From CIB Co-sponsored Events

Towards 0-impact Buildings and Built Environments

Review of the SB10 Conference Western Europe

SB10 Maastricht was part of the series of Regional SB10 Conferences taking place in 2010, which together with the World SB11 Conference in 2011, are all organised under the auspices of CIB, iiSBE and UNEP.

SB10 Western Europe chose a challenging theme: towards 0-impact buildings and built environments. Looking back at the event, which took place from the 11th up to the 13th of October in Maastricht, Heusden-Zolder, Liège and Aachen, we can conclude that this has been taken up very well by the 190 participants. The limits and ambitions were pushed, both by keynote speakers and paper authors. Most papers included the 0-ambition in their paper, and the authors explored the consequences of such ambition. This sometimes led to lively discussions during and after presentations.

The papers in the conference provided a good collection of explorations into the 0-impact approach, and showed that this is a path to follow in the next conferences and events.

The best contributions have been collected in a book, with the same title as the conference.

The conference was an ambitious organisation, being an example of cross border co-operation and knowledge exchange. It was organised by 4 partners, and took place in 4 locations in three countries. Participants were transported by bus in order to have the first day in Maastricht (the Netherlands) and Heusden-Zolder (Belgium), the second day in Liege (Belgium), and the third day in Aachen (Germany). Not only countries changed, but also the character of locations. In Maastricht the conference venue was an old factory, refurbished with second-hand furniture (that was for sale on the site, contributing to re-use of goods), with sustainable regional catering and it was the spot where participants collected their sustainable name badge (made of bamboo fibres, corn plastic and biodegradable plastic). All this created a pleasant intimate atmosphere, very well suited for informal contacts. In Liege attendees were guests in the University’s lecture rooms, right amongst the students. In Aachen they were guests in the famous town hall, in which Charles the Great was crowned long ago. Three beautiful locations, showing the variety of the built environment and solutions to reduce environmental burden, by re-using, multiple use and integration.

Students of the three participating universities were invited each day and joined in different parts of the programme, contributing from their points of view to the discussion on 0-impact. On the second day, a floating dinner from Liege to Maastricht completed the Euregional experience.

On the day after the conference ended, 3 excursions throughout the Euregion were organised, and participants who arrived before or stayed after the conference were able to enjoy the different cities.

Thoughts on 0-impact
It is obvious that when the limits are pushed towards 0-impact, a clear picture emerges of what is essential and what is of secondary importance or even “luxury”. It was no wonder that some topics, addressing this
hierarchy, became a hot topic during the conference, both in the presentation and discussions.

A first hot topic when pushing the limits was the need to make choices between what has priority and what has not and to develop protocols about how to handle and deal with this. A practical example came from the development of a zero emissions polar station. A protocol decides where the electricity goes first (circles of priority), and decides on remaining distribution.

A second hot topic turned out to be the way money was mobilised to support change. It was not a discussion about details of taxes and subsidies, but a discussion on the overall potential when money is mobilised like in the town of Gussing, Austria, where local money stays in the local economy instead of being used to buy external energy. The idea of RiBuilT is to use these contributions as examples for developing a 0-impact Euregion, investigating mobilisation of economic values, greenhouse reduction plans, local production of energy and more.

Concept Dating Cafes
A new feature in the conference was the attempt to translate technical and scientific finding directly into usable forms for implementation. For this reason a series of parallel sessions was organised to discuss these conclusions with market parties, and to explore the use of creating a practical roadmap for the market stakeholders. The success was limited, due to the fact that only a few participants found their way to these sessions, which was related mainly to the lack of communication for the transition process towards 0-impact and the communication to participants of the conference. However, some results were obtained and were put into a roadmap for the Euregion, which was handed over to the Mayors of Maastricht and Heerlen during the closing plenary session.

Nils Larsson presents his Plans for Rapid Reduction of CO² in the famous Crowning Hall of the Aachen Townhouse

Wrapping up
Many issues were examined during the conference days, and examples of successful projects and strategies were seen, as well as gaps in knowledge and understanding of implementation of 0-options in a complicated world. How to proceed from here, to set the transition towards 0-impact in motion, to provide the knowledge and insights, tools and strategies to make 0-impact work? The knowledge presented at the conference will be evaluated and published. One such future opportunity will be at the SB11 Global Conference Sustainable Building in Helsinki 2011. We will continue working on 0-impact, within RiBuilT, but also within international networks, like some working groups of iiSBE, CIB and IEA. A next conference is planned for October 2012, focussing solely on implementing 0-options in existing buildings and neighbourhoods. Before this conference takes place, workshops will be initiated on issues like "principles and protocols". For the Euregion, the three countries and 4 languages, the roadmap, set up during the conference, will be developed further to a real instrument that can be used to realise a 0-impact Euregion.

Conclusions
There is one conclusion that can be drawn already: people can make an enormous difference: people with a drive, people with leadership qualities. All keynote speakers were examples of this themselves, and therefore not surprising they had one and the same general message: "Just start doing it!". It was best illustrated with the words of Peter Vadasz, Mayor of Gussing, saying: "It is always: we should, we could, we might, we try…. But it should be: no, we will and we do!". And he did, and now Güssing is producing more energy than it consumes. He proudly announces: "When prices are climbing we start smiling."

A second conclusion is that the advantages of sustainability should be made economically visible and aimed at a regional level.

A third conclusion is that the focus in the near future should be on the priorities and protocols on the use of land, water, material, air and energy use.

So that is a lesson for everyone: Start, learn on the job, and ask help from experts and anybody that can give directions. To make a plan on possible rapid greenhouse gas reduction, implement elements towards a 0-impact region, and transform the built environment into a 0-impact built environment with closed loop, before it transforms the community. Starting today.

Additional Information
Material presented at SB10 Western Europe can be obtained from the website: www.ribuilt.eu.

Other SB conference
Information about other SB10 conferences and about the SB11 World Conference in 2011 can be found in the SB10/11 Portal (see here).

A separate news article on the Proceedings has also been published (see here).