proposal can serve as a regenerative model beyond Gadehavegaard.

New Ideas for the Nordic Bauhaus

The competition's creative and thoughtful design proposals serve as models for other sites facing similar challenges and offer valuable inspiration for the broader construction industry.

In a time of global uncertainty, these proposals illustrate how architecture can play a key role in strengthening communities and fostering societal resilience. The student submissions covered a wide range of architectural approaches, from introducing new imaginative functions within existing structures to careful refurbishments and large-scale transformations.

The jury included **Camilla Berggren-Tarrodi** (RISE), **Marlene Johansson** (RISE), **Ambra Trotto** (EIT Culture & Creativity), **Maja Westman** (Kvarteret Konstruktörer), and **Patrik Karlsson Ryberg** (RISE). Read the full jury assessment [here](#).

Beyond Zero Exhibition



Photo 10 Beyond Zero exhibition © Daniel Engvall

The Nordic Carbon Neutral Bauhaus closing event was accompanied by an exhibition, *Beyond Zero*, held in Form/Design Center, Malmö, open until January 12, 2025. The exhibition is curated by Finnish architects, lines Karkulahti, Charlotte Nyholm, **Anssi Lauttia**, and **Meri Wiikinkoski** (Noon Architects & Vapaa Collective).

The exhibition approaches environmental degradation as a multifaceted crisis involving interconnected issues such as emissions, depletion of natural resources, and ensuring a socially equitable transition.

Architecture and other art forms have been recognized as a powerful medium for driving and communicating the comprehensive transformation required. In the spirit of Nordic Bauhaus, addressing architecture's environmental impacts and its potential to enhance ecological conditions is connected to broader processes that underpin the creation of the built environment.

To reconsider the societal role of architecture, the exhibition proposes a six-point-manifesto including the following themes:

- 1. From Pioneering to Mainstreaming**
- 2. Architecture Is a Material Practice**
- 3. New Life for a Building**
- 4. Enough Is Enough**
- 5. No Hoax**
- 6. Sustainability is Stagnation.**

To illustrate these further, *Beyond Zero* showcases seventeen projects from the Nordic countries and Estonia, each offering its ambitious perspective on the transition towards sustainable practices in the building industry in the spirit of New European Bauhaus.

The exhibition includes projects by Arhitekt Must, Arkkitehtitoimisto Sipinen & BST-Arkkitehdit, Anna María Bogadóttir, Collaboratorio, Djernes & Bell Architecture, EFFEKT Architects, Helen & Hard, Kaminsky Arkitektur & Hans Eek, Lendager, Mad arkitekter, Erik Mårtensson, Narva Katmann Architects, Pihl Katmann Architects, Kati Salonen & Mona Schalin Architects, Studio Granda, Tengbom and Visit Faroe Islands.

The *Beyond Zero* exhibition is accompanied by a publication *Beyond Zero – Nordic Architecture on the Road Towards Renewed Practices* that can be downloaded [here](#).

After its opening in Malmö, the exhibition will also tour in other Nordic countries during 2025–2026.

Sustainable Building Saga Podcast

The Sustainable Building Saga podcast explores the latest trends and advancements in sustainable building and living. It is designed for professionals and enthusiasts passionate about creating a more sustainable built environment.

The term "Saga" originates from the rich Nordic storytelling tradition, particularly strong in Iceland but also prevalent across Scandinavia. These ancient tales and poems have preserved myths, legends, and historical narratives, remaining an essential part of cultural heritage and inspiration for generations.

The podcast saga is also forward-looking. Amidst the pressing environmental crisis, the podcast aims to instill hope and encourage positive change. The construction industry is known for its significant environmental impact, but instead of fostering despair, the podcast seeks to empower its listeners with knowledge and optimism for a greener future.

The first season launched in October 2023, featuring interviews with leading designers, researchers, and policymakers, alongside emerging voices in the field. Discussions covered climate change mitigation, carbon flows, wood construction, and posthumanism. The second season returned in November 2024 with eight new episodes continuing themes further.

The podcast is hosted by Matti Kuittinen, Professor of Sustainable Construction at Aalto University's Department of Architecture and a former Senior Specialist at Finland's Ministry of the Environment. Kuittinen has been actively involved in the New European Bauhaus initiative at both European and Nordic levels.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

From Nordic Carbon Neutral Bauhaus to NEBA North Hub

The collaboration conducted in Nordic Bauhaus will continue in 2025 in the context of the New European Bauhaus Academy which was inaugurated in Into the Woods event organized by Nordic Carbon Neutral Bauhaus.

The NEB Academy is a key initiative by the European Commission aimed at accelerating the upskilling and reskilling of professionals in the construction industry. It is building a network of training hubs across Europe to leverage regional expertise and provide access to cutting-edge training methods and educational resources focused on sustainability, circularity, and bio-based materials.

The academy's mission is to equip the construction sector with the skills to achieve carbon neutrality while fostering a sustainable, inclusive, and aesthetically pleasing transformation of the built environment.

The NEB Academy Hubs that were launched in 2024, involve 14 organizations across 11 countries. Among these, the NEBA North Hub has been established by the Research Institutes of Sweden (RISE), Aalto University, and the Estonian Academy of Arts.

NEBA North Hub will focus on lifelong learning in sustainable building, offering, for example, training packages on timber construction and training connecting circular construction to social sustainability and inclusion.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Summarizing Remarks and Recommendations

The Nordic Carbon Neutral Bauhaus (NCNB) exemplifies the Nordic commitment to the New European Bauhaus (NEB) and its core principles of sustainability, aesthetics, and inclusivity. Through innovative policies, circular construction practices, and cross-sectoral collaboration, this Nordic model serves also as an important benchmark for the entire NEB community.

To grasp these, the report will conclude with three recommendations:

1. Inventing Nordic design narratives for our time

Beyond being a mere policy initiative or an exchange of best practices, the Nordic Carbon Neutral Bauhaus also functions as a contemporary expression of Nordic design – a tradition that, much like historic Bauhaus, has always sought to align architecture and design with societal wellbeing.

The Nordic countries have long placed high-quality architecture and design at the heart of sustainable development, social welfare, and cultural identity. Throughout the 20th century, Nordic architecture has articulated its own interpretation of Bauhaus aesthetics, continuing to do so today. Thus, it was unsurprising that from the co-design phase onwards, participants in NCNB workshops and events consistently emphasized how Nordic values—equality, democracy, and climate neutrality – formulate the foundation of NCNB. Nordic art, design, and architecture have historically played a crucial role in shaping the Nordic welfare society, and the NCNB project reaffirms this role in the age of climate transformation.

Through projects like Beyond Zero and the NEB Design Challenge competition, NCNB demonstrates a momentum for revitalizing Nordic democratic design tradition in the new sustainable era. Updating Nordic design tradition for the 21st Century requires an evolution that integrates climate responsibility, inclusivity and participatory urban planning, digitalization and smart solutions, as well as resilience and adaptability.

This aligns not only with NEB but also with other Nordic initiatives on sustainable construction. Take for example the Nordic Network for Circular Construction, which, in its report *An Invitation to Be Exceptional* edited by Demos Helsinki and [published](#) by the Nordic Council of Ministers, argues that the Nordic interpretation of Baukultur, a concept introduced by Davos declaration, should evolve beyond aesthetic discourse to focus on more profound systemic change.

2. Walking the talk of Nordic model

Nordic design has historically been about modernization and the expansion of the built environment. However, as NCNB participants emphasized, the biggest challenge today is mainly the opposite: how can we reinforce democratic societies without excessive new construction?

We need to stop the demolition of existing buildings and prioritize retrofitting, renewal, and regeneration.

There is still a long way to go. While the Nordic model is often regarded as a front-runner in carbon neutrality, there is a risk of self-complacency. It is easy to celebrate Nordic excellence, yet Nordic consumption of energy and natural resources, as well as CO₂ emissions, remain significantly higher than the global average.

Additionally, Nordic perspectives should not omit indigenous perspectives. The Sámi architectural tradition, for instance, offers deep knowledge of how to design buildings in harmony with nature's metabolism. Greater engagement with Indigenous wisdom is needed to advance truly regenerative design.

3. Incorporating the NEB-approach to Nordic sustainable construction and architectural policies

The Nordic Carbon Neutral Bauhaus has mapped a need to change our cultures and ways of living and building within the planetary boundaries. To combine the green transition with a more holistic approach, we need to move beyond the instrumental understanding of CO₂ emissions and acknowledging social and cultural values in the built environment.

Achieving carbon neutrality is not just about offsetting CO₂ emissions; it requires a fundamental redesign of the built environment to be more inclusive, regenerative, and culturally aware. For many, this transformative vision embodies the historic spirit of Bauhaus, here reimagined through both historical and contemporary Nordic values.

While NCNB has taken important steps – notably through the NEB Design Challenge and Beyond Zero exhibition – further dissemination and capacity-building in the Nordic context are needed. Here especially the NEBA North Hub holds great potential to spread and test Nordic Carbon Neutral Bauhaus ideas further in practice. Similar way the national architectural policies are key mediums in thinking NEB-values further in national context.

The Nordic Carbon-neutral Bauhaus is not just about implementation – it is about driving cultural transformation in both society and the built environment. To achieve this, broad engagement, participation, and ownership are essential.

Let's continue to shape a Nordic Bauhaus that not only reflects Nordic traditions but pushes for bold, innovative, and sustainable transformations in line with Nordic Vision 2030.

About Nordic Carbon-neutral Bauhaus

Project partners

Ministry of the Environment (Finland)

Ministry of Education and Culture (Finland)

Aalto University (Finland)

Ministry of Infrastructure (Iceland)

Danish Authority of Social Services and Housing (Denmark)

The Swedish National Board of Housing Building and Planning/ Boverket (Sweden)

Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development (Norway)

Co-design phase

The Co-design events were organized by Ministry of the Environment (Finland), Aalto University (Finland), Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland in collaboration with Nordic Council of Ministers, the Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning/Boverket (Sweden) Council for Sustainable Cities (Sweden), Innovation Agency Vinnova (Sweden), Archinfo (Finland), Doga (Norway), DDC (Denmark), Iceland Design and Architecture (Iceland) and Nordic Historic Wooden Towns' Network.

The full report of co-design phase can be downloaded [here](#).

NEB Design challenge

The Design challenge was organized by the Research Institute of Sweden in collaboration with Architects Sweden.

Beyond Zero exhibition

The exhibition is curated by lines Karkulahti, Anssi Lauttia, Charlotte Nyholm, and Meri Wiikinkoski (Noon Architects & Vapaa Collective).

The exhibition design is by Johannes Nieminen and Tuomas Siitonen (Kombo Office).

Website

<https://www.nordicbauhaus.eu/>

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