

The Copenhagen Lessons points towards a sustainable architecture industry

- **UIA WORLD CONGRESS OF ARCHITECTS 2023**
- **COPENHAGEN, 2-6 JULY 2023**

ON THE SHOULDERS OF THE MANY

The 28th UIA World Congress of Architects took place in Copenhagen from July 2-6, 2023. Its rallying call: “*Sustainable Futures – Leave No One Behind*” attracted more than 6,000 delegates from all corners of the built environment and from 135 countries.

Convening in the Danish capital, the world’s leading architectural event provided a vibrant platform for the exchange of ideas, a bold look into the future of design & construction, a call for **decisive action** and measurable impact aligned to the UN 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Architects from both the public and private sectors met to discuss and create feasible and consistent means to achieving equitable, inclusive, and sustainable futures for everybody across the sector and within the framework of the SDGs. **Youth engagement** was emphasised throughout the event since early engagement will lead to longer tail impact of the event, especially over the emerging careers of the young architects engaged.

Delegates were immersed into a varied program with more than 150 parallel sessions at the main congress venue – the Bella Center Copenhagen – including over 250 scientific paper presentations.

In addition, the city hosted 75 concurrent events delivered in partnership with local and industry collaborators. It also provided guided tours and site visits to iconic venues including the House of Disability Organisations (the world’s most accessible house), the 15 SDG Pavilions alongside the harbour, and to other inspiring urban developments including the BIG-designed CopenHill power plant – the cleanest waste-to-energy power plant in the world, also known as Amager Bakke - which powers 150,000 homes, processing 440,000 tons of waste annually, and wrapped within a ski slope!

More than 400 knowledgeable and inspiring keynotes and speakers contributed to the high caliber content, while 135 enthusiastic and generous partners brought all kinds of resources to the congress to make the event worthy of the title “UNESCO-UIA World Capital of Architecture 2023”.



photo: Wonderful Copenhagen

THE BOLD BID

The source code of the outcomes and impacts resulting from the world congress did not rest on the shoulders of a single person or organisation but upon a handful of visionary people who made some daring decisions years ago at the bidding stage.

In fact, it was way back in 2016 that the **Copenhagen Convention Bureau** (Wonderful Copenhagen), **The Danish Association of Architects, Realdania, The City of Copenhagen, The CPH City and Port Development**, and **The Royal Danish Academy** joined forces to co-create a compelling bid to host the 28th International Association of Architects World Congress 2023 and bring the title of UNESCO-UIA World Capital of Architecture 2023 to Copenhagen, and to Denmark.

This successful bid was announced in Seoul in 2017 and after seven years of hard work, mitigation of unforeseeable challenges, Covid-19 lock-downs, war, and an energy crisis, the congress finally came to town with an impact strategy in place.

During the period between securing the bid in 2017 and the congress itself in 2023, Copenhagen Legacy Lab emerged. This structured tool for association/destination engagement around impact and legacy, which aligns the mission of the organisation and the purpose of the event, confirmed the enormous impact potential already shaping the UIA 2023 Congress legacy program and activities which Copenhagen Legacy Lab is still supporting.

The success of the event was orchestrated by the UIA bid committee, its destination engagement with Copenhagen Convention Bureau, and its global collaboration of architects, researchers, students, developers, foundations, policymakers, and institutions. The mission and Congress activities were therefore scoped and pre-designed in partnership with the city and aligned to the theme of the event – *Sustainable Futures – Leave No-One Behind* - the active participation throughout the event enabled effective advocacy, funding, content curation, and knowledge sharing.



Photo: Wonderful Copenhagen



Photo: Wonderful Copenhagen

A SPECIAL MOMENT IN TIME

Throughout the gestation of the congress impact program, three pillars were paramount:

- engagement of stakeholders
- monitoring impact
- building legacy

A multi-channel series of ideation meetings, pre-congress seminars, talks, workshops, competitions, and communications across every possible global outlet combined with strong media partnerships and dedicated collaborators from the realm of the built environment.

These pre-event engagement strategies proved to be critical in shaping the success of the event impact program and its legacy.

And not only in terms of creating awareness of the congress and its mission, but also in

terms of building new connections, networks, alliances, and business opportunities for everybody who participated. At first it seemed like a positive spillover from the congress itself, but as the congress matured and finally took place it became clear that the spillover was infectious and has become a vital part of the impact.

Some would even say it has evolved into a movement.

“When we are trying to solve the problems we have in the world due to climate change, due to poverty, due to inequality, we can only do it together.”

Mette Lindberg, CEO of the UIA World Congress of Architects Copenhagen 2023

A COUPLE OF EXAMPLES:

- The congress’ academic partners – universities, academies, and schools – report that an overwhelming amount of new scientific partnerships have been forged, and that global institutions of high caliber are reaching out to connect.
- A network of State and City Architects was established during the congress, convening a broad representation of global experts in sustainable city development, and creating new opportunities for the sharing of knowledge and experiences in the future.
- **The Copenhagen Lessons** – ten principles for how to build in the future without harming the planet and its inhabitants – was announced on the final day of the congress. These principles, or Triple Bottom Line, continue to be adopted by cities, educators, and businesses ensuring that the flow-on communication, debate, and implementation of the principles are assured across the planner, policy, and practitioner communities into the future. The implementation and impacts derived from The Copenhagen Lessons will be monitored by the Danish Association of Architects and reported at the UIA World Congress of Architects 2026 in Barcelona.

The UIA World Congress of Architects 2023 proved to be far more than just another congress....

When 6,000 dedicated professionals, scientists, and students meet to coalesce around a pre-defined and critical agenda, great things can happen. And this was surely the case with the resulting *Copenhagen Lessons*.

The congress proved to be a catalyst for positive, equitable, and regenerative change in a sector critical to the social and climate challenges faced by societies worldwide.

The Copenhagen Lessons will remain the embodiment of the congress legacy to be facilitated and implemented by the youth contingent of this vital sector for decades to come.

Photo: Wonderful Copenhagen



Photo: Anna Katrine Tan



LEGACY PROCESS



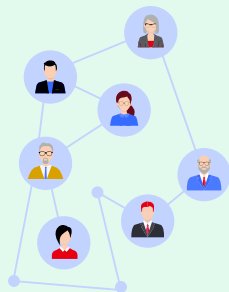
Strategic goals and societal needs

The UN 17 SDGs define a crucial global agenda, which the built environment must contribute to. Furthermore, the built environment is responsible for about 40% of annual global CO2 emissions. How we act on this must be bold - even radical - compared with current practice.



Objective

“The Copenhagen Lessons” aim to create a common language to accelerate sustainable change in the built environment for both practitioners and investors, but also to encourage politicians to support local, national, and global legislation that promote sustainable transition.



Stakeholder involvement

Years of preparation, 250 science papers, and multiple debates among scientists and practitioners have led to the formulation of “The Copenhagen Lessons”. The 10 principles have been defined in collaboration between the UIA World Congress of Architects 2023, The Royal Danish Academy – Architecture, Design, Conservation, and the Danish Association of Architects in partnership with Rambøll/Henning Larsen, who act as knowledge partners.

Throughout the process Copenhagen Convention Bureau and Copenhagen Legacy Lab have supported the process by giving general guidance and advice on how to work systematically with legacy. The partnership has particularly focused on “The Copenhagen Lessons” to make sure that they will live on and create value after end congress.



Activity

The congress concluded with the launch of “The Copenhagen Lessons” (10 principles for rapid and radical change in the built environment). With “The Copenhagen Lessons”, the UIA World Congress 2023 presents 10 principles for what that means when we plan, develop, and construct the built environment. The health of the planet and basic human needs are on the line, and we have no time to waste.

“The Copenhagen Lessons” were the result of the many above mentioned pre-events, scientific paper presentations, partnerships, talks, and debates. The lessons represent the **essence** of the congress mission and can be seen as a version of the UN 17 SDGs that fit the built environment.



Outputs (immediately after the activity – direct results)

The launch of “The Copenhagen Lessons” were launched in front of 3.000 people.

The news of “The Copenhagen Lessons” were afterwards shared by prestigious industry medias such as *ArchDaily*, the world’s most visited architecture website with 17.9 million monthly visits, and *Dezeen*, one of the world’s most influential architecture magazines with 5 million monthly visits.

In the national press “The Copenhagen Lessons” were shared by industry medias such as Byrummonitor and Dagens Byggeri. On social media, the message took off and resulted in one of the best performance posts, reaching more than 6,000 recipients as well as liked and shared by app. 1,000 followers.



Outcomes (+6-12 months - changed behaviour)

Since the congress, “The Copenhagen Lessons” has been translated into at least six languages and adopted by influential actors in both the public and private sector (e.g., The Technical and Environmental Committee, Henning Larsen Architects, and the Danish Association of Architects).

Additionally, it has been applied in a consultation response for the City of Copenhagen’s next planning strategy, used as a moderating tool during seminars, and picked up by network associations as a headline for professional events. All different examples of how “The Copenhagen Lessons” function as a conversation starter for actions that accelerate sustainable change.

LEGACY PROCESS



Impact (+1 year – societal value)

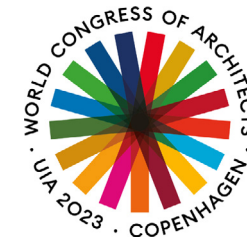
The UIA World Congress and “The Copenhagen Lessons” has been born out of many new alliances, and we expect more to come, which will continue the development of a shared language for sustainable change in the built environment. Local examples of the application of “The Copenhagen Lessons” will develop and enhance sustainable change, through new knowledge and discussions.

As an example, the Danish Association of Architects has launched the open idea competition, [Fingerplan 2.0](#), encouraging architects to draw inspiration from “The Copenhagen Lessons” when submitting their proposals for the future urban development of Copenhagen. Additionally, these lessons have become an integral part of the association's strategy.



Potential legacy (+1-3 years and beyond...)

The continued application of “The Copenhagen Lessons” in the private and public sectors, as well as in education, directly supports the acceleration of sustainable practices in the built environment in Denmark and internationally, thereby creating a substantial legacy.



COPENHAGEN LESSONS 10 Principles to build on

1. Dignity and agency for all people is fundamental in architecture, there is no beauty in exclusion.
2. People at risk of being left behind must be accommodated first when we construct, plan, and develop the built environment.
3. Existing built structures must always be reused first.
4. No new development must erase green fields.
5. Natural ecosystems and food production must be sustained regardless of the build context.
6. No virgin mineral material must be used in construction, when reuse is possible.
7. No waste must be produced or left behind in construction.
8. When sourcing materials for construction, local renewable materials come first.
9. In everything we build, carbon capture must exceed carbon footprint.
10. When developing, planning, and constructing the built environment, every activity must have a positive impact on water ecosystems and clean water supply.

The COPENHAGEN LESSONS were presented at the conclusion of “SUSTAINABLE FUTURES – LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND”, the UIA World Congress of Architects 2023, held in Copenhagen. The COPENHAGEN LESSONS build on the substantive new research and practice developed and brought together in the years up to and during the Congress, exploring architecture's contributions to the UN Sustainable Development Goals with Ramboll and Henning Larsen as knowledge partners. The COPENHAGEN LESSONS are formulated with the hope that they can serve as inspirational principles to build on, for a sustainable future.

