



**"Architects have a role to play in experimenting, developing critical thinking".**

**ACE had the opportunity to talk with Jorge Figueira and Gonçalo Canto Moniz to discuss their vision regarding the NEB, quality in the built environment, relevance of architectural policies, education, housing and the EU-funded project Urbinat.**

In the framework of the International Conference "From Bauhaus to the New House", the Portuguese Association of Architects (OA) released recently the report 'New European Bauhaus: an opportunity to recentre architecture.' This European Conference on Architectural Policies reflected a commitment on the part of the OA to respond to an appeal from the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and assumed the mission of architects as agents of change, constructing the New European Bauhaus, putting forward a dialogue on the current challenges for a post-pandemic future and crossing architecture, art, city and politics: From Bauhaus to the New House – Post-Covid Landscapes.

**ACE: From Bauhaus to the New House. Last year, the Portuguese Association of Architects (OA) proposed a dialogue on the current challenges for a post-pandemic future, crossing architecture, art, the city and politics, responding to the challenge of the President of the European Commission to create a New European Bauhaus. Can you tell us more about this initiative and key considerations?**

**Jorge Figueira:** "We were really excited when we heard about the New European Bauhaus proposal from the European Commission President, and as part of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union, we decided to organise an European Conference for Architectural Policies on the New European Bauhaus theme. The conference had the merit of bringing together people from the 5 continents to exchange on the New European Bauhaus - it was not a narrow centric gathering. The main topics were: (1) the New European Bauhaus beyond Europe, (2) transforming the post-pandemic city, (3) Architecture, Art and sustainability and (4) Architectural policies and the new European Bauhaus. We managed different angles and experiences to the debate, with people coming from different countries, Angola, Brazil, Macao or Mozambique. They told us resilience stories of how they face today's challenges, such as the pandemic and the climate crisis. Although problems are similar, the solutions may differ. In the second session, 'transforming the post-pandemic city', we discussed the phenomena of tactical urbanism in order to tackle the emergencies in the city, facing the pandemic. In session 3 dedicated to 'Architecture, Art and sustainability', we exchanged case

studies illustrating ways of dealing with this pressing concept of sustainability through architecture, art and design, a very “Bauhaus” kind of discussion. The last round table was dedicated to how these matters can result in practical architectural policies, namely under the umbrella theme of architecture quality.

I would like to mention our main keynote speaker, Eduardo Souto de Moura, the 2011 Pritzker Prize winner, who is a legendary admirer of Mies Van Rohe. Eduardo Souto de Moura brought us back to that time in a very lively but critical way and reminded us not to go for the easy and immediate solutions when dealing with the present crisis. We worked on a publication that captured all these considerations, case studies etc.

We believe that our conference put forward the kaleidoscopic view of the New European Bauhaus and that it was a clear demonstration of how we can discuss the most pressing topics under this concept. For the visual backdrop of the conference, we used the famous Triadic Ballet developed by Oskar Schlemmer, master of forms at the Bauhaus. We said that we wanted to launch a new Triadic Ballet with new polarisations, new themes but the same effort to bring beauty to these troubled times".

**ACE: Gonçalo Canto Moniz, you were involved in the session dedicated to Architecture, Art, Sustainability. What were the main highlights of this session?**

**Gonçalo Canto Moniz:** "I see the New Bauhaus as the main “marriage” of bringing this sustainability issue to the architectural culture. The way in which the New Bauhaus is presented in this challenging dialogue, across different disciplines, will be crucial and it will be very important to follow the next steps. Regarding the conference session, we highlighted co-creation as the most interesting but also the most challenging issue for architects and artists. The main highlights of this co-creation discussion were the types of methodologies, definition of tools and the limit of this process. When we tried to open this dialogue with the communities by addressing the design issues, we found limited expertise; on the one hand, we have the technical and scientific expertise of the architects, on the other side we have the everyday expertise of the citizens. How can we work together? How can we set up these effective co-creations processes for cities and public spaces? I also would like to highlight the contribution of the Academy for city- planning and research in general, by offering a critical perspective on urban planning, on what the cities are doing but also a very realistic one in terms of opportunities to think about the cities in another way".

**ACE: Tell us more about the title of the conference ‘From Bauhaus to Our House’.**

**Jorge Figueira:** "We borrowed this title "From Bauhaus to our house" from Tom Wolfe’s novel to underline the fact that history has its highs and lows, and that we cannot jump from 1919 to our times without the knowledge of what went wrong in this century of successes and failures. The book written by Tom Wolfe is a very satirical, very ironic, very cruel view of the masses of architecture. So, when we made this very subtle reference to Tom Wolfe, we wanted to state

that Bauhaus is not a magical password. It's full of contradictions, failures, excesses, incongruousness. Nevertheless, we fully appreciate the intelligence and the opportunity offered by the European Commission President in bringing back such an institution, which is so meaningful to us, architects, artists and designers. While Tom Wolfe was satirical towards modernism, we want to see the New European Bauhaus as a sign of hope and with the historical knowledge of what went wrong. And what went wrong, cannot be repeated".

**Gonalo Canto Moniz:** "I also made a hint in my presentation title, "From Bauhaus to our public space", highlighting one of the dimensions that Tom Wolfe brought in 1981, namely the idea that one of the failures of the modern city was the lack of public space. We need to create some familiarity for the urban space, it's not an abstract space. It's not only a space for everyone, it's our public space. In this sense, we need to reappropriate the public space. This is? one of the challenges of the modern city. Most of our discussions in this roundtable were about rethinking the 1960s, when there was a critique of modernity in general, and in some way of Bauhaus. This is a trend of our contemporary culture; rethinking the positions that were very strongly pointed out in the 1960s. Also rethinking the role of the architect that ranges from that of technical expert to an artist with a vision of the city, to a mediator between communities and governments and private sector. Of course, the New European Bauhaus is also an idea of rethinking the Bauhaus. It's not about doing the same. So, maybe the "new" word creates this idea of do something equal to the original Bauhaus, but I think the position of the European Commission is very clear".

### **ACE: In your opinion, what are the main opportunities and challenges of the New European Bauhaus initiative?**

**Jorge Figueira:** "The opportunities are great. We're very excited about this EU initiative. It surprised everybody, the politics as much as society. It was really a big surprise because we, architects, are not used to getting such interest from the highest level in Europe, by putting culture, architecture, art and design at the centre of the discussion. It was a kind of emotional reaction because we are always listening to things related to finance, economy, and technology, while the cultural side of things is somehow marginal. One of the main exciting aspects is the crossing of disciplines; the solution to ecology and sustainability must include all citizens. And, of course, the cultural side of things, the participation of artists, architects and designers, etc. must be called on to tackle these very difficult problems, not just technology, not just finances. The main challenge is to avoid transforming the NEB into a new magical discourse, a new doctrine, with its own technocratic jargon. We must avoid this technocratic solution. Critical thinking is what Bauhaus means at its best - a cacophony of ideas, discourses, of eccentric people from Europe and beyond, trying to create something new. And it is that more than chaotic and very creative moment of Bauhaus that interests me and not what then develops as a doctrine, or something that is fixed. So, be aware of the jargon, be aware of the doctrine. Be aware of the technocracy and let's go to the more creative and

inventive and free way of thinking that Bauhaus represents".

**Gonçalo Canto Moniz:** "It's very important to develop initiatives that relate to research and practice. And of course, that's the field of architects, designers, sociologists, artists; a dialogue that will promote reflective practice. At the academic level, we are interested in projects offering the opportunity to put research into practice. At the professional level, they? represent an opportunity to have a more reflective practice. To illustrate this, during the OA conference, the keynote speaker, Eduardo Souto de Moura, didn't want to talk about his projects but offered a real reflection on his practice, with the influence of Mies Van der Rohe. Interdisciplinarity represents an opportunity and is one of the challenges for achieving the NEB. One of the permanent challenges of our society is the dialogue with other areas; although we aim to do it, sometimes the concept changes, the methodologies change, from area to area. So to achieve the NEB, we have to be open to the others, to listen and to do it together, it's one of the most important issues of this programme, and the other one is to put in dialogue, areas that usually are in opposite sides: sustainability is always looked at as an environmental issue, the inclusiveness is always looked at as a social issue, aesthetics is something that only belongs to culture. Housing is a main issue highlighted in the NEB programme, we know that there will be strong economic support from the European Commission to rethink housing but municipalities are not prepared to face these challenges and to deal with the financial support without having tools like guidelines and good practices to illustrate what municipalities can do across Europe".

**Jorge Figueira:** "Let's have these guidelines, without eliminating critical thinking, and I think the NEB has the opportunity to create a framework for more experimental solutions in housing".

**ACE: The Covid-19 crisis has multiplied questions on urban planning and climate issues. In your eyes, how will architects rethink cities and re-invent spaces?**

**Gonçalo Canto Moniz:** "Architects have a role to play in experimenting, developing critical thinking. Usually, we have this idea that we can only do good architecture, if we have good clients; it's a systemic change. It's not the role of the architects alone. COVID 19 triggered this systemic idea that things need to change. We cannot do things alone, we need developers, we need municipalities, we need citizens with critical thinking about how things work. Of course, there is a current discussion on housing. Today, we need the house to be more flexible, integrating several activities like home working. It is not one of the activities that is programmed when we first think about what the house should be. Jobs are already changing, many people have been hired to work from Portugal to Brussels but are based in Portugal, so

their houses need to be adapted and have a more open relation with the exterior, with balconies or external areas, but also the spaces in between. The idea that public space is a space for intense use, not only for leisure, but also for walking through to have access to public facilities as illustrated by the 15 minutes city where everything is close to hand, so we can have a more intense use of public space and less use of car or public transport. Governments, architects, planners, and citizens need to be together to rethink the way we want to redesign our cities. This will be the big challenge to create the structures to do things together - a challenge, not only for architects, also for municipalities, and also for the citizens that need to be prepared and have the tools to contribute to the discussion – which is not always very easy due to lack of time or critical capacity. Nevertheless, we have a society that is well educated and wants to play a role in the decision-making processes, so let's take this opportunity of this systemic change to do things differently".

**Jorge Figueira:** "Well, some things will remain the same because human nature is the same. We will try to be as normal as we can be, as we were before the pandemic. We must be careful because the 20th century showed us that when we are too messianic, too voluntary or too radical, this may lead us to some catastrophes. Before the pandemic, the role of architects was to build iconic structures and buildings; that has now changed. It was already under severe criticism, but with the pandemic, architects are now being called on to have a more political and structural intervention in the city. And that means perhaps what we can call a renaissance of Europeanism. The main change now is that Europeanism has become a newborn discipline, because we are talking about not embellishing but surviving. We need to undertake not just random transformations of the streets but really tackle the pandemic crisis with the support of politicians and all citizens who must have a new role in our society".

### **ACE: What is your definition of quality in the built environment?**

**Jorge Figueira:** "In Portugal, we don't really have a tradition of speaking in terms of quality because we don't see architecture as a product. Products have qualities, like you would say it to qualify a TV or a fridge. We see architecture, with some cultural arrogance I must admit, as being a work of art. We're now trying to deal with this concept of quality and architecture and to downgrade to the concept of being a product. Let's see if we can do that. But the main thing I want to see in a building is the intelligent use of forms and resources. And also, the sensuality, the beauty or the aesthetics of these forms and resources. I want to see intelligence, sexiness and rationality. Inclusivity, the rationality of bringing people together and not dividing them. Quality in the built environment is something that lasts and can pass the criteria of the ephemeral. I'm a little bit critical of these tactical modus operandi of Europeanism because I don't know if they will last, if they will be something more than a brief painting on the street. My temporary definition of quality in architecture? To have an expectancy that the things will last, that they are made in an intelligent and sensible way".

**Gonalo Canto Moniz:** "When debating the NEB during the conference or at URBiNAT, our interest was more focused on the process than on the results. Of course, the final results are what will last, and what will be used by the people, but we are also really interested in the way in which things are done. The practice of architecture is evolving and is dealing with a lot of actors. The way we dialogue and engage with each other in something that we all believe will transform the space, is also a demonstration of quality. So, on the one hand, the process of doing/practicing is something we try to teach in the architectural schools, and it's an important issue of quality and on the other hand, we go after the things that are built or implemented and try to understand the impact they have on the quality of life of people. And that is something that I think architects and institutions are more and more aware of, by trying to understand how people are using the space and whether an intervention has been positive" .

### **ACE: How do you see your buildings aging?**

**Gonalo Canto Moniz:** "At URBiNAT, we try to build with nature. In public space, nature is an important material for organising the space and creating opportunities for addressing environmental issues, as well as a more friendly use of space. So, at the URBiNAT project, the nature-based solutions have a focus on the material - not only as an end, but also as a means. But of course, it's also about the way people perceive the materials and how they interact with them. There's also a change in the way of thinking about materiality. When we built public space in the 1990s we used very sophisticated materials (with quality stone, steel, glass). We tried to bring some high-quality to the public space. There is now a change. Today, we try to work with more raw materials not only for economic and environmental reasons but also to give a human and natural touch to the material. We're developing materials that also create an opportunity for 'built with nature'; for instance, when we build a wall to solve a difference between two platforms, these walls can be built not only as a support but also as an opportunity to create some vegetation. There's another way of thinking about materials and their capacity to create space and change, to challenge the technological solution. In addition to a technological solution, there can also be a social opportunity".

**Jorge Figueira:** "This change of material might bring a new paradigm to the built environment. If concrete was the key material of the 20th century, wood might be that of the 21st century. It's difficult for me to acknowledge and to understand how big cities, for instance in South Africa or South America, can abandon concrete and steel. I will tackle this issue with some critical thinking, because the idea that bamboo will be the solution to our problems in central Europe or in Sao Paulo in Brazil is quite delirious. Of course, there must be some changes in the materials, but we must be careful with these new trends. There's no 'innocent' material, that has no commercial interest. Of course, some changes must occur and perhaps this will bring us towards a new architecture and a new public space".

**ACE: In your opinion, what is the relevance of architectural policies? What are your expectations at European level in terms of supporting professional practice and ensuring the quality of the built environment?**

**Jorge Figueira:** "We are oscillating. There's been ever growing policies, taking power away from architects, limiting architects to the form and the volume of the building, and then the engineers and interior designers will take over. That was the trend before the pandemic. I hope that architects, with the social dimension they bring, will have be able to have a renewed presence and power. We learnt our lessons. If the architect is someone that only does iconic, baroque, and very high-tech buildings, he will be disconnected from the people. Perhaps this new modesty and this new proximity to social issues, that we all always had but were in the background, have now moved to the foreground. Perhaps they will lead the way to creating some guidelines and policies where architecture and new urbanism will be priorities".

**Gonalo Canto Moniz:** "We need to create a close relationship with the ones that are also putting these policies into practice, with municipalities for instance. A lot of work has already been done for example, the way we are governing our cities or the way the technicians who are called on to design the European regeneration process need to improve, not only in terms of bureaucracy, that is sometimes a challenge in terms of developing the architectural process but also in the way that architects are involved, for instance, in participatory processes led by the municipalities."

**ACE: As Associate Professors of the Department of Architecture of the Faculty of Sciences and Technology University of Coimbra what are the trends you see in the new generation of architects? What is your advice for young architects?**

**Jorge Figueira:** "Well, my main advice is not to give up on architecture. I think architecture doesn't have all the solutions, but represents a way forward?. It's fundamental to teach history to understand the main factors that led to this situation. In order to have this critical thinking put to the forefront, we must teach, or somehow try to develop in our students, the ability to be critical of the situation. Architecture can still be a way of intervening away from a vision of the world. Of course, all professions are important. There are, perhaps, other professions that are more important today than architects like doctors, etc. But we are in the middle of things. Architecture can gain a new relevance. Just as we can't imagine a world without poetry, beauty or sensibility, so we can't imagine a world without forms, without history. There are resulting forms of architecture that conduct the way we live and are still something to aspire to. My two main pieces of advice are: Be critical, and still enjoy architecture!"

**Gonalo Canto Moniz:** "The beautiful thing about architectural students is that they always give advice to the professors and to the institution. For instance, the students of the University of Coimbra, created a programme "H Baixa", a parallel programme of learning, in a very activist way, where they offered their services to create events in public space with architectural infrastructures and to renovate houses for people with financial needs. They invited some teachers to support them and showcased what needs to be improved with these learning processes. It's a really engaged generation, with an activists' approach. It's quite positive to see this and my advice would be to keep this critical thinking alive and/or to nourish it! The basis for this critical thinking is that we need to learn from the past to act in the future. So, I think that the schools that have a very strong technological approach might lose this capacity of developing critical thinking. Critical thinking is key, when architectural students have the capacity to challenge us with different ideas and different educational proposals. Look at the past and open your eyes to the world, because the possibilities of acting as an architect are very wide!"

**Watch the European Conference on Architectural Policies "From Bauhaus to the New House" on Youtube.**



### ABOUT

**Jorge Figueira** is an architect, associate professor at the Department of Architecture and researcher at the Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra . He is also member of the National Council of the Order of Architects of Portugal. Read more [here](#).

**Gonalo Canto Moniz**, is a architect and associate professor at the Department of Architecture and researcher at the Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra. Read more [here](#).

### FOCUS ON URBINAT with Gonalo Canto Moniz

"At URBiNAT, we are a team of professionals and academics comprising 28 partners with different backgrounds and expertise, working together in order to address the sustainability topic with nature-based solutions. Coordinated by the Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra, this project affords an opportunity to develop a critical reflection on the way nature-based solutions are being addressed for the urban regeneration of public spaces.



It was important to bring a social dimension, with the contribution of architects, to these environmental calls for projects of the European Commission, in the frame of the Horizon 2020 programme, there are two main objectives: - To act in social housing neighbourhoods. According to modern housing planning, this still creates a challenge for the cities today, because most of these neighbourhoods are not integrated in the city's structure. We identified several of these neighbourhoods, in different European cities, that share the same difficulty of belonging to the city - not only the physical structure, but also the social structure; - To discuss nature-based solutions. For us, we don't build the city with specific solutions; we build the city with the integration of solutions that create the idea of a space. So, we proposed this healthy corridor idea as a cluster of integrated solutions. They are identified and co-designed by the citizens. At URBiNAT, we are developing a different way of acting in relation to the regeneration of the cities. It's very important to create a dialogue between the political strategies for the territory, and the citizens' vision for their community. The citizens' needs are the citizens' dreams".

### **ACE: How do you ensure this dialogue?**

"That's the biggest challenge of the project. We work on three levels:

- by organising public events and activities that create ownership? of the project by all the community.
- by using a workshop methodology where we work with small groups of volunteers who are representative of the community. At this level, we try to develop a more interactive process in order to co-design solutions.
- by developing a street presence to ensure a level of proximity with the citizens. It's also an opportunity to listen to the community. We need to go from one group to the other several times; this is a key factor to success. Besides, we are also setting up a stakeholder advisory board, a commission of representatives of the different groups, including politicians, to promote dialogue and a collective decision-making process. On the architects' level, there's a change regarding the architectural tools. We also learn from the social sciences tools, where we can create a space for dialogue and for a creative process. It's not easy, and what we learn is that it's different from city to city across Europe, because we are working in seven different cities, so we cannot create a methodology that will be strictly implemented by each of the cities. We simply need to incorporate it according to the local cultural of doing things. It's also very important that this process is very flexible and adaptable to the local culture".

### **ACE: How do you measure the feedback?**

"We have our own indicators and own ways to measure the level of satisfaction / engagement. There are always citizens that come for one workshop, but they don't come for the next, but there are citizens that keep their engagement along the whole process, and that's a very important sign. We don't expect a very high participation, but we expect a very committed

participation. We also run interviews with some citizens to understand what is working well and what can be changed. It's very important to rethink the project and replan the activities according to their feedback. Tactical, urbanistic approaches are very important to create a sense of engagement because you see things happening, it's tangible. We have two groups of citizens, three cities that start in the first moment (front-runner cities) and another group that is starting a little bit later (following cities). What we learn is that we must start immediately with very tangible actions so that people are engaged by doing, and not only by discussion".

## About URBiNAT

URBiNAT focuses on the regeneration and integration of underserved city districts. Project interventions focus on public spaces and the co-creation, with citizens, of new social and nature-based relationships within and between different neighbourhoods.

On 16 & 17 June 2022 the H2020-funded URBiNAT project is hosting an international conference in Milan on the potential of nature-based solutions to bring about more inclusive urban regeneration. To participate see details of Call for Abstracts and Registration form on the URBiNAT website: <https://urbinat.eu/conference-2022/>

**NATURE FOR INNOVATIVE AND INCLUSIVE URBAN REGENERATION**  
International Conference  
Milan, 16-17 June 2022

**16 June - Day 1**  
In Chiostro del Bramante, Milan

**Part 1: Keynotes, Round Tables & Pitches**

- Welcome Session
- European Commission presentation
- Keynote 1
- Round Table 1
- Colline Round
- Keynote 2
- Round Table 2
- 5 minute pitches x 5 invited speakers
- Lunch

**Part 2: URBiNAT Cities Fair - world cafe**

- Citizens engagement
- Co-design of the intervention area
- Co-design of NBS and healthy corridor
- Co-implementation of NBS
- Co-governance model
- Co-monitoring the healthy corridor impact
- Final Debate

**17 June - Day 2**  
In SUEM University, Milan

**Rooms sessions**

- Co-creating NBS for Sustainable Cities
- Innovating Public Space for Inclusive Cities
- Engaging Citizens for Healthy Cities
- Transforming Governance for Innovative Cities
- Changing Economy for Equitable Cities

**SAVE THE DATES**

- Close Call for abstracts | 4 March 2022
- Review abstracts | 20 March 2022
- Communication of approval | 18 April 2022
- Submit expanded abstract | 31 May 2022

platform to submit | <https://urbinat.eu/conference-2022>

**MORE DETAIL ABOUT THE CONFERENCE PROGRAMME**  
<https://urbinat.eu/conference-2022>

## activities