

Bauhaus der Erde

Bauhaus der Erde FAQ

What does „Bauhaus der Erde“ stand for?

Like the Bauhaus movement of the 20th century, the “Bauhaus der Erde” takes a holistic view of the built environment and creates an intellectual foundation for a transformation of the sector. Ultimately, the question is: how can we make the built environment ecologically sustainable, socially just and aesthetically pleasing? A transformation of the industry in which reinforced concrete is replaced with bio-based materials could, for example, not only avoid greenhouse gas emissions, but also create a significant CO₂ sink. This could offset some of the historical emissions that we are aiming to tackle today. Our civilization would, as it were, grow itself out of the climate crisis. However, at the center of this initiative is not the climate crisis, but people. The “Bauhaus der Erde” sees itself as the engine of a movement that creates a new narrative of contemporary construction. The vision is a built environment that is regenerative, polycentric, digital, inclusive and beautiful.

What is the problem?

The 2015 Paris Climate Agreement enshrined an international commitment to limit global warming to no more than 2 degrees. In the years since, the global temperature increase has already reached 1.25 degrees. The danger of a “heating period” – with dramatic consequences for mankind and global ecosystems – continues to grow. From a climate research perspective, we cannot avoid a significant transformation, i.e. moving away completely from a fossil fuel- based economy (“decarbonisation”) by 2050. In order to limit global warming, it is also necessary that we strengthen natural carbon sinks (in particular forests, which remove CO₂ from the atmosphere through photosynthesis) and to create artificial carbon sinks (organic cities and infrastructures that durably and securely store CO₂ for centuries).

What role does the construction sector play?

Considered over its lifecycle, the built environment is responsible for more than 40 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions through the construction, use and demolition of structures. About 11 percent of global emissions can be directly attributed to the production of concrete, almost five times the climate effect of all air travel. So far, the built environment has not been adequately considered in the climate equation and it is in this context that Hans Joachim Schellnhuber speaks of the “elephant in the climate room”.

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What are the goals of the “Bauhaus der Erde”?

The “Bauhaus der Erde” pursues a holistic approach that combines ecological and social goals. As the catalyst of a global movement, the “Bauhaus der Erde” aims to sustainably transform the built environment. The central elements of this transformation include the reforestation of degraded areas, rewetting of peat areas, sustainable forestry and the use of renewable raw materials for the retrofit of existing buildings and the construction of new housing and cities. All of this must happen under a holistic narrative of a built environment that is people-centric, ecologically sustainable and aesthetic. The founders of “Bauhaus der Erde” believe this new architectural era is inevitable. The “Bauhaus der Erde” aims to be both a driving force for innovations in the construction sector and a “thorn in the flesh of business-as-usual politics”. Initially, the initiative will consist of a think tank, an innovation lab and network. Lighthouse projects that demonstrate this new architecture are a fundamental part of the strategy.

Who is behind it?

100 years after the founding of the Bauhaus in Weimar, the climate researcher Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, together with around 20 thought leaders, brought the “Bauhaus der Erde” into being. The starting point was the signing of the “Caputh Declaration” in December 2019. The founding group includes the President of the German Environment Agency Prof. Dirk Messner and the architect Annette Hillebrandt from the Bergische Universität Wuppertal, as well as State Minister Monika Grütters, Berlin’s Senator for Construction Regula Lüscher, Brandenburg’s Minister of Science Manja Schüle and the managing director of the German Energy Agency, Andreas Kuhlmann. The European Commission has already taken up the idea of the “Bauhaus der Erde” with its “New European Bauhaus”. For the development phase, the German “Bauhaus der Erde” has now received funding of 2.5 million euros from Laudes Foundation, a new foundation that has joined the growing movement to accelerate the transition to a climate-positive and inclusive global economy.

What distinguishes the “Bauhaus der Erde” from other initiatives for sustainable building?

There are now numerous important initiatives and innovative solutions for sustainable buildings. From the perspective of the new Bauhaus movement, what is missing so far is, in addition to a comprehensive strategy, is a holistic and convincing narrative. In other words, a story that describes a pathway and that inspires politicians, entrepreneurs, architects, designers, artists and citizens alike and moves them to act. This is what the “Bauhaus der

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Erde” wants to design and disseminate, in the tradition of the historical Bauhaus. The idea is to initiate a social dialogue that regards the built environment as a “complete work of art” – taking into account the specific conditions of the 21st century such as demographic developments, environmental challenges, social upheavals, and cultural dynamics, as well as digital and other disruptive innovations.

What could the built environment look like in the future?

While “modern” architecture after the Second World War increasingly oriented itself toward the machine, the built environment of the future should be more based on organic and metabolic models. Perhaps towards the end of the 21st century, certain urbanizations will hardly differ materially and structurally from ecosystems. After all, it took evolution around 500 million years to invent and optimize the tree. Its “flesh” (the wood) has developed outstanding material and structural properties, qualities that we need to rediscover in construction and apply sustainably and regeneratively.

Is there a catch?

Fire, storms, termites – modern wood processing now has numerous approaches to address such challenges. High-rise buildings have already been constructed in wood without technical problems, applying both historical and emerging systems for laminated structural timber. With the right materials and techniques, timber buildings can be even more resistant to earthquakes than reinforced concrete structures. Building with bio-based materials is becoming cost-competitive with conventional mineral- and fossil hydrocarbon-based building systems. And what about conservation of natural ecosystems? From the point of view of environmental research, we cannot avoid developing climate-adapted forest management practices and we must re-forest degraded areas. Working closely with a regenerative forestry sector, a transformed construction sector can readily produce and apply bio-based building materials and assemblies to minimize its environmental impact and mitigate climate change. At the same time, we must work to protect and preserve species-rich and ecologically critical primary forests from exploitation and destruction.

For more information see: www.bauhausdererde.org/news

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