

Planet Home – Act Politically

Political demands for climate-friendly architecture in the city and beyond

Prologue: Towards a new self- conception for architects

The political demand for a carbon-neutral building stock is justified. Constructing and operating buildings requires an extraordinary expenditure of material and energy. That has to change.

Through our work, we as architects and urban planners can demonstrate ways to reduce the enormous environmental impact of our consumption-oriented economy. We can demonstrate that saving resources is possible. We can demonstrate how to design carbon-neutral architecture using renewable energies and renewable and reusable raw materials. We can demonstrate that existing buildings can be renovated ecologically and to the benefit of communities. And in all these ways, we can conjure an inspiring and positive vision for the future.

We need architectural and planning concepts so far-sighted and responsible that they will endure over a long period. To that end, they must simultaneously satisfy ecological and aesthetic criteria.

Developing ecologically responsible practices is a task for society as a whole. Architects and urban planners stand by the Paris climate goals and, through their work, bear responsibility for society and the environment.

A new understanding of the profession's role is required. In the future, ecological concepts and strategies must be developed – and if possible implemented – in closer cooperation and collaboration with local communities. In participatory processes, the power of personal behavior can be experienced live, increasing motivation to make more ecologically-friendly choices.

Key points of responsible climate policy

This reconceptualization requires a conducive political framework, with guidelines and incentives that support the ambitious goal of a carbon-neutral building stock. A swift and decisive conversion is needed to a price and tax system based on the true ecological costs of energy, resources, and materials.

The European Green Deal, which among other things calls for and promotes energy-saving and resource-saving

construction and renovation, must be further developed as a systematic environmental and economic program across sectors, then implemented by member states.

Responsible climate policy is based on the following principles, which must be universally anchored in legislation:

- human needs must be brought into balance with the requirements of nature
- the consumption of energy and materials must be evaluated holistically
- the entire life cycle of a building must be considered in determining its environmental impact
- environmental costs are to be borne by polluters, not society

The theses and attendant political demands of the Association of German Architects BDA are based on these principles.

1

A culture of experimentation: encouraging innovation

The ambitious EU climate goals for 2050 are good. But they require new ways of thinking and acting for architects.

Why?

We need creativity, freedom, and innovation in order to develop and test ecologically sustainable building methods and materials, as well as architectural and planning concepts that enable users to develop environmentally responsible practices.

Political demands:

- a substantial proportion – at least five percent – of all public construction investment must be earmarked for experiments in climate-adapted and resource-adapted architecture
- real-world laboratories, like those used as institutional test spaces for digitalization, must be systematically established in the construction industry in order to promote innovation through temporary modification of the legal framework
- building codes and ordinances must be drafted in such a way that honors public service obligations while simultaneously leaving legal leeway for experimentation
- building codes and ordinances must be further developed through active regulatory learning
- technical regulations and safety standards must be formulated in such a way that they leave room for multifaceted solutions, experiments, and innovations

2

Energy and material consumption: holistic evaluation across lifecycles

Carbon-neutral building requires holistic assessment of all relevant environment impacts.

Why?

Only a holistic understanding of energy, materials, and the construction and use of buildings can pave the way for integrated and resource-saving architecture.

Political demands:

- the existing focus of legislators on energy consumption during building use must be expanded to include the material consumption required for construction on the basis of life cycle assessments (LCAs)
- an obligation to inform must be introduced for the CO₂ balance of building materials, technical equipment, and construction technologies
- a comprehensive, nationwide life cycle assessment must be legally formulated, and it must include resource extraction, material production, product manufacture, transport, construction, use, and maintenance of a building all the way through to its demolition, material reuse, and disposal

3

Simply intelligent: reducing technology and consumption

Priority must be given to architectural and building solutions that facilitate energy and material savings with the least possible use of additional technology.

Why?

Technical systems often lead to increased energy consumption during building use and for building maintenance. Nonetheless, the use of technology is currently encouraged by building standards.

Political demands:

- beyond the evaluation of specific technical data, alternative architectural and building solutions must be recognized as sufficient if they meet energy efficiency requirements
- technical norms and regulations must be designed or adapted so that repairable, low-maintenance, and thus energy and resource-saving building concepts become standard
- an effective CO₂ price must be levied in order to support the competitiveness of renewable materials and more energy-efficient construction methods
- the CO₂ balance of materials, technologies, and user energy consumption must be made transparent and accessible using an easily understandable measurement system (e.g. traffic lights) in order to inspire sustainable user behavior
- actual energy consumption during use must be ascertained and monitored

4

Care for the existing building stock: sustainable renovation

Less emphasis must be placed on new construction.

Why?

Renovating and upgrading buildings rather than demolishing them enables resources and raw materials to continue to be used and affordable living and working space to be preserved.

Political demands:

- when existing buildings are modified or renovated, the supervisory authority must justify itself if it requires compliance with current building regulations; otherwise, grandfathering should apply
- the gray energy of existing buildings must be consistently included in energy assessments in the form of a bonus system
- the preservation of gray energy in existing buildings should be given preferential support by the state
- for the demolition of buildings, evidence must be provided that further use, including of partial structures, is technically unfeasible; otherwise, the demolition costs of buildings must no longer be tax-deductible as business and operating expenses
- the use of renewable insulation materials must be much more rigorously promoted
- the neighborhood approach to energetic renovation must increasingly be seen as the duty of the state

5

Circular material cycles: less waste, more recyclables

The easy demolition of existing buildings, with no regard for the ecological value of their still usable resources, must no longer be acceptable.

Why?

Many components and materials are suitable for further use in new building projects, making resource-consuming new productions unnecessary and simultaneously reducing waste.

Political demands:

- the VAT rate for reused components and materials must be significantly lowered
- regulations must mandate that 80 percent of materials used in new buildings be reusable
- the law must stipulate use of pure materials and reversible connections for easy reparability
- technical standards and regulations must be simplified so that building materials and components can be easily reused
- the shipment of waste must be measured against the ecological follow-up costs through appropriate taxation, with environmentally harmful waste exports prohibited

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Land policy: environmental and social justice

Land policy must give equal weight to the common good and ecological responsibility.

Why?

Land is a limited commodity, and its value for both society and the natural world is inadequately represented in the logic of the market economy.

Political demands:

- appropriations must be distributed to support cities and towns in land acquisition in order to promote land policy with long-term sustainability
- increases in land value that arise without any special effort or capital expenditure on the part of the owner must be harnessed for the good of the community
- urban development projects must be assessed with regard to their land-conserving, resource-generating, and climate-stabilizing effects
- in order to reduce land consumption, the ecologically-friendly, internal development of cities and towns must be legally prioritized in the building code over external development
- municipalities must increasingly use their leaseholds for socially and ecologically just property policy and land allocation
- traffic areas and parking lots that fall into disuse must be converted into public spaces and green spaces that serve the common good

7

Capital market and financing models: responsible investment

The capital market and financial products, as well as investors and the real estate industry, must be compelled through policy initiatives to behave in a sustainable manner.

Why?

The real estate sector, which prioritizes economic efficiency, has so far been insufficiently liable for the ecological costs it generates. A climate-neutral building stock can only be achieved if the real estate sector is motivated through the tax code.

Political demands:

- clear criteria must be defined for sustainable financial investments
- strong, comprehensive, and quality-oriented ecological reference values must be specified for sustainable real estate
- the allocation of loans and grants must be based on criteria for sustainable real estate

8

Regions: strengthening cities and towns

Small and mid-sized cities must be consolidated as places to live and work, and their quality and regional identity must be strengthened through rigorous regional planning and development policy.

Why?

In order to drastically reduce land use and the growing number of commuters, life in small and mid-sized cities must be made more attractive. Particular emphasis must be placed on downtown areas.

Political demands:

- a mandatory resource-saving settlement policy must be anchored into regional planning programs
- regional planning administrators must be given greater decision-making authority to implement projects based on climate policy, including vis-a-vis municipalities
- the preservation, renovation, and experimental repurposing of existing buildings must be strongly supported through funding programs
- municipalities must be legally required to develop integrated development concepts, and the funding for this must be stabilized and expanded
- more financial support must be earmarked to encourage cooperation between municipalities, including to finance the necessary specialist staff
- real-world laboratories must be established on the regional level as fields of experimentation for resource-saving construction and economies

9

The public sector: pioneer of change

Public contracting authorities must strengthen their role as pioneers of ecological building.

Why?

As a role model, the state can demonstrate how to forge new and unusual paths and encourage others to do the same.

Political demands:

- mandatory ecological criteria must be integrated into the award decisions for planning and construction services
- financial budgeting for planning and construction projects must be freed from the primacy of construction costs and take a more holistic view that includes operating costs and ecological follow-up costs over the entire life cycle of a building on the basis of transparent and generally accessible data
- the circular use of materials for public construction projects must be made legally binding, with any deviation from the requirements specifically justified
- building authority employees must receive regular and ongoing training in ecological building (which must also be more intensively integrated into their core education)