



A New European Bauhaus: op-ed article by Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission

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Chicago, Tel Aviv, Ascona, Dessau, Kaliningrad. Paul Klee, Kandinsky, Anni Albers, László Moholy-Nagy, Iwao Yamawaki. The "State Bauhaus", founded in Weimar in 1919 by Walter Gropius and friends, quickly became an international movement for architecture, art and design. It has influenced creative thinking, furniture as well as city landscapes throughout the world for over a century. By combining art and practicality, the ingenious avant-garde of the Bauhaus literally helped shape the social and economic transition to an industrial society and the 20th century.

A hundred years later, we are facing new global challenges: climate change, pollution, digitalization and a demographic explosion predicted to increase the world's population to up to 10 billion people by mid-century. These developments are going hand in hand with a seemingly limitless economic growth at the expense of our wellbeing, our planet and our limited natural resources.

Buildings and infrastructures are responsible for at least 40% of all greenhouse gas emissions. Modern constructions are largely based on cement and steel, which both consume an immense amount of energy to produce and even directly releases CO₂ through chemical reactions.

All the signs point the same way: we must rethink and replan. And Europe can and must play a leading role in this. That is why we have made the European Green Deal our priority. It opens up a host of new opportunities and is our new growth strategy. The headline goal is for Europe to be the first climate-neutral continent in 2050. This will require more than cutting emissions. We need an economic model that gives back to the planet what it takes away from it through a circular economy that is powered by renewable energy.

But I want this to be more than an environmental or economic project. The European Green Deal must also - and especially -- be a new cultural project for Europe. Every movement has its own look and feel. And this systemic change needs its own aesthetics - blending design and sustainability.

This is why we will launch a new European Bauhaus movement - a collaborative design and creative space, where architects, artists, students, scientists, engineers and designers work together to make this vision a reality. The New European Bauhaus will be a driving force to bring the European Green Deal to life in an attractive, and innovative and human-centered way. It will be a movement based on sustainability, accessibility and aesthetics to bring the European Green Deal closer to people and make recycling, renewable energies and biodiversity natural.

People should be able to feel, see and experience the European Green Deal. Whether thanks to a construction industry that uses natural materials such as wood or bamboo. Or architecture that adopts near-natural forms and construction principles, that considers ecosystems from the outset, that enables and plans for sustainability and reusability.

The new European Bauhaus should also take advantage of the other revolutionary megatrend of our century. Digitization is increasingly changing the way we think and act. In the future, houses, settlements and cities will work and function better thanks to their "digital twin". Computer simulations will make it possible to improve design decisions in terms of resource efficiency, reusability or impact on the environment and local climate. The goal is to achieve climate-neutral cities that are more livable.

Like the historic Bauhaus movement that spread around the world from Weimar, the New European Bauhaus is intended to be more than just a school of architecture that uses new technologies and techniques. The groundbreaking success of the Bauhaus would not have been conceivable without the bridge to the world of art and culture, or to the social challenges of the time. The old Bauhaus proved that industry and good design can improve the daily life of millions of people.

The New European Bauhaus should trigger a similar dynamic. It should show that the necessary can be beautiful at the same time, that style and sustainability go together. We must leave familiar paths and change our perspective. The New European Bauhaus will create the space for this.

In the next two years, an initial five European Bauhaus projects will be created in different countries of our Union. All of them will commit to sustainability, but with different focus. Their focus can range from natural building materials and energy efficiency, to demographics, future-oriented mobility or resource-efficient digital innovation; always combined with culture and art. As creative, experimental labs and docking points for European industries, they will be the starting point for a European and worldwide network that maximizes economic, ecological and social impact beyond the individual Bauhaus.

I would like to see the New European Bauhaus kick-start a creative and interdisciplinary movement that develops aesthetic as well as functional standards - in sync with state-of-the-art technology, environment and climate. If we manage to combine sustainability with good design, then the European Green Deal will be given a boost - even beyond our borders. It should stimulate debate on new construction methods and design forms. It should experiment and provide practical answers to the social question of what modern life in harmony with nature can look like for Europeans. It will help to make our 21st century more beautiful and humane.

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