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Level(s) Newsletter



28 April 2020



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Level(s) in the spotlight

"Debate, Reflect, Advise – Get Level(s) right" Conference

Take a look at what happened during the "Debate, Reflect, Advise – Get Level(s) right" Conference on 20th February in Brussels.



Looking back at the Level(s) Conference

On 20 February 2020, the European Commission hosted the “Debate, Reflect, Advise – Get Level(s) right” conference in Brussels. The event brought together about 140 participants from across Europe to present the analysis and findings of the Level(s) test phase. It was also a great opportunity for the building sector to revise Level(s) and ensure its success past the test phase.

Highlights from the morning session

The morning session started with a presentation of the results from the Level(s) test phase by the Joint Research Centre (JRC). After that, the participants got first-hand insights on the practical implementation of Level(s) and key reflections given by test coordinators from Finland, France and Denmark.

The **Finnish Ministry of the Environment, together with the Finnish Green Building Council**, coordinated 25 buildings testing Level(s). They consider Level(s) a tool with the potential to harmonise the sustainability assessment of buildings across Europe. The testing of Level(s) resulted in better understanding of building sustainability. To reach ambitious sustainability objectives, it is important to set these together with the client early on. Online courses, a language adapted to the end user and compatibility with Building Information Model (BIM) will greatly help a wider uptake of Level(s).

Alliance HQE-GBC (France) coordinated 9 projects, mostly newly built but also renovation ones. Testing showed that Level(s) is a very useful tool for practitioners keen on implementing life cycle assessment (LCA) in building design. For Level(s) to be adopted at national level, it will be crucial to develop specific regulation and certification schemes.

The **Danish Association of Architectural Firms** coordinated the Level(s) testing in 17 building projects. While Level(s) is a valuable tool to improve sustainability, it needs to be simplified and aligned with existing workflows. With slight modifications and a stepwise introduction to Level(s), the framework could greatly support early dialogue and qualitative assessment as well as target setting.

Highlights from the afternoon sessions



During the afternoon, participants attended interactive breakout sessions on key topics – for instance, options for benchmarking and evaluation of sustainability in buildings, or how to better support less experienced users in adopting Level(s).

In the breakout session on *“How can Level(s) be adjusted so that it really works as an ‘entry level’ for users with limited/no previous experience?”*, Dr. Matti Kuittinen, Senior Specialist at the Finnish Ministry of the Environment, praised the forward-looking values at the core of Level(s): *“Level(s) has a great momentum. It could help to build bridges between overarching European climate and resource goals and individual construction projects. For grasping this, digitalisation will become essential”*.

The breakout session participants suggested that simplified communication through straightforward step-by-step guidance, using accessible, jargon free language, would make it easier for a wider range of users to understand and use Level(s). In addition, they pointed out that step-by-step instructions could be accompanied by a series of questions to help the user to apply the right Level.

Taking Level(s) forward

Besides the discussions on-site, the participants were also very active on social media, sharing their insights and impressions under the hashtag #BuildCircular. Be sure to keep sharing all your Level(s) insights there! \u8203 ?

This event served as a central element in the Level(s) open consultation process, and the views shared during the conference will be used by the European Commission to improve and finalise Level(s), getting it ready for its wider uptake during the second half of 2020.

The [background paper](#) and [presentations](#) (links on the agenda document) for this conference are now available on the Level(s) webpage.

Policy Insights

New Circular Economy Action Plan published

What will this ambitious plan mean for circularity and sustainability in the built environment?

The European Commission has published a new [Circular Economy Action Plan](#) (CEAP) , a key building block of the European Green Deal.

Putting the circular economy in the mainstream of economic activity will make a decisive contribution to achieving climate neutrality by 2050. The key will be to de-couple economic growth from the level of use of resources.

The Action Plan proposes measures along the entire life cycle of products, aiming to ensure that resources are kept and used within the economy for as long as possible. As Executive Vice-President of the European Commission, Frans Timmermans, said: *"Today our economy is mostly linear, with only 12% of secondary materials and resources being brought back into the economy...There is huge potential to be exploited both for businesses and consumers"*.

Seven key product value chains are identified in the Action Plan: Electronics and IT; Batteries and Vehicles; Packaging; Plastics; Textiles; Construction and Buildings; and Food, Water and nutrients. The seven sectors provide a focussed approach to build a sustainable product framework on an economy-wide spectrum.

The Construction and Buildings value chain accounts for about half of all extracted materials. The sector is responsible for about a third of all the EU's waste generated. Greenhouse gas emissions from material extraction, manufacturing of construction products and renovation of buildings are estimated at 5-12% of total emissions, varying between EU countries. The Circular Economy Action Plan refers to a recent study of the International Resource Panel (UNEP), which concludes that 80% of these emissions could be cut.

To realise this potential, the Commission will launch a Strategy for a Sustainable Built Environment. This strategy will be broad and link objectives and initiatives related to areas such a climate, energy, circularity, material, waste, skills, digital, biodiversity, pollution etc.

The importance of assessing sustainability over the life cycle of buildings is further emphasised in the Action Plan, by the inclusion of the Level(s) framework. The role of Level(s) to implement life cycle assessment in public procurement is a key example in the Plan. The Level(s) framework's increasing adoption will be instrumental in the design, commissioning, building, occupation and renovation of buildings. Its lifecycle approach with the use of proven metrics for comparative progress and securing resource efficiency and sustainability benefits, will support the construction sector, building owners and occupiers.

The Action Plan gives an important new impetus to how Level(s) can be used, helping to deliver vital changes towards a circular economy and climate-neutrality.



The Lindblom Interview

Audrey Nugent, World Green Building Council

Each month Josefina Lindblom, DG ENV's lead on the Level(s) initiative and member of the Sustainable Production, Products and Consumption Unit, talks to someone who really understand Level(s) and the benefits adopting the framework has for building professionals and occupants. This month she talked to Audrey Nugent, Head of Advocacy at the World Green Building Council. Green Building Councils (GBCs) bring together businesses and other organisations active in the building and construction industry to work on greening buildings nationally and globally. They started their conversation talking about the involvement of the Green Building Councils in Level(s).



On this Level(s) newsletter issue, Josefina Lindblom (left) interviews Audrey Nugent (right) from the World Green Building Council.

Josefina: *From your experience with this tool so far, how do you see Level(s)?*

Audrey: In my view, the key thing about Level(s) is that it's designed to give stakeholders across the value chain a 'common language' of sustainability. Plus the fact that Level(s) can be used as a decision-making tool to drive better performance of buildings and take action on the total impact of our sector. By focussing on real performance criteria, it can help the sector to deliver zero carbon emissions, zero waste and better indoor air quality.

Our network believes that Level(s) should have a central role in forthcoming EU policy and ahead of the publication of the European Commission's Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP), we [co-signed a letter with over 60 organisations](#) calling on the European Commission to ensure that 'Level(s)' framework plays a

central role in future buildings policy.

We were therefore pleased to see that the CEAP promises a Strategy for a Sustainable Built Environment which will use Level(s) as a basis to integrate life cycle assessment in public procurement, the EU sustainable finance framework and explore the appropriateness of setting carbon reduction targets.

Josefina: Yes, this is indeed what we will be working on/towards. What about the implementation of life cycle thinking, on the ground?

Audrey: That's where our network of Green Building Councils comes in! Green Building Councils have been working with the European Commission on the development of Level(s) for the last seven years. As Level(s) moves from theory to practice, the knowledge and expertise of GBCs becomes even more important.

Eight GBCs in our network have recently embarked on a three year [project \(https://lifelevels.eu/\)](https://lifelevels.eu/) under the LIFE programme to understand how Level(s) can be integrated nationally. This project will see GBCs in eight countries work with their governments and industry stakeholders to explore how the key Level(s) indicators on whole life carbon, circularity and indoor air quality can be practically implemented on a pan-European scale.

Josefina: Which GBCs are participating in the project?

Audrey: There are GBCs participating from eight countries: [Green Building Council España](#), [Croatia GBC](#), [Dutch GBC](#), [Alliance HQE-GBC](#) (France), [GBC Finland](#), [GBC Italia](#), [German Sustainable Building Council \(DGNB\)](#) and [Irish GBC](#).

Josefina: Many of these GBCs have indeed contributed a lot during the development of Level(s) and it is great to see this continuous engagement. Can you explain the aim, more precisely?

It is about creating the infrastructure required to mainstream Level(s). The project will achieve this by splitting into four key pillars of work, including:

Certification - Europe's leading green building certification schemes will align with Level(s) to provide more comparable data on the environmental performance of buildings;

Data - Supporting the collection of information on the environmental and health impact of construction products;

Procurement - Working with cities and public authorities to align indicators on whole life carbon, circularity and indoor air quality into procurement standards;

Training - Building the capacity of product manufacturers and public authorities to understand and apply the indicators.

Josefina: These are indeed key points that you are tackling. One last question...is the world ready for Level(s)?

Audrey: Delivering on the Level(s) promise requires transformational new policies that enable the building sector to tackle its total carbon impact. But, I'm absolutely sure that Level(s) will provide a solid foundation for such policies at both the national and European level, demonstrating that our sector is ready to respond to the climate emergency.

As a final comment, I would like to add that the project has kicked off at a

highly strategic time in Europe as a new European Commission takes office, promising climate neutrality and a Green Deal for Europe.

Josefina: Thanks a lot for your time, Audrey, and your insights. And the best of luck with the project, which we will follow closely!

Audrey: You're welcome Josefina, and all the best for the Level(s) launch.

Meanwhile in...

Slovenia: Knauf Insulation and the Slovenian Government

The KIEXC project has the ultimate goal of reshaping building sustainability requirements.

The **Slovenian Government** is looking at Level(s) as a way to reshape building sustainability requirements at a national level. At the same time as the Slovenian Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning was developing national sustainable criteria for buildings, Knauf Insulation started the construction of the **Knauf Insulation Experience Center (KIEXC)**. It is a project especially designed to support the development of indicators that assess the environmental and social performance of buildings throughout their lifecycle. This was an excellent opportunity for the Ministry to follow the pilot project, from the initial design to final completion.



The new building has attracted considerable interest from the authorities as well as architects, but also the European Network of Green Building Councils, as an extra source of research for Level(s). It is moreover the first building in Slovenia to receive the German Sustainable Building Council (DGNB) platinum certification.

According to Saša Galonja (Head of Construction Division, Spatial Planning, Construction and Housing Directorate at the Slovenian Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning), *"the opening of KIEXC is a demonstration of Knauf Insulation's pioneering approach to sustainable construction. The project gave us the opportunity to learn how an established certification*

scheme as DGNB works in our legal and built environment, and how the Level(s) framework is compatible with DGNB but also with our national sustainability criteria. This project represents a reality check for the application of new sustainability requirements in our country."

In addition, the pilot project has enabled further benefits for Knauf Insulation: *"It is a great opportunity for Knauf Insulation to be part of such an exciting initiative as Level(s) and it will be fascinating to see what impact it will have on national and international legislation"* says Vincent Briard, Head of Sustainability of Knauf Insulation. *"It helps us to understand the complexity of getting sustainability related data of construction products. Data about life cycle assessment, products related, air emissions or content declaration are still very scattered and data digitalisation through Building Information Modelling (BIM) files still need to be further developed"* says Jean-Pierre Pigeolet, products and buildings sustainability manager of Knauf Insulation.

Slovenia is now in the second year of the development of a national sustainable framework for buildings and the first draft indicators based on Level(s) are being defined just now. As a result, a large number of meetings, presentations and workshops have taken place with a wide range of stakeholders to disseminate the Ministry's contributions to and insights from testing Level(s).



Star Tweet

Star Tweet

This issue's Star Tweet is by Céline Carré, Head of Public Affairs at Saint Gobain and Vice-President of EuroACE.

Céline Carré @CelineC77 · Feb 20

Txs @MattiKuittinen for inspiring feedback on Level(s):

- ▶ it should not be perfect, it has to be adequate
- ▶ calculating carbon footprint is doable 🤔
- ▶ 💡 Level(s) can help assess if a 🏢🏠 is compatible with national #climate goals & carbon budget

#BuildCircular ♻️
#EUGreenDeal

EU Environment and 7 others

5 23

Be sure to share your insights on the future of the built environment with the Level(s) community by using the #BuildCircular hashtag.

Calendar of Events

COVID-19

N.B. The Calendar of Events will become a regular section of the Level(s) newsletter just as soon as those countries who are experiencing a COVID-19 lockdown make public events possible once again.

More

What's your level?

EU Green Deal quiz

Do you think you know the EU Green Deal inside out? Take our quiz to find out (1 point per correct answer).

Q1. How important is the private sector to The European Green Deal?

- (1) Vital
- (2) Moderately
- (3) Hardly at all

Q2. What is included in the European Climate Law?

- (1) An EU-wide legal target for climate neutrality by 2050 that binds the EU Institutions and national governments.
- (2) Creating a predictable business environment for industry and investors, with the pace of emission reductions mapped out from 2030 to 2050, showing them what needs to be done, and at what speed. (3) A process to include in the Climate Law the updated 2030 emissions reduction target.
- (4) A mechanism for keeping everybody on track – with regular reporting on progress and tools to catch up if anyone falls behind.
- (5) A focus on the effective transition towards a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource efficient and competitive economy.
- (6) A renewed focus on adapting to the impacts of climate change to strengthen Europe's resilience, including for its vulnerable communities.
- (7) All the statements mentioned above.

Q3. What percentage of energy is consumed by buildings?

- (1) 30%.
- (2) 35%.
- (3) 40%.
- (4) 45%.

Q4. Within the EU Green Deal frame, what does the EU BSO stands for?

- (1) Building Sustainability Observatory
- (2) Building Supplies Online
- (3) Building Support Organisation
- (4) Building Stock Observatory

Q5. What percentages of the building stock is energy inefficient?

- (1) 70%
- (2) 75%
- (3) 80%
- (4) 85%

Q6. New technologies, sustainable solutions and disruptive innovation are critical to achieve the objectives of the European Green Deal [...].

Horizon Europe, in synergy with other EU programmes, will play a pivotal role in leveraging national public and private investments. How many percentages of the budget of Horizon Europe do you think is needed to fund new solutions for climate, which are relevant for implementing the Green Deal?

- (1) 30%
- (2) 35%
- (3) 40%
- (4) 45%

Q7. In Europe, if we look beyond the use phase of buildings towards their full life cycle (including extraction, manufacture, transport, construction and end of life) they are responsible, among others, for:

- (1) 1/4 of all water use.
- (2) 2/3 of all water use.
- (3) 3/4 of all water use.

Q8. How many Europeans agree that taking action on climate change will lead to innovation?

- (1) 69%.
- (2) 79%.
- (3) 89%.
- (4) 99%.

Q9. Within the EU Green Deal frame, what does SEIP stands for?

- (1) Sustainable Europe Investment Plan.
- (2) Sustainable Europe Innovation Plan.
- (3) Sustainable Europe Integration Plan

Q10. The EU has put in place a comprehensive framework of policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Between 1990 and 2018, it reduced greenhouse gas emissions by...

- (1) 3%
- (2) 13%
- (3) 23%
- (4) 33%

Your score:

0-4 – Hmmm, it looks like there is still a lot about the EU Green Deal for you to discover.

5-8 – Not bad – you have the EU Green Deal basics covered, but are still missing a few details.

9-10 – Good job! You really understand how important the EU Green Deal is

for Europe and its citizens.

Check you score and the answers in the document attached below.



Document

[Level\(s\) Quiz Answers](#) (217 Kb)

About this Newsletter

This newsletter is issued at least four times a year as part of the Level(s) initiative, and managed by a consortium on behalf of DG ENV.

Visit the [Level\(s\) page](#)

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