

Level(s) Newsletter

10 December 2021



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Level(s) in the Spotlight

Level(s) virtual conference highlights: Reshaping sustainability practices in the built environment

Thank you to more than 360 participants who joined the Level(s) virtual conference on 24 November to learn about the impact of Level(s), discover new tools and get started! An online vote in the opening presentation revealed that 55 % of participants were new to Level(s), which is an excellent indicator that the common language for sustainable buildings is capturing the attention of the sector across Europe.

The event got underway with a keynote by Emmanuelle Maire, Head of Unit B.1 at the European Commission Directorate-General for the Environment (DG ENV). She explained why Level(s) is important in a broader policy context and

how Level(s) contributes to EU sustainability policies, above all the European Green Deal, for transforming the EU into a resource-efficient and competitive economy, with zero net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050. She also explained the contribution of Level(s) to legislation and EU initiatives such as the New European Bauhaus, while drawing attention to what this means for professionals and policymakers in the built environment sector.

Shane Donatello, Policy Officer at the European Commission Joint Research Centre (JRC) followed up to go deeper in explaining Level(s). He summarised the main benefits and outlined the Level(s) macro-objectives and indicators. Shane gave participants a sense of the versatility of the framework, explaining exactly how it can be applied to building projects of all sizes and at all stages of the life cycle, from planning and design through to deconstruction.

Part 2 of the conference looked at Level(s) in practice, with presentations highlighting some case examples from EU Member States.

Hugo Soriano, Architect and Technical Lead at the European Commission Joint Research Centre (JRC) described how his team used Level(s) in the design of the new JRC office building in Seville to house 450 staff. He showed how Level(s) can foster a sustainability mindset from the start of the design process to address circularity, biodiversity and local climate-specific challenges. Hugo's presentation further demonstrated how Level(s) can be applied hand in hand with the principles of the New European Bauhaus initiative, which prioritises on aesthetics, inclusion and sustainability.

Marc Wellens, Head of Unit of the Support Services of the JRC in Geel, Belgium, delivered the next example, illustrating how Level(s) is informing the refurbishment of a conference centre on the JRC Geel site. The team and stakeholders will be going through each Level(s) indicator to identify the scope of the project and the sustainability priorities. Level(s) will be used as a checklist and tool to evaluate the pre-designs. In relation to the inclusion criteria of the New Bauhaus, the design team will also evaluate the accessibility and useability of the built environment.

Next up was Christine Ruiz Duran, Project Manager for Research Projects Focused on the Circular Economy at the German Sustainable Building Council (DGNB), a major certification system provider. Christine delivered a walkthrough showing how national certification standards can be aligned to Level(s) to help achieve EU sustainability objectives for buildings. Ms Duran introduced DGNB as one of eight project partners in the LIFE Level(s) project consortium, funded under the EU LIFE programme. The project runs from 2019–2022 and aims to mainstream sustainable buildings in Europe and to

promote the widespread adoption of Level(s). The first part of the project aimed to align Level(s) with national certification schemes, while the second part is focused on the integration of the Level(s) indicators into public procurement. Ms Duran's presentation is essential viewing for certification providers as she explains the tools DGNB used to check the conformity between Level(s) and three DGNB certification schemes to address any gaps.

In Part 3, participants learned about a new suite of tools and e-learning materials for the Level(s) community.

Dr. Susana Saiz Alcazar, Director at Arup opened the presentations to showcase the soon-to-be-released Level(s) learning programme which has been created to guide users through the development of the project plan, building description and building assessment. It will help familiarise stakeholders with the Level(s) goals and metrics while equipping them to define the right assessment level for each project. Users will learn, with reference to case studies, how to apply and monitor the Level(s) indicators and to complete a building description. Ms Saiz emphasized that the programme has been extensively tested by 80 users and has an excellent satisfaction rating.

The final presenter, Manfred Fuchs, Senior Policy Assistant at DG GROW, introduced the Level(s) Calculation and Assessment Tool (CAT) which is expected to be released before the New Year. The tool supports users to apply the Level(s) methodology. It is designed to enable users to focus on specific indicators or life cycle stages of a project. CAT also allows for the comparison of results between up to three different projects or between different approaches to the same project. Mr Fuchs provided a walkthrough of the tool's features and encouraged users to provide feedback following its release in the coming weeks, to support ongoing improvements.

[Watch the event video](#) covering all presentations (including detailed timestamps) on the LinkedIn Group. Note: you will need to join the LinkedIn Group in order to play the recording.

Level(s) webinar highlights: Supporting the sustainable public procurement of buildings

Thank you to the 64 participants who joined the Level(s) webinar on 2 December to learn how the EU common language for sustainability performance can help to future-proof Europe's buildings.

Josefina Lindblom, Policy Officer with responsibility for Level(s) at DG ENV, set the scene for procurement professionals with a presentation focused on the uses of Level(s) in the planning, design and financing of building projects. She explained how Level(s) makes it possible to address the EU's ambitious goal to cut buildings' embodied carbon by 60–80 % by 2050 through supporting action on individual buildings, with help from Level(s). She explained how the Level(s) common language works and how it can help inform better public procurement decisions. Josefina further summarised how Level(s) is the basis on which to bring circularity and life cycle thinking into building policy, including, for example, buildings legislation, the EU sustainable finance package and green public procurement criteria, as well as the recovery plans, policies and certification systems in Member States.

Théodora Lizop, Mission Officer at Alliance HQE GBC, gave an overview of how Level(s) indicators can be integrated into public procurement with examples from the LIFE Level(s) project, an EU project delivered in cooperation with the Green Buildings Council in eight EU Member States. She described how LIFE Level(s) is helping to improve the life cycle performance of buildings by explaining the Level(s) methodology to public actors, connecting Level(s) to existing certification schemes, and helping public authorities to incorporate Level(s) indicators into public procurement.

The second half of the webinar focused on examples of initiatives in Member States. The first presentation, by Andrea Moro of the International Initiative for a Sustainable Built Environment (iisBE) Italia, focused on the role of Level(s) in national procurement schemes in Italy. Next Dr Anna Braune (DGNB) and Heike Fetzer (Heilbronn City Council) shared innovative practices and instruments used by the city of Heilbronn to develop Neckarbogen, a model sustainable district in Germany. Finally, Valentina Schippers-Opejko of the City of Haarlem, the Netherlands, shared the city's experience in integrating circularity principles into procurement for the renovation of public buildings as part of the Urban Agenda Partnership on Innovative and Responsible Public Procurement.

Thank you to the speakers for providing a taste of the huge potential for integrating the Level(s) common language framework into public procurement, encapsulated well in a remark by Mr Moro during his presentation:

"Because this assessment system is the one used by the regions and municipalities in green public tenders [in Italy], Level(s) will have a really strong impact, introducing new assessment topics that are not present today... a huge step forward in promoting a full life cycle approach."

Stay subscribed to the newsletter and join the LinkedIn group to hear about further events in 2022.

Have you joined the Level(s) LinkedIn group yet?

The group is the perfect place to share experiences of Level(s) with the sustainable building community. You'll also be among the first to learn about Level(s) tools, e-learning materials, events and publications. Since the group launched in March it has grown to more than 1 000 members from all over Europe. [Join the LinkedIn group.](#)

Noticeboard

A new eLearning programme and a Calculation and Assessment Tool (CAT)

A comprehensive set of online training materials will be released on the Level(s) site in January 2022. Our eLearning course will provide a detailed overview of Level(s) and prepare you to start using it in your working environment. For those already using Level(s), there will also be a Calculation and Assessment Tool (CAT), to make it easier to complete your sustainability performance assessments. Read the Lindblom interview with Manfred Fuchs of DG GROW (below), for more information about CAT.

Have you heard of the LIFE Level(s) project?

The project implements the Level(s) framework and its sustainability criteria in public procurement processes, green building certification schemes and more. Recently, it was shared in the Project Repository Journal! The publication featured a section of its latest volume to the matters of sustainable buildings through the project's perspective. [Read the latest issue.](#)

New Report: Why real estate businesses can't afford NOT to invest in sustainability

The World Green Building Council (WorldGBC), a global network accelerating sustainability and decarbonisation in the building and construction sector, has set out the updated value proposition to drive investment in a sustainable built environment by launching a new report 'Beyond the Business Case' at COP26 in Glasgow. In the lead up to Cities, Regions and Built Environment Day at COP26 on Thursday 11 November, the report provided a timely and unique perspective for decision makers to accelerate the industry's sustainability transformation by capitalising on the economic opportunities, addressing risk mitigation and embracing the social value case.

[Download the report.](#)

The Lindblom Interview

Interview with Manfred Fuchs, Senior Policy Assistant at the European Commission Directorate General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW) Unit H.1



Please introduce yourself and describe your role as it relates to Level(s)

I have been working in DG GROW for more than 20 years. As a civil engineer by training with a PhD in Urban Sociology, it was just logical to join the construction unit of the Directorate General. The name of the DG as well as the one of the 'construction unit' has changed several times. My main role however – covering sustainability in construction – has remained with me over the years,

as has my focus on protecting consumers and the environment from chemicals and specific construction materials.

In my work, I have seen that environmental legislation is most effective in cases where stakeholders' obligations are unambiguous. In such cases, the Commission's role is to set clear and transparent rules.

In areas in which all actors are still gaining experience – and this applies to 'sustainability,' even though the term has been used for some thirty years – instruments like Level(s) can complement legislation by preparing the ground for professionals and laypeople, while giving them 'room for manoeuvre' to go further than the guidelines or recommendations and to introduce improvements.

You've been working on a Calculation and Assessment Tool (CAT) to support Level(s) users. What can you tell our readers about its overall purpose and practical benefits?

The main idea is to provide a simple calculation format that helps Level(s) users to apply the indicators relatively easily after completing the eLearning programme. CAT mirrors the structure and vocabulary of Level(s) framework.

The main advantage of CAT is that it enables users to complete all of the calculation work necessary in order to assess sustainability performance against the Level(s) indicators, without having to invest in any IT solutions or software.

Secondly CAT allows users to compare results between their own projects and other users' projects. This makes it easier to exchange experiences.

However, further work is needed to support the comparison of notes between different users on one screen. From January 2022 onwards, we will start collecting feedback from users to improve the tool. It's important to be aware that any improvements we introduce during 2022 and 2023 will only affect the tool itself. The structure and content of Level(s) will remain untouched by these improvements.

Which kinds of Level(s) users will find CAT most helpful?

When I was still working in the private sector, I have seen (from my small perspective) how SMEs and large companies were operating. Among larger offices of designers or construction companies, introducing new requirements is still challenging, but their resources allow them to adapt to changes faster.

For SMEs and – as for many architects and micro-enterprises – the adaptation costs are significantly higher, creating a barrier to change.

Therefore, CAT should, in particular, help the smaller sized companies and even individuals to use Level(s) with minimal upfront investment. I am not saying that no preparation is needed before using it. From my own experience with CAT I can tell you that, at least for Level 2, you should have already decided which macro-objectives and indicators you would like to focus on beforehand. Otherwise, the information required from the user and the calculation results could be confusing – the opposite of what we want to achieve with Level(s)!

When CAT launches it will be available in English. Will it be available in additional languages in the future?

We plan to release CAT in all official languages of the EU over the next few years. The first five translations for the user manual (in French, German, Italian, Polish and Spanish) are in preparation and should be ready during early 2022. The translation of CAT itself will be more time-consuming.

When will CAT be available on the Level(s) website?

We are now really close to the finish line and I expect to have CAT publicly available before Christmas. However, I doubt many people will use CAT over the festive period, so I wish everyone success in getting started with the tool in the New Year!

What's your level?

Quiz

Test your knowledge on the soon-to-be released Level(s) Calculation and Assessment Tool (CAT). Tip! You'll find it helpful to read the Lindblom interview with Manfred Fuchs first (see above).

[Take the quiz!](#)

About this newsletter

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

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