

# BUILDING SUSTAINABILITY CERTIFICATION

## A case for all and not only for the exemplars

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I often come across potential pursuers of building sustainability certification. Initially enthusiastic aiming to achieve a very high certification rating and even flirting with the concept of innovation. Just to find out after the first encounter that their potential rating is well below their unsuspecting expectation. It is at that moment when they surrender and finally opt out.

From my first encounter with sustainability of the built environment, beyond any technological advancements, I was trying hard to find the innovation in it. At a fundamental level it is hard to define “getting the balance right” an innovative concept. The Greeks expressed this as “pan metron ariston” thousands years ago although finding hard these days to implement it.

This obsession or self-imposed barrier of high rating in certification, aiming to the sky, is the primary reason for a stakeholder to opt out before even trying. However, building sustainability is not about the excellence of the 2%.

By default, it does not work like that. To have a significant impact in a larger scale, infinitesimal steps are needed from the majority. That is, these synchronized small steps that can make the difference rather than the quantum leap of the distinguished 2%.

So how do we go about it? How do we convince that sustainability is not only about exemplar performance? Well as we always did in the past. Initially is to inspire. Communicate the why in priority. Then after, make small consistent steps, getting into the culture which can possibly lead towards an exemplar performance through daily small wins. This attitude helps for the solid establishment of a sustainable culture that develops. Beware of the flamboyant exception of the one off project. This does not last and is not able to make an impact in a larger scale. Because sustainability is an ongoing concern for all of us.

Having been the assessor and consultant for a recent certified building in Europe with a relatively low rating I sat back and pondered: Ok this is not the sustainability gem building. Is there value in this act? You bet there is

- Because the stakeholder is a large property company, and smaller (wannabe larger) companies will ponder twice than me.
- The property company after its first experience can easier apply sustainability to more of its buildings. It's called the learning curve.
- Fellow companies will overcome the complexity of dreaming high and opt for implementing realistically. It's called entering competition or within a greater context being part of the community.
- And bottom line a low certification rating for a stakeholder is far better than the inert unclassified wonderer.

Last but not least, one might argue why certify at all? The answer lies in the inherent complex nature of building sustainability, where currently, many stakeholders need the guidance and support as well as the recognition. And add to this the necessity of an independent third party intervention in order to avoid “self-complacency” cases such as the VW one.

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