

Lifelong learning

Borys Czarakczew and Wacław Szarejko talk about the idea of the New European Bauhaus, Nebinar promoting and helping to understand its tenets, and the great enthusiasm with which they create the programme and exchange ideas with its participants.

Beata Stobiecka: To begin with, I wanted to ask you how you see the future of the architectural profession?

Wacław Szarejko: This profession in its current form may simply not exist in five or ten years. What is happening now, the changes that are taking place, mean that we are witnessing a key moment in history. I think the conclusions about how we fit into the New European Bauhaus can answer questions about the future of the profession.

Borys Czarakczew: Yes, we all feel that we are currently experiencing a period of redefinition of the architectural profession. The changes taking place are irreversible. Of course, digitalisation plays an important role, but it is not the only factor affecting our profession.

The romantic notion of the architect drawing on a blackboard and supervising construction is becoming obsolete. A colleague of ours, on his return from a climate conference in Glasgow, rightly pointed out that right now we need to define new areas of the architect's work that will give us a place in the investment process. Climate change requires the presence of a person rationalising and distributing relevant information to those who then process it accordingly. The architect, by virtue of his or her training and aptitude, can fulfil this role. However, it may happen that he or she is not prepared to do so and is replaced by someone else.

B.S.: So how can this situation be prevented?

B.Cz.: It is important that we in Poland discuss our profession and define its place. In order to think about the future, we need to carry out proper research and determine where we are at the moment. At ACE, such research is carried out every two years by an independent agency from London that looks at trends in the profession. The results show significant changes, such as an increase in the number of women architects. Architectural events are also paying attention to new trends - at architecture biennales, fewer and fewer exhibitions are about the creation and execution of buildings and more are devoted to solving social problems.

The same is true of competitions - the award-winning projects are not icons of architecture as previously understood, focusing on the aesthetics or grandeur of buildings. They are often simple architecture, based on containers and tin, aimed at solving social problems and creating spaces where people could meet.

B.S.: In Poland, there is also a trend towards social, regenerative and interdisciplinary activities. Some architects call it 'swinging the bat', which means designing involving different disciplines and taking action at the borderline of different fields. And this raises the question of the appropriate preparation of architects in the context of new professional challenges.

B.Cz.: There is certainly a need to create a new language for architects that enables them to communicate effectively with those outside the industry. The fact is that the architectural language is not understood outside our environment. Therefore, within the Polish network of architectural organisations, we have taken steps to develop an appropriate language. We have prepared a table that enables communication both within the industry and in related fields. The table contains, on the one hand, formulations specific to architecture and, on the other, those concerning social issues. The very need for such a system underlines the fact that in addition to the cultural and creative aspect, architecture also has to address social challenges.

W.S.: I think that architects who have received academic training are aware of the various assumptions that can be attributed to the creation of architecture, although the 'waving a stick' approach may seem naïve to them in the context of complex and demanding building processes. Here, a systems approach that considers the entire sequence of events and implements specific guidelines is important. Architecture becomes a process of building something new from elements that were previously only symbolic gestures. It is important that we not only define new structures, but also understand who has an interest in this and what the social needs are. This approach to architecture requires soft skills such as social negotiation and the ability to understand the needs of different groups. This goes beyond mere form and touches the essence of human interaction.

Architects are increasingly involved in initiatives such as creating solutions to improve the quality of life in the city.

B.S.: **Given the tenets of the NEB, however, it is apparent that architecture is not entirely expected to abandon its existing functions. After all, one of the main points on the agenda is aesthetics.**

B.Cz.: After the pandemic, changing and adapting our lives to new circumstances became a necessity, and the desire to transform our cities towards sustainability and the creation of green spaces became a reality. In this context, the New European Bauhaus was born, assuming that we would work together to create a sustainable and beautiful environment for all Europeans. Previously, the European Commission considered architecture to be a field with a cultural dimension and the architect to be a transducer of social needs into the language of engineering. Its role is to transform these needs, making the architect's work extremely humane. From this understanding, the idea of a new European Bauhaus was born. It was about getting back to thinking about working together as the Bauhaus did.

B.S.: **I understand that this does not preclude the NEB from referring to local needs. It should solve specific problems in a specific location.**

W.Sz.: There is a need for both localness, i.e. tailoring solutions to specific locations, and globalness, i.e. addressing general principles and challenges on a European scale. The new European Bauhaus is intended to be a flexible approach that can be interpreted and implemented differently in different European locations.

The emergence of this initiative opens up the possibility of jointly seeking answers to questions about the future of the profession and the direction of architecture. It is important that this initiative is new to everyone, regardless of their country of origin, which means that all participants have equal opportunities and the need to learn and exchange ideas together.

B.S.: I understand that the Nebinar you are organising in Wrocław aims to do just that and to broaden the idea of inclusivity. However, I have concerns that in Polish society this may be seen as exclusive rather than inclusive. I am also concerned that the authorities do not take it seriously.

B.Cz: The new European Bauhaus is of course also a political issue, and we as architects had very limited influence in Poland on who would be involved in the process.

What is important now, however, is first and foremost the fact that architecture and urban planning are of great importance for society and the economy. In order to build a better and more sustainable world, international cooperation and the inclusion of different perspectives are needed. Therefore, it is important for architects and experts to promote dialogue, cooperation and develop inclusive solutions at different levels, from local to international. Therefore, architectural policy should be based on facts, research and expert experience to avoid politicisation and focus on long-term benefits.

W.S.: Creating quality places is crucial for NEB, and quality here refers to the level of satisfaction of needs, regardless of political divisions. So we should rather focus on the fact that our goal is to find the best solutions to create places where people want to live, work and stay. Poles have a unique ability to lead change and find the highest quality, best solutions. It is important to showcase our achievements. The new Bauhaus is an excellent tool to promote our achievements and develop cooperation on an international level.

B.Cz.: It is also important that we learn from previous mistakes. When we joined the European Union, we thought that we would immediately receive the best models. However, it soon turned out that the worst models from Germany, the Netherlands or France also came from us. That is why it is important that we ourselves are role models for others.

In our country, unfortunately, there is a problem of disregarding discussions at EU level and ignoring certain topics that we consider irrelevant. However, we should be aware that these discussions have consequences when they turn into EU directives and are implemented in our country. So we should participate in them.

B.S.: **So tell us about the Nebinar programme itself and how you think it can help Poland, but also other countries from the eastern part of Europe, to join the initiatives resulting from the NEB.**

W.S.: The programme is a joint venture between ACE and the Wrocław University of Technology. We are mainly targeting young people, students and architects who are not yet members of the chambers of architects. We wanted to enter a completely undeveloped area, so our main audience is people who have recently graduated but still want to develop and improve their qualifications. We also want to reach out to students, as well as updating and transferring knowledge to those who have been working in the industry for a long time.

Nebinar's premise is to bring together different ways of looking at problems, combining academic and professional perspectives to create a dynamic international environment where ideas can be exchanged. Our aim is to create a think tank that draws both from the world of practitioners, representing professional organisations from all over Europe, and from the academic world, from universities. We are trying to find a synergy between theory and practice and so far we are succeeding.

B.S.: And what does this linking of theory and practice look like in practice?

W.S.: The basis of our activities are lectures, which we try to combine with discussion and various additional elements. Through them, we learn about the activities of architects from different countries, how they work in Lithuania, what ideas there are in the Czech Republic, how the industry is developing in Romania, what the approach to construction is like in Sweden. Of course, the task of the lectures is to impart knowledge about NEB and to prepare participants for the design workshops that will take place in different places in Europe.

We want the structure and the choice of topics and activities to be very dynamic. We want to have constant feedback from invited speakers and interlocutors. We want to have outstanding speakers and the highest level of lectures.

B.Cz.: We are creating something new. It's a fluid process where we are learning and creating all the time. It is important that we are all aware that there is no template or ready-made solution yet - we are all learning together. For me personally, it is also important that we have the same problems in different parts of Europe. We have different approaches to these problems, but we have a common goal, which is, for example, the aestheticisation of the Great Plate buildings. Recently, the Lithuanians have shown us how to improve the aesthetics of houses in housing estates by creating diverse and innovative solutions. By listening to such examples, we can derive value from the experiences of others.

W.S.: Thanks to the NEB, we have certain frameworks of action, methods, ways that lead to high quality projects. They can be summarised as beauty, sustainability and community. These are three words that represent an idea, but there is a powerful design theory behind them. It is not easy, but it is important to learn from each other and understand the issues. This is what the nebinair aims to do, with conversation and the exchange of ideas at its core.

We hope that, at some point, our programme will become a friendly tool to help move towards a new vision for the architectural profession, as it is not only a shift from flat drawing to BIM technology, but also a change in design perspective to create value for society.

We are committed to the widest possible reach for this programme, so we will start making the lectures available free of charge, not just to architects. We are currently in the process of moving our programme from online to offline, so it will be available as a library.

B.S.: We wish you the best of luck and, of course, we are ready to support you in these activities.