

# Davos<sup>2018</sup> Declaration

Conference of Ministers of Culture  
20 – 22 January 2018, Davos Switzerland

## Towards a high-quality *Baukultur* for Europe

We, Ministers of Culture and Heads of Delegations of the signatories of the European Cultural Convention and of the observer states of the Council of Europe, as well as representatives from UNESCO, ICCROM, the Council of Europe and the European Commission and from the Architects' Council of Europe, the European Council of Spatial Planners, ICOMOS International and Europa Nostra, meeting from 20 to 22 January 2018 in Davos, Switzerland, at the invitation of Mr. Alain Berset, President of the Swiss Confederation, Head of the Federal Department of Home Affairs, in the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018, on the eve of the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum,

*considering* the current challenges, including the lasting effects of the economic and financial crisis, the fourth industrial revolution, accelerated urbanisation, the shrinking of peripheral regions, migration and social change, increasing inequality, climate change and environmental damage, and the major impact that these are having on our living environment;

*aware* of the substantial steps that have been taken by the international community towards a more inclusive and sustainable world, but equally of the urgent need to strengthen these efforts and to develop new approaches to protecting and advancing the cultural values of the European built environment;

*recognising* the crucial contribution that a high-quality built environment makes to achieving a sustainable society, characterised by a high quality of life, cultural diversity, individual and collective well-being, social justice and cohesion, and economic efficiency;

*aware* of a trend towards a loss of quality in both the built environment and open landscapes all over Europe, evident in the trivialisation of construction, the lack of design values, including a lack of concern for sustainability, the growth of faceless urban sprawl and irresponsible land use, the deterioration of historic fabric, and the loss of regional traditions and identities;

*aware* that it is high time to take measures which will ensure that present and future social, economic, environmental and climatic developments and trends do not further diminish the quality of the built environment, but are instead used as opportunities for improvement, and that the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018, with its objective of recognising the value of the historical dimension of the built environment, is the right moment to do this;

*emphasising* that everyone, irrespective of background, has the right to experience, share and belong to the cultural environment, that the ways in which we live together and evolve as societies are fundamentally cultural, and that shaping our living environment is therefore, above all, a cultural act,

**declare:**

### **The central role of culture in the built environment**

1. Culture enables and drives economic, social and environmental sustainability. It shapes our identities and defines our legacies. Therefore, culture must be placed at the centre of development policies and its contribution to the pursuit of the common good must be emphasised. There can be no democratic, peaceful and sustainable development if culture is not at its heart.
2. Policies must stress the need for culture-centred, sustainable approaches to development everywhere and on every scale. The value and irreplaceability of Europe's landscapes and cultural heritage must be underlined, with the emphasis not only on cities and urban areas but also on peripheral and rural areas and their interconnectivity.
3. There is an urgent need for a holistic, culture-centred approach to the built environment and for a humanistic view of the way we collectively shape the places we live in and the legacy we leave behind.

### **The concept of *Baukultur***

4. *Baukultur* embraces every human activity that changes the built environment. The whole built environment, including every designed and built asset that is embedded in and relates to the natural environment, is to be understood as a single entity. *Baukultur* encompasses existing buildings, including monuments and other elements of cultural heritage, as well as the design and construction of contemporary buildings, infrastructure, public spaces and landscapes.
5. In addition to architectural, structural and landscape design and its material realisation, *Baukultur* is also expressed in the planning processes for building projects, infrastructures, cities, villages, and open landscapes.
6. *Baukultur* refers to both detailed construction methods and large-scale transformations and developments, embracing traditional and local building skills as well as innovative techniques.

## **Our vision for a high-quality *Baukultur***

7. We urgently need a new, adaptive approach to shaping our built environment; one that is rooted in culture, actively builds social cohesion, ensures environmental sustainability, and contributes to the health and well-being of all. This is high-quality *Baukultur*.
8. The design of the built environment, the relationships between objects and their built and natural surroundings, spatial coherence, scale, materiality: these are all factors which have a direct impact on our quality of life. A high-quality *Baukultur* is therefore expressed in the application of conscious, well-debated design to every building and landscaping activity, prioritising cultural values over short-term economic gain. High-quality *Baukultur* thus not only fulfils functional, technical and economic requirements, but also satisfies people's social and psychological needs.
9. Cultural heritage is a crucial component of high-quality *Baukultur*. The way we use, maintain and protect our cultural heritage today will be crucial for the future development of a high-quality built environment.

## **The benefits of a high-quality *Baukultur* for society**

10. High-quality *Baukultur* improves our sense of place. By enabling people to identify with their living spaces, it fosters an inclusive and cohesive society, counteracts discrimination and radicalisation, and promotes integration and civic awareness. This is not only relevant for city centres and historic sites but for every aspect of Europe's living environment; suburban and rural areas, villages, industrial zones, and infrastructure.
11. High-quality *Baukultur* fosters vibrant and mixed-used neighbourhoods. It creates built environments which embrace contemporary cultural expressions while at the same time respecting cultural heritage. It provides sustainable living conditions and strengthens social resilience by producing decent, affordable, and accessible housing.
12. High-quality *Baukultur* protects the environment. It supports sustainable transport and responsible land use, increases urban green spaces and promotes health and biodiversity.
13. High-quality *Baukultur* adds economic value by creating higher-quality and more durable assets and favourable conditions for economic prosperity within society. It uses resources sustainably, thus ensuring that future generations will also be able to benefit from positive social and economic development.

## **Towards a high-quality *Baukultur***

14. High-quality *Baukultur* requires striking the right balance between cultural, social, economic, environmental and technical aspects of planning, design, building and adaptive re-use, in the public interest for the common good.
15. High-quality *Baukultur* must form part of the relevant legal instruments. The central goal of high quality for the whole built environment, including cultural heritage, must be made obligatory in all activities with a spatial impact. The requirement for high quality must be considered at the same level as economic or technical interests. Applicable standards and norms should also be compatible with the goal of high quality.
16. High-quality *Baukultur* can only arise in the context of interdisciplinary discourse and through multilevel and cross-sectoral cooperation between policy-makers, competent authorities and professionals. Since it encompasses creative, functional and social aspects, all relevant disciplines and professionals must take part on an equal footing. One key example of an instrument for fostering high quality is interdisciplinary and widely-debated design competitions. To be successful, high-quality *Baukultur* also requires the participation of civil society and an informed and sensitised public.
17. High-quality *Baukultur* calls for efforts in the field of education and awareness-raising, with a view to enabling better judgements regarding *Baukultur*. All those involved, public and private sector alike, bear responsibility for the quality of our built environment, which will be passed on as a legacy to future generations.

*Stressing that *Baukultur*, as a common good, is the shared responsibility of governments, organisations and the private sector, and that there is an urgent need to raise awareness of the cultural, social, economic, environmental and technical issues at stake, we*

### **commit to:**

18. mainstreaming and promoting the ideas and principles of high-quality *Baukultur* to all stakeholders, including other members of Government and the general public, particularly young people, and highlighting in every relevant and appropriate way its beneficial impact on society;
19. implementing better policies that embrace the culture-centred concept of *Baukultur*, and integrate the vision of a high-quality *Baukultur* as a core policy objective;
20. supporting further actions and measures which contribute to the promotion and implementation of the vision of a high-quality *Baukultur*;

21. urging all relevant stakeholders, both public and private, to recognise the positive impact of high-quality *Baukultur* on the common good and to acknowledge their responsibility to contribute to its implementation, particularly with regard to *Baukultur*-related investment;
22. encouraging other regions of the world to recognize the value of a high quality *Baukultur* and join the process.
23. convening again, in no more than 10 years' time, to evaluate and discuss the progress made towards achieving a high-quality *Baukultur* for Europe.

Davos (Switzerland), 22 January 2018.