



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION
Historic Towns and Regions

Tomorrow's Heritage

An integral part of NEB's potential legacy?

This paper defines the initial concept of 'Tomorrow's Heritage' - first identified as a subject worthy of exploration as part of NEB by Heritage Europe in its partner application - and subsequently briefly discussed as part of the NEB 'spirit of the place' co-design session at the NEB partners meeting on 28th May.

It is presented as a contribution to the NEB design phase and as a potential area of collaboration with other NEB partners.

What do we mean by Tomorrow's Heritage?

Since the invention of cities there have been efforts to improve their quality whilst retaining what makes them unique to a particular place, culture, or nation. The new European Bauhaus is a timely reminder, however, that we are living at a time when global challenges are in danger of overwhelming societies; where long accepted values systems are under threat; a time when we are not responding sufficiently to those challenges; where in too many places we are not improving the quality of our villages, towns, and cities. We can see where this is leading yet seem collectively powerless to deliver change on the scale and in the way needed.

Europe is a continent characterised by its rich and varied history where its overall identity is in large part shaped by its historic areas - the places both urban and rural within the continent's capital cities, regional centres, market towns and villages where Europe's culture and heritage values can be fully experienced.

Tomorrow's Heritage is about both understanding, protecting, and exploiting what makes places unique and exploring and developing ways high quality new building, renovation and adaptive re- use can be facilitated and recognised as adding lasting value to places and communities. It is society that ascribes cultural value to traditions, languages and/or buildings and determines what we mean by 'heritage' – a concept that requires re interpretation over time. NEB provides an ideal opportunity

not just to shape the conversation around what legacy we foresee but to develop the approaches, tools, and mechanisms to ensure that legacy is delivered in practice.

We believe that design in its broadest sense can play a crucial role in exploring how 'place' can provide the setting within which inclusive and sustainable solutions can be experienced, new lifestyles developed and citizen's quality of life enhanced; that 'place' is uniquely important to Europe and the development of any new aesthetic, where understanding 'context' is a critical consideration not only to new buildings and urban design but to communities' and citizens' quality of life and development of new ways of working and living.

Why should Tomorrow's Heritage not be beautiful, sustainable, and inclusive?

The current urban regeneration process includes participation as a source of insight and improvement, but it tends too often to do so with 20th century one-size-fits-all approaches focussed purely on "hard" infrastructure and top-down decision-making.

Current perceptions of value and therefore protection by statute by national and local governments tends to focus on a narrow perspective of historic and/or architectural value - important considerations but not sufficiently holistic to provide the inspiration and drive for innovation needed to tackle the societal challenges of today - nor to deliver places that are beautiful, sustainable, and inclusive.

Heritage preservation mainstream approach remains focused on physical quality and visual memory preservation that do not as such take account of more "soft" factors that include the cultural component as a strategic asset to transform areas in decay into vibrant hubs that foster inspiring and practical solutions to today's problems.

At the same time, the concept of quality in urban regeneration and new buildings has too often been compromised by the focus on maximising short term economic value - without taking account of the many positive and sometimes negative externalities that have a decisive impact on its legacy for future generations.

Europe thrives when it leads by example. Our combination of diversity, democracy and inclusion is still unique worldwide and probably the best place in the world to imagine and create better futures. So the challenge is to reset the narrative, broaden our horizons and build a consensus around the need for integrated approaches and solutions that are practical, affordable, and capable of delivering NEB's vision.

How can we deliver Tomorrows Heritage?

The concept of Tomorrow's Heritage does not start from a blank sheet of paper but draws on, for example, the strategic thinking central to the 'Baukultur' – set out in the Davos Declaration 2018. Here 'Baukultur' is shorthand for the preservation and development of quality, sustainable and culturally relevant buildings, and cities.

We see Tomorrow's Heritage as having the potential to be an integral part of NEB' future workstreams focusing on the ingredients, tools and mechanisms needed to

establish the framework conditions where tomorrow's heritage can be delivered successfully and at scale.

A few ideas and questions to flesh out some of what could be covered to begin the conversation:

- Understanding the spirit of the place – do we have the tools to capture the UNESCO concept of urban landscapes i.e. to identify the essence -tangible and intangible - of what makes a place special.
- Should we be prioritising immaterial memory mapping and story collection before knowledge and skills disappear? If so, what barriers are stopping this?
- Do designers highlight the importance of context in creating new innovative buildings and landscapes in historic urban areas. What challenges arise and how can they be overcome?
- Can beauty and aesthetics be defined and if not, how can they be judged - bearing in mind the various statutory processes in place to regulate development. What practical actions are needed to raise awareness and change perceptions to secure design that is valued by society in the future i.e. Tomorrow's Heritage.
- It is often said that the 'client' can be the main obstacle to innovative high-quality design. If so, what measures could be introduced to persuade developers and all stakeholders with procurement and commissioning responsibilities of the added value of quality design.
- What are the barriers preventing sustainable design in historic areas? Are sufficient solutions/ materials readily available and affordable to successfully retrofit historic buildings. Is research, innovation and entrepreneurship in this field a priority?
- What are the challenges of energy transition to renewable energy in historic areas?
- How can we best promote and foster the inclusion of adaptive reuse of cultural and natural heritage, re- think new functions and re-design urban spaces through the lens of the emerging new 'circular' business, financing and governance models?
- Is there a need for new legislation, regulation, or technical guidance to deliver Tomorrow's Heritage sustainably?
- The pandemic is leaving city centres - very often also historic urban areas - with unprecedented challenges and a need to reimagine their future - in what ways can this be seen as an opportunity?
- What conditions need to be in place to move from mere consultation to co-participation and creation on the design of the city including new layers of exploring and inquiring that guarantee the right to diversity in tomorrow's heritage for the next generations.
- Should we urgently address cities' unused civic potential by highlighting concrete practices such as temporary and meanwhile use and see these as a catalyst for creative community engagement.
- Can we ensure that future urban regeneration grants and investment prioritise the use of tools that include community-based activities? Often funding goes

to building and material acquisition alone rather than including bottom-up community engagement processes.

- How can we Increase support to preserve immaterial as well as material heritage - thereby increasing our heritage pool of resources making it easier for culture to be used as a strategic asset.

Next Steps

The NEB Design Phase closes at the end of June and therefore we submit 'Tomorrow's Heritage' as an idea - fully aware that it needs to be further developed. The delivery challenge as envisaged requires a wide range of expertise and experience as to how to overcome the many barriers that have in large part eluded municipalities, practitioners and academics, designers, developers, and entrepreneurs to date. NEB has brought together however a unique collection of strategic partners covering the spectrum of place making presenting an unparalleled opportunity to develop this concept into a structured holistic programme of research, pilot testing, guidance, and upscaling.

Our suggestion and hope would be to invite other NEB partners who see potential in this approach to co - create a development programme aligned with NEB's workstreams and delivery timetable.

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