



TRANSFORMING EUROPE: THE NEW EUROPEAN BAUHAUS AND SOCIAL ECONOMY INTEGRATION



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The New European Bauhaus, launched by the European Commission in September 2020, is a multidisciplinary initiative aiming at reimagining and transforming the way we live in our built environment. Ursula Von der Leyen describes the NEB as “**the soul of the European green Deal**”.

By creating bridges between different backgrounds, cutting across disciplines and building on participation at all levels, the New European Bauhaus inspires a movement to facilitate and steer the transformation of our societies along three inseparable values:

- **sustainability**, from climate goals to circularity, zero pollution, and biodiversity
- **aesthetics**, quality of experience and style beyond functionality
- **inclusion**, from valuing diversity to securing accessibility and affordability.

These values are at the foundation of social and solidarity economy and social economy enterprises are in a central position to play a key role in the NEB by emphasising the importance of equitable economic practices, community engagement, and social cohesion. Many social economy initiatives represent a concrete and successful implementation of NEB principles.

The **SEA4NEB project**, one of the main components of Diesis involvement in the NEB, identified and analysed six initiatives regenerated according the NEB principles in urban and rural areas.

- The **Youth Center** in **Split, Croatia** is a huge, never completed and for a long period unused building, built in the late socialist era. Initially squatted, it was finally taken over by the local government – becoming a best practice of collaborative approach in co-development and co-management of public spaces within the ongoing process of regeneration. The Centre is a meeting place for different fields of activity, interests, perceptions and thoughts, involves cultural institutions and non-profit organisations, promoting cultural creativity, with particular attention to contemporary forms, as well as encouraging lifelong education and social inclusion.
- **Luznava Manor** is very unusual example of romantic Art Nouveau building, surrounded by large park, in a rural area of **Latvia**, just 100 km from border with Russia. It went through substantial restauration and became an inclusive cultural place for the community, tourism, business, a driving force in the regeneration of rural areas.



- In **Poland**, the **Living Factory** – the new city center of Dąbrowa Górnicza is an important development project, designed together with the residents and for the residents, based on principles of Integration, Ecology, and Transformation. The process of regeneration of the former "Defum" machine tool factory started in 2017 and integrates spatial, construction, infrastructure and social processes. It uses essential tools for sustainable city development, based on the identity of the place and social expectations of a development-friendly, open and modern space to develop various activities covering a wide range of issues such as ecology, transport, support for entrepreneurship, cultural development and civil society development.
- In **Romania**, the **Mihai Eminescu Trust** promoted the **"Whole Village"**, an integrated concept for rural development through heritage, which aims to revitalise local communities and help them become self-sufficient. The concept of the "Whole Village" has been developed progressively and continuously in rural Transylvania, starting in the year 2000 with one village and continued in 2001 with other four villages, then in 2003 with other three villages and in 2008 when the last two communities were included in this revitalisation process.

The case studies of the Whole Village and Luznava Manor showcase the **strong links between rural communities' development and creative cultural activities**. Creative and cultural activities have a strong territorial dimension, often make positive impacts in the areas where they are located, because their openness and interaction with other activities give rise to agglomeration and cluster effects. They tend to generate a high proportion of total value added locally. The same is true for social economy organisations (SEOs). Due to their very nature, **SEOs can adapt flexibly to local development needs**. Not committed to maximising financial profit, they can take into consideration the values and expectations of actors in the field of local development, and the long-term effects of decisions, as well as define actual development strategies.

In very uncertain socioeconomic environments like the rural area, given the fragility of the organisations, their limited financial contributions and weak balance sheets, the development of the members' activity along with their pooling of economic and financial resources can be a decisive issue for their future.

The **'social economy cluster' model**, a valuable strategy for social economy entities seeking new development perspectives, was successfully combined with NEB principles in the examples of Messina and Ploucs. Social economy clusters function through a **jointly managed legal entity or an informal structure, led by a cluster organisation**, and set up supportive projects and services for their members. Fields of activity are diverse and cross-sectoral. This model strives for a quadruple-helix model, unique in its synergy between social economy and mainstream enterprises, research and education, public authorities, and civil society.

- **PLOUCS** is a prime example of SSE (Social and Solidarity Economy) cluster development that embodies several good practices aligning with the principles of the New European Bauhaus. The organisation promotes social entrepreneurship, sustainability, and community resilience to contribute to the economic and social development of the **Landes region**, a rural area in the South West of France. PLOUCS also promotes SSE values through education and collaboration with local authorities and schools and fosters networking among SSE players and other organisations to achieve its mission of building resilient communities.
- In the **Province of Messina**, Fondazione Messina together with other social economy actors of the area have developed the cluster model of **Advanced Social Cluster (Distretto Sociale Evoluto DSE)**, to promote urban regeneration and requalification of common goods, aimed at enhancing the social capabilities of the territories. In the last years it coordinated and financed the renovation and refunctionalisation of six highly valuable environmental and architectural/monumental areas, that were abandoned or had been confiscated from the Mafia.



Roccavaldina is a brilliant example of combination of national and local policies and programmes that promote sustainable development, social innovation, and economic revitalisation. Additionally, the initiative focuses on developing social green enterprises and supporting businesses through social inclusion and empowerment of local youth.

All these initiatives have been assessed according to the **NEB Compass**, a tool for decision and project makers wishing to apply the NEB principles and criteria to their activities. The assessment showed for all the projects a very high level of ambition in terms of inclusion, as they are built on solidarity and cooperation and have the potential to **break obsolete social models, create value and bring transformative benefits on a societal level**. The presence of social and solidarity economy also emerges from the high level of **participatory governance**, one of the criteria of NEB assessment, since all the projects analysed enable stakeholders to negotiate and engage in trade-offs with powerholders, at all stages of the project's lifecycle (design, management, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) and **empower the community to make decisions and govern the project**.

In order to enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of regeneration initiatives, the **SEA4NEB project** addressed to EU and national policy-makers recommendations to promote effective partnerships between public institutions and social economy actors, thus amplifying the impact of the NEB at both the local and European levels. By facilitating effective exchange both horizontally and vertically, EU policies can advance collaborative frameworks that integrate place-based strategies with systemic thinking. This approach ensures that regeneration initiatives produce transformative impacts beyond their initial scale, connecting stakeholders with shared purposes across various levels and driving sustainable development. By harnessing the collective expertise of stakeholders and local authorities, **these policy recommendations aspire to advance the NEB's vision of a more inclusive, sustainable and aesthetically enriching future for European communities**.

References

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