

Introductory Information for Teachers

Case Studies for Schoolchildren

Baukultur and its quality criteria

“Baukultur” denotes the designed living environment. It refers not only to what is built, but also to the sum of all human activities that change and influence a living environment. Baukultur therefore encompasses not only historical and contemporary buildings, squares, transport routes and landscapes, but also planning and production processes. From handcrafted details to settlement planning, everything is an expression of Baukultur.

The designed living environment surrounds us wherever we may currently be. We shape it, and it shapes our actions. High-quality Baukultur – in other words, the high-quality design of our living environment – is therefore important for the quality of life.

But what is high-quality Baukultur – and what is not? This question is a recurring source of debate. In Switzerland and in Europe, there are many initiatives to improve the quality of our designed living environment. One of these is the Davos Baukultur Quality System. It offers a method for assessing the quality of Baukultur that takes into account not only the usual technical, ecological and economic criteria, but also social, cultural and emotional criteria. The quality system formulates eight criteria that can be used to describe the designed living environment: governance, functionality, environment, economy, diversity, context, sense of place, and beauty.

The project “Case Studies for All”

The “Case Studies for All” project on the web platform baukulturswitzerland.ch invites people to describe places that are important to them using these eight criteria, and to share with others what has worked well and what has been less successful. The objective is to promote dialogue among the general public about designed living environment.

“Case Studies for All” also explicitly seeks to involve children and young people. To this end, the following guide was developed specifically for schoolchildren, and an input mask tailored to this age group has been set up on the web platform.

“Case Studies for Schoolchildren” – a guide

The guide is designed to enable children and young people to work largely independently. To describe their favourite place or a place that is important to them according to the eight criteria, they have to answer questions about the place. To do this, they should spend some time observing and exploring the place, gathering information about it, and filming it. Pupils can work individually or in small groups.

Depending on their grade level, they may need support to follow the instructions. The teacher can advise them on the choice of places, possibly accompany and guide them in their observations and explorations and discuss or review the texts with them. Pupils should read the questions carefully and answer them precisely and in detail. The aim is for them to justify their answers and to write in full sentences, not just jot down keywords. At least four lessons should be allocated to the project. Access to a computer, smartphone or tablet with internet and a video camera is required. Depending on the grade level, the pupils may need technical support.

Embedding and augmentation

The project can be embedded and augmented in the subject “Nature, Man, Society” as well as in the subject “Design”, for example by looking closely at one’s own perception or the design of spaces. In addition to the written documentation, the chosen places can be explored through the senses and described and depicted using other creative means. This conceivably might include exploring surfaces and materials with rubbings, clay impressions or detail drawings, (re-)constructing buildings that are important now and in the future, or drawing places and paths from memory to emphasise the importance of personal perception. The latter can also be used to practise and reflect on spatial orientation. Collective decision-making processes can also be rehearsed, for example by asking who owns a place and who should be responsible for it, or whether a place should be preserved in the future and if so, why.

Legal matters

For legal reasons, a teacher or a person with parental authority must assist the pupils when uploading a “case” to the web platform. They must provide their contact details and confirm the accuracy of all the information entered. They must also check that no persons can be identified in the videos and that the texts do not violate personal rights.

If this assistance is provided by the teacher, it may be necessary to obtain a declaration of consent from a person with parental authority.

By submitting a “case” to baukulturschweiz.ch, senders give their consent to their work being published in accordance with copyright law. Videos, images and texts must comply with Swiss data protection legislation.

Further reading

Swiss Federal Office for culture, ed. (2021). Davos Baukultur Quality System: Eight criteria for a high-quality Baukultur.

<https://baukulturschweiz.ch/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/2022-06-22-164855-the-davos-baukultur-quality-system.pdf>

Swiss Baukultur Round Table, ed. (2011). Manifesto on Baukultur. <https://baukulturschweiz.ch/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/2022-07-07-153618-manifesto-on-baukultur.pdf>