

Building Culture – Is it Possible in EU-Funded Projects?

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Abstract - The focus of the study is on the environment, which is an essential part of the history, culture and economy of each country. The surrounding environment also serves as an important means of artistic expression, creating a sense of belonging, identity and tomorrow's heritage. The impact of the environment on society is crucial in ensuring and improving the quality of life. The surrounding environment is influenced by social and political factors, economic development and culture affect the surrounding environment. At the same time, these factors are also influenced by the environment itself, creating continuous and mutual interaction. Economic interests drive the development of construction in a market environment, but the quality of construction works, and the quality of the environment associated with it are public goods, the improvement of which may not be a business goal. Construction policy determines the priorities and strategic goals of the government. In this way, the state protects the public good. Every human activity aimed at creating, preserving or transforming the surrounding environment includes the aspect of creating culture, cultural identity and diversity. Construction culture requires not only the preservation of existing buildings with cultural and historical significance, but also the responsible creation of new public spaces. The novelty of this research lies in its examination of how construction culture principles are integrated into the implementation of European Union (EU) Cohesion Policy Fund projects—an aspect that has not been systematically analyzed before. This study bridges the gap between construction policy, cultural identity, and sustainable urban development by assessing whether EU-funded projects uphold the values of construction culture. The aim of the study is to determine whether the principles of construction culture can be observed in the implementation of European Union (EU) Cohesion Policy Fund projects. To achieve this goal, the following research tasks have been set: to analyze the concept of construction culture; to identify the main principles of culture formation and to provide recommendations for observing these principles when implementing EU Cohesion Policy Fund projects. The monographic and descriptive method and the logically constructive method are used. The

results have developed the main components necessary for ensuring construction culture. **Main conclusions and recommendations:** considering the significant investments of EU funds in infrastructure and their impact on the economy and welfare of the Member States, the construction sector with all its sub-sectors should be given much greater attention. Investments in research and development of this sector should be increased in order to respond to the changing and growing demands of society, ensuring the competitiveness of the sector both in the EU and globally.

Keywords – *building culture, EU-funded projects.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Europe is characterised by a rich and diverse architecture that has evolved and developed over time. Considering the varying climatic, political, geographical, social, and economic conditions that have shaped different regions, Europe can take pride in a wide range of distinctive architectural styles and landscapes. Recently, concerns about economic stability in Europe have been growing significantly influenced by migration, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Several regions are experiencing economic stagnation or significant contraction. Political extremism and populism are becoming more prevalent due to the increasing social and economic polarization. The European Union's (EU) cohesion policy plays a crucial role in addressing these challenges. It serves as the primary instrument to tackle these issues and counteract the resulting problems.

Addressing these challenges and responding to global trends also impacts the development and preservation of buildings and landscapes. The EU incorporates issues such as eradicating poverty and inequality, ensuring economic prosperity and security, and optimizing energy consumption - focusing on sustainable and inclusive

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environments - into many of its strategies, programs, and projects. The European Union establishes cultural requirements for modern planning and construction. The EU has emphasised the importance of high-quality built and restored environments, articulated in at least two Council of the European Union resolutions [1], [2]. Both resolutions call for improving architectural quality while taking urban sustainability into account, emphasizing a careful and respectful approach to cultural heritage. The environment must provide good, safe, and healthy living conditions that promote social cohesion.

Buildings serve technical and economic purposes while also meeting artistic, aesthetic, cultural, and social needs. The goal of construction is to ensure that buildings are fit for purposes, durable, safe, and comfortable while bringing people together, fostering a sense of well-being, and promoting social cohesion. Construction creates spaces where people meet and interact. Attractive, diverse, and inclusive cities, towns, and landscapes emerge only when construction is carried out with a commitment to high quality.

Culture is defined as "...the totality of spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features of a society... in addition to art and literature, it includes lifestyles, collaboration, value systems, traditions, and beliefs..." [3]. Culture shape's human identity and defines their heritage. Without culture, there can be no humanity, rationality, critical thinking, or moral commitment [4]. Culture forms the foundation of intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual existence. Buildings themselves are a form of culture, creating spaces for cultural expression. Building culture represents a skilled and sustainable approach to preserving and developing significant buildings and urban spaces. It encompasses every human activity that transforms the surrounding environment. Culture is a transformative force that fosters community renewal. This is evidenced by the 30-year success of the "European Capital of Culture" initiative and cultural infrastructure projects funded by the European Structural and Investment Funds. The "European Year" initiative places particular emphasis on the cross-cutting contributions of cultural heritage to European society and the economy [5].

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

To achieve the research objective, the following methods were used: Monographic and descriptive method: This method was employed to provide a detailed description of the principles of building culture and their significance in the implementation of European Union (EU) funded projects. Logically constructive method: This approach was used to develop recommendations that would enable the effective application of building culture principles in EU-funded projects.

The materials used included: Scientific articles: These analysed the significance and impact of building culture on the economy and cultural development. EU official documents: These highlighted the importance and impact of building culture on society. Project data: This allowed for conclusions to be drawn about the implementation and outcomes of various projects.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As a component of cultural identity and diversity, building culture encompasses all human endeavours aimed at creating, preserving, or transforming the surrounding environment. Building culture calls not only for the preservation of existing buildings with cultural and historical significance but also for the creation of responsible new public spaces. "Baukultur" is particularly well-known in German-speaking countries, where it is increasingly used. The French term "culture du bâti" and the Italian term "cultura della costruzione" are direct translations from German. Thus, it can be concluded that the concept of "building culture" in Latvian has also come from the German language. This concept is quite challenging to translate into English in a way that conveys its full meaning. The German language is famous for its compound words, and "Baukultur" is no exception, as it combines the verb "to build" (Bau-) and the noun for culture or civilization (Kultur), thus giving it a simultaneous, societally significant meaning: "culture of construction." "The foundation of building culture is the tradition provided by the local architect, thorough and detailed research and analysis of heritage, onto which... functionality and technology are layered" [6]. Building culture is an active approach to shaping the environment, prioritizing cultural values over short-term economic gains, thus assembling not only functional, technical, and economic requirements but also addressing people's social and psychological needs. The way we use, maintain, and protect our cultural heritage today will be crucial for the development of high-quality construction in the future [7]. The concept of building culture in English (The Culture of Building) has been extensively studied by Howard Davis in his comprehensive book of the same title, where he describes building culture as "a coordinated system of knowledge, rules, and procedures that is common to people who participate in construction activities and that determines the form of buildings and cities" [8]. In the author's view, this explanation unjustifiably excludes all others, leaving only those who work at a professional level in construction, as the individual is the product of their living environment. Therefore, building culture applies to everyone. Regardless of whether they are merely present or actively shaping their surroundings, people influence their environment. Everyone is responsible for the active creation of their living environment. Building culture as a code of morality, ethics, and expertise in architecture, environmental culture, and construction art is nothing new. It is a modern extension of the principle of *firmitas, utilitas, venustas* (strength, utility, beauty – in Latin) formulated by Vitruvius, a contemporary of Christ [9]. Building culture encompasses all People shape their living environment in all its diversity, a phenomenon known as building culture. It also includes landscapes – both built and natural. Thus, building culture connects the past and the future.

In her publication on the LSM (Latvian Public Media) portal, Evita Ruka describes the significance of building culture in our lives: "The concept of culture has a wide

range of definitions, but all of them emphasize that it is not innate but develops as a result of upbringing and interaction with society. Buildings share a common nature. Human hands create them, shaping them through upbringing and societal demands. Buildings and their complexes are just like people – cultural and not so much, harmonious and destructive, outwardly brilliant and internally unstable, inviting and rejecting, joyful and gloomy, loudly striking and quietly serene. There are buildings and urban environments where a person instinctively feels good and wants to stay longer, but there are construction objects that cause stress, unpleasant feelings, and make you want to walk around them. Of course – each to their own, but building culture is the sensible and aesthetic foundation that creates pleasant places" [10]. Undoubtedly, a significant role in shaping Latvian society's understanding of architecture was played by journalist and architectural critic Mārtiņš Kibilds (1973–2019), who created and hosted the program "Adrese," offering direct analysis and valuable recommendations. The programme emphasised that architecture is the shared living space of society, making it particularly important to study and analyse both successful and unsuccessful, or even glaringly poor, examples of architectural and environmental design [11]. The first organisations operating in the field of building culture were architecture museums, such as the Museum of Finnish Architecture, established in 1954. Since the 1970s, the number of organizations both in Europe and globally that promote architectural and construction culture has steadily increased, highlighting the significant role these fields play in people's lives. State or municipal financial resources fully or partially fund most of these organizations, with only a small proportion relying on private funding and donations. While the scope of these organisations and their understanding of the concept of building culture may vary, their main goal is to provide information and create opportunities for discussion [12]. In 2000, the German Federal Ministry of Construction launched the Architecture and Baukultur Initiative to promote and focus public discussion on construction planning and quality in Germany. In December 2006, the German federal government approved a law for the establishment of the Federal Baukultur Fund. Founded in Potsdam, the fund serves as an independent and active platform for all matters related to architecture and building culture. In April 2007, during Germany's presidency of the European Union, the European Architecture Policy Forum was held in Hamburg [13].

The concept of Baukultur gained global prominence in early 2018, when, on the eve of the World Economic Forum in Davos, European ministers responsible for culture and spatial and regional planning signed the Davos Declaration on the central role of culture in the built environment and the implementation of the Baukultur concept in construction [7]. This concept encompasses all activities within the built environment related to existing buildings and cultural heritage elements, as well as the planning, design, and construction of modern buildings, infrastructure, public spaces, and landscapes. It includes construction methods, skills, and innovative approaches. The Architects' Council of Europe [14] emphasised the critical importance of high-quality Baukultur in its 2018 annual report, urging the

European Commission to take actions to implement the Davos Declaration. The significance of Baukultur was also highlighted in the organization's 2023 annual report [15].

The Davos Declaration tries to connect the past and the present by providing a broad idea that includes both protecting cultural heritage and making new environments. This idea defines Baukultur as a single entity [16]. The concept of Baukultur refers to the activities and processes that influence the spatial environment. Meanwhile, the term "high-quality Baukultur" refers to an enhanced and superior spatial environment. This concept is used to describe high-quality construction work, ensuring that Baukultur, with its values, is placed at the centre, preserving or creating an environment that meets cultural and social needs [17].

The goal of high-quality Baukultur is to create and maintain a high-quality environment. This quality fosters essential societal values such as quality of life, well-being, social cohesion, and social integration. High-quality Baukultur ensures adequate housing, including the surrounding neighbourhood, and creates conditions for the growth of economic added value. With its vision that encompasses the entire built environment and focuses on the common good, the concept of high-quality Baukultur adds value to any environment. High-quality Baukultur enhances the sense of "place," allowing people to identify with their living or working environment, thus promoting the formation of inclusive and cohesive communities. It protects the environment by supporting sustainable transportation, increasing urban green spaces, and promoting biodiversity. Baukultur represents the power and responsibility to shape the environment in which we want to live [18]. High-quality Baukultur ensures the common good for all of society. Only a conscious approach to the task, involving collaboration between the state, local governments, and the private sector, can achieve this. A crucial aspect is the shared responsibility that all these sectors must bear. The state and local government sectors should set an example for the private sector by recognising and promoting the importance of Baukultur. All sectors are equally responsible for ensuring that Baukultur becomes our heritage, which we will pass on to future generations. High-quality Baukultur can be achieved by clearly expressing and consistently implementing the desire to reach it, meaning Baukultur should be incorporated as a fundamental goal in the planning, design, and construction phases. Undoubtedly, an essential factor in this process is a fair procurement procedure, i.e., the decision about who will carry out the planned work on the site. Technical and/or economic interests must not override the principles of Baukultur in the decision-making process.

As mentioned in the Davos Declaration [7], there are several references to how the architectural environment, including materials, influences human health and psychological well-being. The declaration emphasises that intentional efforts to create a high-quality

architectural environment, one that supports human well-being, should be a priority over short-term economic gains. Many of the anticipated benefits of such quality construction include greater social cohesion, better health, and enhanced biodiversity. According to the Davos Declaration [7], Latvia needs to implement high-quality Baukultur – a new, culture-based, and sustainable approach to shaping the built environment. The preservation of cultural heritage today plays a crucial role in shaping the future development of Baukultur. There is no direct action required by the Davos Declaration [18] regarding projects funded by European Union funds. However, it is a great way to make sure that big financial investments are in line with Baukultur principles. The European Commission launched the New European Bauhaus initiative in 2021, and Latvia is actively participating in it. It promotes sustainable solutions for transforming the built environment and lifestyle during the green transition. The New European Bauhaus is a strategic, creative, interdisciplinary initiative focused on the environment, economy, and culture. It connects design, sustainability, accessibility, and investment to achieve the goals of the European Green Deal. Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission, announced the initiative in 2020 [19]. Although we can compare the concept of Baukultur to the principles of Bauhaus, this research does not focus on Bauhaus itself.

High-quality Baukultur adds economic value by creating more durable and sustainable assets. Thus, in the author's view, the concept of Baukultur is closely linked to the concept of sustainability, as the core idea of sustainability is to preserve resources for future generations, while the core idea of Baukultur is to build with respect for the past, ensuring a high quality of life for future generations. Since 2021, the Davos Baukultur Quality System has been the only way to judge high-quality Baukultur. It does this by putting social, cultural, and emotional factors on the same level as more common technical, economic, and environmental factors. Eight criteria have been defined — diversity, governance, economics, functionality, environment, context, beauty, and sense of place — which form the principles of Baukultur [20]. Baukultur is essential for creating an environment where it is and will be worth living. Similar to sustainability, which rests on three pillars - social, environmental, and economic - and incorporates an ethical aspect, Baukultur also encompasses social, environmental, and economic dimensions, along with ethical and aesthetic dimensions. Mastering, creating, and utilising Baukultur is a social process based on a broad understanding not only of quantitative indicators but also of qualitative values and objectives. Engagement in Baukultur makes wisdom from the viewpoint of many stakeholders. Private house owners can generate circumstances for the long-term care and improvement of their funds. Through their projects, public organisations can donate to the individuality of our cities and thus fortify local and national individualities. Politicians can address potential discontent and direct it into productive channels, thus gaining broad approval for development and change. Baukultur is the main way to generate equally social and profitable additional prices. It is an investment in upcoming living spaces.

Only a genuine effort to uphold sustainability can ensure it, just as discussing Baukultur requires an understanding of the old, preservable elements and the ambition to create new structures that meet the quality standards dictated by contemporary times. The role of the client is particularly important in this context. The construction industry is increasingly playing a key role in mitigating climate change and ensuring environmental, social, and economic sustainability. The sector is increasingly focusing on these issues and conducting substantial explanatory work. Industry professionals are working to create innovative solutions, breaking down the perceived boundaries between construction and sustainability. It is common for every project's failure to have an excuse - lack of money, insufficient time, poor-quality materials, subpar work, unforeseen tasks, lack of will or desire from the client or other stakeholders, lack of experience, and so on. Sometimes, the situation is even more complicated, as the issue could be that the project is being implemented at the wrong time, place, or with the wrong function for the space or environment. Often, the bureaucratic requirements of funding are cited as one of the main reasons, but it's not always clear what additional bureaucracy is involved in implementing funded projects compared to self-funded ones. Unfortunately, situations are still observed where funding projects are implemented not because there is a specific need but simply because there is available funding. That is, instead of defining the problem first and then solving it, the approach often becomes: we see there's money available and then find a problem to match it. The biggest challenge is preserving cultural and historical heritage - whether to preserve the old in its original form or to find a new method that combines it with the new. There are often debates about this, especially when the process of restoration involves very expensive efforts, such as using authentic and high-quality materials, techniques, methods, and labor. People may not understand why the costs are so high. Ultimately, they might perceive the expenditure as invisible - everything could seem excessively costly. This means that when implementing such projects, it is crucial to also focus on explanatory work. Society needs to be told and shown what exactly has been done, what has been preserved, what has been restored, and what has been newly built. Only in environments where people expect it can Baukultur thrive. It exists when all stakeholders are involved in the construction process and society at large has a clear understanding and ambition for it. The greatest understanding and ambition must come from the client. Certainly, indifference has not led to the creation of so many masterpieces in the world. An important guiding principle of built culture is investment in the living space of the future. During the 2013–2020 programming period of the EU funds, one of the mandatory elements of the publicity campaign was the slogan "An investment in your future!" Is there not an obvious similarity? Let's not ignore it!

IV. CONCLUSIONS

There is promising evidence that favourable environmental impacts can lead to positive changes in human behaviour and physiological states. For example, various elements of building design can promote a sense of social identity and the development of social capital. Built culture balances cultural, social, economic, planning, design, construction, adaptive reuse, environmental, and technical aspects. The quality of landscape and architecture shapes urban space, which is also a significant factor not only in tourism development but also in attracting qualified and creative workers to a specific locality. Therefore, it is crucial to increase the interaction between planning, architecture, and construction sectors to create or restore attractive, user-orientated areas that adhere to the principles of built culture. The state, regions, local municipalities, residents, and businesses must collectively address the important task of creating and revitalizing functional and well-designed urban environments. Municipalities need sufficient room for action to responsibly plan, implement, and control environmental development measures, ensuring long-term stability. Given that a significant portion of municipal financial resources invested in infrastructure development or renovation come from European Union funds and initiatives, it is especially important to use these funds in line with the principles of built culture. Undoubtedly, national-level responsible bodies, such as the Ministry of Economics, which oversees the construction sector in Latvia, must also be involved in addressing this issue and supporting municipalities. Only interdisciplinary discussion and cooperation can ensure the preservation of built culture. It is essential to ensure integrated collaboration, not conflict, among the responsible parties. Systematic and structured exchange of experience and knowledge must take place to create sustainable inhabited areas. Europe needs cities and regions where living is comfortable. To make sure that the EU's sustainable development strategy, the Lisbon strategy, the European employment strategy, and the Davos Declaration are all followed, there needs to be a European-level platform for developing and coordinating good practices, statistics, and evaluative research. This platform should also include and coordinate how these issues are updated and dealt with at all levels and sectors.

The EU Cohesion Policy is a significant source of funding for regional development and shapes the geographic and thematic distribution of local regional policy funding over a seven-year planning period. It forms a substantial part of the overall national capital expenditures and funding for national economic development. To ensure that these significant financial resources are invested in line with the principles of built culture, several key aspects need to be considered, as listed below. When preparing the project application, built culture should be established as one of the principles to be adhered to throughout the project's implementation. It is essential to clearly understand the status of the building and/or location where the project's activities will take place, including its value and other critical factors. The project's target group, the local community, and the neighborhood residents should be informed about the

planned activities, as they will be the primary consumers of the project's outcomes. In the author's view, it is not correct to invest in infrastructure or implement project activities solely with the aim of developing a tourism product and increasing tourist flows. The primary environmental consumers are the local community. When considering new functions, they must be compatible with the existing environment, meet the community's needs, and be sustainable. An analysis of existing built culture models can also provide inspiration for how to preserve and build. The quality outcome of any project largely depends on the human resources involved, the methods applied, and the relationships between all stakeholders. To ensure compliance with the requirements for effectiveness and quality, it is essential that all project participants are adequately involved in every stage of the project. Establishing effective communication channels with all parties involved in the project implementation ensures both planned communication and the ability to promptly address issues. The project implementation plan and management structure must be clearly defined and aligned, allowing for adjustments to planned activities and the efficient use of resources. It is crucial to anticipate unforeseen circumstances as much as possible. Funds should be allocated for additional research, material testing, or other unplanned activities. We must fully document, archive, and make available for future use the entire project implementation process.

The system of technical regulations is the foundation of building culture. This system defines the mandatory requirements for all participants in the design and construction process, establishing effective control mechanisms for evaluating compliance with these requirements. To ensure building culture, at least the following three key components are necessary:

- A highly effective system of technical regulations.
- Safe and high-quality materials and technical resources.
- Highly qualified personnel.

The eternal dilemma - the headache of all project managers - faster or better? In the case of EU project implementation, the allotted time often cannot be extended, or can only be extended for a limited period, such as no more than six months, unless it's an exceptional case. Therefore, this limited time frame creates additional pressure for all involved and significantly impacts the quality of construction work. Therefore, it's crucial to engage in extensive and continuous planning. No optimism in procurement - a contract won't be signed in a month. It won't! If this scenario occurs, the contract won't yield any positive results. Don't be pleased if no questions are asked during procurement - that means the bidder hasn't delved into the requirements, specifications, or construction project. These questions during procurement often help "catch" significant errors in the terms and conditions, technical specifications, or the construction project itself. Losing a

couple of weeks by carefully responding to bidders' questions helps avoid painful and expensive mistakes in the future. The project implementation schedule should also factor in this time. When developing procurement regulations for design/author supervision, construction works, and construction supervision, it is crucial to avoid vague formulations, such as "5 years of experience in similar projects." This already contains at least two contradictions: which specific five years are meant to demonstrate experience (for example, if the procurement is announced in June, does the experience gained up until June of the year of the tender submission count?), and what exactly is meant by similar experience (scope of work, type of work, type of construction, etc.). Procurement requirements, like ensuring maximum energy efficiency on the construction site, are equally debatable. However, it remains unclear whether and how these requirements will be considered when evaluating the bids, and what specific evidence the bidder needs to provide to support them. Unfortunately, there are many such examples of unclear requirements in the regulations. It is crucial for specialists drafting these regulations to maintain complete confidence in each requirement, including its necessity, the supporting documents, and the evaluation process. To ensure that price does not hold too much weight in procurement and is not the determining factor in the decision-making process, the so-called two-envelope system can be used. This system guarantees the separate evaluation of criteria unrelated to price. The goal of this procedure is to ensure neutrality and objectivity when making the decision to award the contract, prioritising quality over price. The evaluation process takes place in two stages: first, the technical proposal is evaluated. In the second stage, only the financial offers of those bidders whose technical proposals have received enough points are considered. This approach ensures a better balance between price and quality.

A crucial aspect in assessing environmental impact is the application of life-cycle cost and life-cycle analysis. By taking environmental, quality, and life-cycle factors into account in the procurement evaluation criteria, these principles make sure that society gets the most for its money.

High-quality building culture:

- It shapes identity and establishes a system in which individuals coexist while still having the chance to secure their own living space.
- The goal is to create cities and settlements that are well-planned, vibrant, and equipped to meet changing social demands while preserving their historical character.
- Encourages people's desire to identify with their city, locality, or region.
- Buildings and landscapes add value by enhancing economic efficiency and external perception.
- Supports sustainable development, playing a crucial role in ensuring prosperity and stability.
- The provision of effective solutions is crucial, as the quality of construction depends on close collaboration and discussions regarding planning, construction, and usage.

- Promotes society's ability to embrace innovation, as large-scale, high-quality projects improve the quality of life for everyone.
- It facilitates a comprehension of the process by which we construct our structures and urban areas, thereby boosting the demand for superior results.

Considering the significant investments from EU funds in infrastructure and their impact on the economies and well-being of member states, the construction sector, with all its sub-sectors, must receive much more attention. Investment in research and development within this sector needs to be increased to respond to society's evolving and growing demands, ensuring the sector's competitiveness both within the EU and globally. It is important to ensure that EU Cohesion Policy programmes are appropriately formulated and include vital issues such as urban environments, quality of life, innovative approaches to construction, and the preservation of cultural heritage, i.e., building culture.

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