

Beyond sustainability-as-usual: co-creating transformative change in sustainable living

Conclusions of Aalto University's main partner event on 5 May 2021 for the New European Bauhaus initiative.



Aalto-yliopisto
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Foreword

In our main event, we encouraged our participants to rethink change collaboratively on systemic and philosophical levels.

- With the New European Bauhaus, what should we leave behind and let go of to create new principles of inclusion, sustainability and aesthetics?
- What should be “new” in the New European Bauhaus?

This co-created report presents shared highlights and viewpoints from the event's speakers, organisers and audience.

This was Aalto University's original plan for the New European Bauhaus:

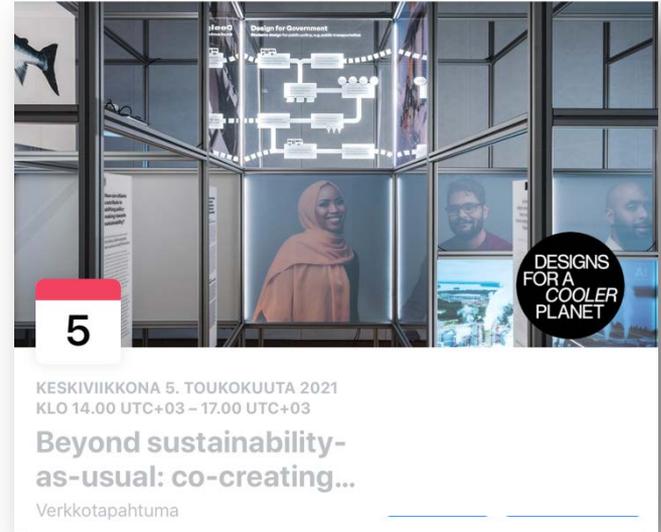
1. *Decarbonising design by balancing carbon emissions to sinks and storages:* explore how wood architecture, landscape design, circular economy, urban metabolism and sustainable financing can contribute to the aspiration of carbon neutrality.
2. *Strengthening local identities and cultural resilience through sustainable architecture and settlements.* This is especially relevant in low-income areas that are exposed to climate-related hazards and disaster risks.
3. *Building a digital community around this new mindset and co-creative methodologies:* Digital learning materials and participation platforms for the development of new built environments.

Our main event in a nutshell

Beyond sustainability-as-usual: co-creating transformative change in sustainable living

- Online event on 5 May 2021
- 290 registered participants from 43 countries:
Finland, Netherlands, Sweden, Turkey, Lebanon, Vietnam, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Thailand, United States of America, United Kingdom, Belgium, Brazil, Australia, Indonesia, China, Portugal, France, Latvia, Estonia, Denmark, Russia, Norway, Scotland, Argentina, Canada, Slovenia, Ireland, Czech Republic, Mexico, North Macedonia, Poland, Hungary, Spain, United Arab Emirates, Indonesia, Republica Moldova, Poland, Singapore, Romania, El Salvador
- Multidisciplinary approach: nine speakers represented different fields and schools of the Aalto University – technology, engineering, design, architecture and arts.

Didn't attend the event? See the recordings [here](#).



[Link](#) to the event page with more details.

Audience highlights

Collection of audience insights before the event

Think of bold questions we should be asking regarding aesthetics, inclusion and sustainability:

1. What should be the inspiring new principles of aesthetics?
2. What should be the values to facilitate transitions to post-carbon, sustainable futures?
3. Who needs to be included and considered in decisions of today? Whose voices are unheard?

Aesthetics

What should be the inspiring new principles of aesthetics?

Taking inspiration from nature

How totally wrong is almost everything we have been doing so far. We do not need buildings, kitchens and furniture to be 'smart' and look like cars. We need them to be adaptive, to **encourage our creativity, to be unique and charming and allow for an individual or communal expression of care.**

Going beyond modernism: **Designing things that age beautifully**, that are adaptive and can be reconfigured to changing life situations.

Cities should be built valuing nature, not destroying it. **We have removed the one thing that brings wellbeing** to our human inner needs, nature and the natural world.

Peace, balance, wellbeing should be our aesthetics.

I would be happy if the new world is exceedingly beautiful!
Something to aspire to, since a lot of the sustainability narrative has also been gloomy.

I believe we are in a process of changing our aesthetic perception.

Sustainability

What should be the values to facilitate transitions to post-carbon, sustainable futures?

What standard of living is enough?
Can we teach or practice the feeling of being content?

Is it possible to just slow down and **do things properly?**
To pay a bit more for fewer things? To have more respect for the resources we depend on?

How to build and how to design **things that don't provide any more choice for living unsustainably?**

Equality, care, extended empathy, community

Asking us to get ready and re-orientate for less. **Accustom us for immaterial sources of happiness** - decouple happiness from the material.

How can we transform our economies away from the 'more is more' paradigm?

Given the sheer complexity of the world, **many systems have been fragile.** How we can map the levels of **resilience/ robustness of some crucial systems such as financial , healthcare, infrastructure, ecological,** and deliberately act to increase their robustness/ resilience over time?

Inclusion

Who needs to be included and considered in decisions of today? Whose voices are unheard?

Non-human stakeholders and future generations who are impacted by our decisions today.

The ones worst affected by climate crises and other environmental crises are least included in design, technology, policy and decision making generally.

Children

Voices to include/currently unheard: the elderly, women, immigrants of diverse ethnic origins, people with a disability.

People who are less well off financially (e.g., jobless, single parents), not academically educated, and living outside of capital areas.

Citizens who do not know about the New European Bauhaus initiative, who are not architects or designers, who are not part of this practice and academic circle, and even **people who are less interested in making a change** and do not demand a change at all. I think their opinions are important, and conversations can create changes in the perspectives of all parties.

Speakers' insights

Speakers' insights

Aalto University's event searched for existing scalable examples, inspiring future visions and challenges that currently prevent us from acting.

Thematic tracks, to share:

1. An identified challenge
2. An inspiring idea
3. An example

Speakers discussed seven different topics:

- Building wellbeing
- Sustainability transformations
- Circular economy and waste recycling
- Collaborative processes and creative practices
- Carbon neutrality in construction
- Sustainable aesthetics
- Social and inclusive architecture

News

Vibrant living environments are created through more inclusive, sustainable and aesthetic design

Krista Kinnunen
Published: 31.5.2021

Aalto University's New European Bauhaus event sought bold perspectives on multidisciplinary and systemic change that would make human activities in harmony with



Photo: Tuomas Uusheimo

Read [the news article of the event.](#)

Five identified challenges

The challenge of resisting the change

We will need major changes in our ways of building and living. Construction and consumption habits cause intolerable environmental problems and contribute to biodiversity loss. We need to turn this course.

- The bigger the change, the bigger the resistance, and most of that resistance usually comes from miscommunication and lack of knowledge.
- Especially, the construction sector is considered conservative.
- How to inspire change, break away from our old habits, let go of our current lifestyles and change the course?



*Art can help us challenge our current views.
Artwork Jani Leinonen
Image Finnish National Gallery / Pirje
Mykkänen*

The challenge of the human focus

Sustainability transformations require paradigmatic shift from anthropocentrism to earth-centricism. Currently other species and next generations don't have their voices "heard" in the process when humans occupy nature for cities, infrastructure, mining and agriculture.

- How to get both the professional practice and education to embrace notions of multispecies sustainability through which not only needs of humans but of all species are met equitably?
- How we can support new, ground-breaking, transdisciplinary and collaborative research to develop new methodologies for these new frontiers – NEB should support such research and avoid a purely executionist agenda.

The challenge of lacking creativity

We need to rethink and reframe to be able to create new solutions. So far, we have been trying to solve the problems with technology and engineering – but what we haven't done yet is to use the potential of creativity.

- Art and design can help the transition, build cultural resilience and alleviate difficult feelings.
- Participatory service design methods should be combined with architecture to produce excellent, innovative and new European living environments.
- Design in the industrial era was mainly a servant of business and profit; in this era of transformations, it should adopt care as its core value and push businesses to adopt success criteria beyond profit.



Kokoon house for temporary accommodation – With design, we can visualise future houses and needs for living.

Image: Mikko Raskinen

The challenge of knowledge integration

Multidisciplinarity and polyphony is the future and challenge the knowledge creation process of urban planning and design – the question is political, but it is also very much a methodological and practical one.

- How do we succeed in combining the huge amount of data and knowledge that is produced by various disciplines, industries and local people?
- How could we best benefit from the computational knowledge processes for more sustainable futures?
- How do we bring people together and communicate over disciplinary and political borders, with private and public interests, across global and local communities?



With visualizations, we can combine data from different fields in a shared format.
Image: Annamari Tolonen

The challenge of legislation

Different aspects of circular economy are sometimes challenging to fit into the existing legislative framework. Adjustments are typically not required for just one law, but into several cross-cutting fields of legislation (e.g., nature protection, construction, chemicals, health & safety, etc.).

- How to speed up the development and approval of new types of resource-wise materials, e.g., construction materials, fertilizers, biomaterials?
- How to favour sustainable and recycled materials over virgin ones?

Four inspiring ideas

Build cultural resilience

The indigenous Sámi people in the North represent a balanced coexistence of humans and nature.

- Originally, the Sámi did not know land ownership. Land use rights were shared in rightful proportions, according to need. The approach contradicts Western legislation and state governance of land-use.
- The Sámi relation to nature and landscape is simultaneously practical and poetic, utilitarian and preserving. Nature is exploited but never overused, human habitat is not meant to leave a trace in the landscape.
- The Sámi conception of time is more cyclic rather than linear, where the events of the past, present and future overlap and interact. Request for punctuality is seen as a violation of one's personal autonomy.
- We need to establish a new relation to our environments: a more sustainable, ecological, visionary, inclusive and equal relationship to nature and our surroundings.



Reuse buildings and materials

We need to develop new ways of thinking and doing; rethink everything we do, across all fields and silos. We know we need to change our ways to design, construct and maintain. Not in the future, but right now. It doesn't get any easier while we wait.

- The reuse of vacant office buildings as common spaces combined with new housing construction on the side could be a part of addressing the current housing crisis.
- Today, 50% of all global raw materials go into construction. We urgently need to design and engineer radically new materials for construction. Could the materials of the future be infinite?
- What if, in order to avoid carbon spikes, we no longer build new houses but instead use existing buildings?



Reused concrete elements:
students Saara Kempainen & Havu Järvelä

Co-exist in one planet

Sustainable living includes the whole life spectrum, and not only the built environment and the life of humans, but also other creatures and non-humans. How should we co-exist? How should we care and receive care? What do we eat and with whom? How can we envision where to go when the future seems to bring along only uncertainties and concerns?

- Collaboration, reflection and direct collective engagement are key to changing the public's orientation to socio-ecological issues. Transformation in this context means not only changing what we do but reflecting and changing who we are and how we do things together.
- Appreciate the local identities of different regions and learn from the indigenous people, e.g., Sámi people who exploit nature but never overuse it.

Sustainability transitions require creativity and imagination to concretise desirable alternative futures.

- Creative practices with other fields can nurture hope and optimism by opening alternative solutions, co-created future scenarios and actions to change.

Create transformative beauty

Urban aesthetics make ecological and social values visible, experienced and valued in our everyday environments. It has a transformative dimension.

- Aesthetics are a realm of both human-made and natural elements.
- Aesthetic is not 'innocent' and something nice but also expressive of the current human and cultural values, e.g., economic status can be coded into the built environment.
- The New European Bauhaus should go beyond existing values, reimagine through transdisciplinary urban study what we have now.
- We need to learn ways that aesthetics can support the desired value chain, e.g., social and ecological values. These new sustainable aesthetic values could empower people to adopt a more caring attitude towards their own living place and belongings.

Examples of good practices

Aalto education examples

- Increasing emphasis on **systems thinking and futures thinking as key skills in education**, e.g., Design for Government study course for Master's students.
- The Main Street study project is **re-converting** challenged, car-dominated areas on the Otaniemi Campus area for pedestrians. Could the model be scaled to other areas as well? The joint studio course for the Master's level in September 2021 is an event and exhibition of the Designs for a Cooler Planet happening.
- Sámi artists are turning the Nordic pavilion in Venice Biennale 2021-22 into a Sámi pavilion. Also, Aalto's Interplay of Cultures study studio is presenting **Nordic indigenous cultures** in the Designs for a CoolerPlanet exhibition in September 2021.

Aalto research examples

- The transdisciplinary CreaTures research project seeks to demonstrate the power of existing **creative practices** to move the world towards socio-ecological sustainability.
- 'Design for Sustainability Transformations: A Deep Leverage Points research agenda for the post-pandemic context' offers a research agenda of 24 questions to guide **sustainability transformation**.
- Putretti™ investigates the potential use of sewage sludge as a **forest fertilizer** in the Lahti region. In the EU, the use of sewage sludge as a fertilizer has been banned for the time being. The NPK fertilizer has a carbon footprint (GWP) 12% lower than virgin fertilizer. The project is co-developing a new soil spreader for forest conditions with farmers.
- World in Transition LAB is a network of researchers and projects focusing on resilient communities, human settlements, humanitarian architecture, environmental awareness, pre-disaster planning, reconstruction, sustainable technologies, community engagement and grassroots action.

Showcasing solutions

Designs for a Cooler Planet event

Resource-wisdom

8.-29.9.2021

In a world of plenty, what is wise to design for the next generations? What happens when researchers, scientists and designers create and collaborate for sustainability?

Aalto University's CoolerPlanet event showcases 30 radical research ideas and prototypes contributing to a resource-wise future. The exhibitions on the Otaniemi campus and online seminars are open to everyone and are part of the official Helsinki Design Week programme.

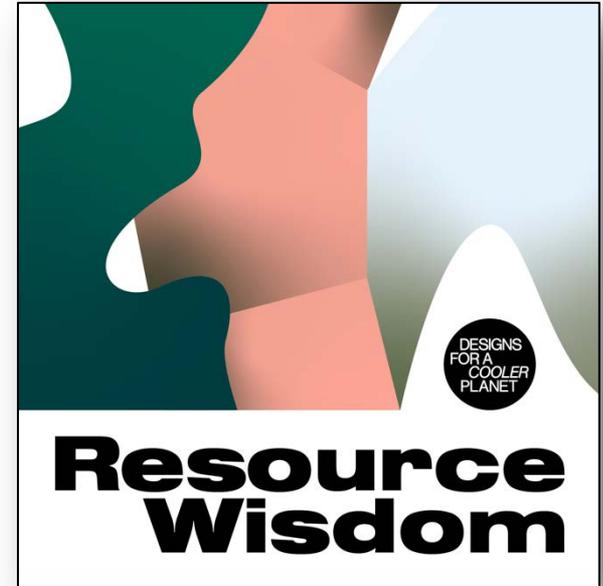


Image Oona Raadelma & Aino Salonen

**Summary: What did we learn
from this process?**

What we learned?

What should we leave behind and let go of with the New European Bauhaus to create new principles of inclusion, sustainability and aesthetics?

- We need to leave anthropocentrism, the human-centered viewpoint.
- We need to get rid of the dysfunctional use and relationship we have with the use of natural resources.
- We need to update our unsustainable aesthetic perceptions. For example, extensive use of marble or glass might soon feel as unethical as furs in fashion nowadays.
- We need to review legislation and governance to become more inclusive and respectful to ethnic and cultural diversity.

What we learned?

What should be “the new” in the New European Bauhaus?

- The creative fields have a role in creating the change itself (processes, imagination, co-creation, etc.), not just applied in different fields and industries.
- We need to succeed in converging and integrating a huge amount of data to make more wise, long-term decisions in urban planning and resource use.
- We need new aesthetics to empower people to adopt to the new and desired values.
- We need to develop new methodologies for considering other species and the next generations in our design processes.
- The political commitment to addressing climate change and sustainability issues has accelerated. We need to make sure the commitment is also embedded in our culture.
- We need to learn to embrace indigenous people, their approaches and local identities.
- We should adopt care as core value, serve the whole society and push businesses to adopt success criteria beyond profit.

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