**LEVEL(S):**

A common language for building assessment

**Introduction**

Level(s) is a European framework to help built-environment sector professionals assess and monitor the sustainability performance of buildings. If you operate an assessment or certification scheme in the European Union, this publication can help you understand how Level(s) complements your work.

**Key benefits**

Level(s) is a free, open-source tool enabling building projects to assess, report on and improve their sustainability performance from design until end of life.

Based on existing standards and circularity principles, it uses a small number of indicators to measure carbon, materials, water, health, comfort and climate change impacts.

Developed as part of the EU’s green transition towards carbon neutrality, Level(s) provides the bridge between the ambitions of the European Green Deal and the realities of professional building operations. It supports key policy initiatives such as the Circular Economy Action Plan and the Renovation Wave and contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals.

**A simple reference point**

Although Level(s) is not a certification scheme, its simple framework helps schemes speak the same language.

Level(s) establishes a clear set of sustainability priorities for schemes to address, which can bring greater consistency to the certification market. Its common language also facilitates consistent assessment methods, reporting and data comparison between projects and countries.

While Level(s) provides a common reference point at EU level, sustainable building projects may see assessment and certification schemes as key sources of external verification and inspiration at national level. By aligning with Level(s), schemes can therefore play an important role in its implementation across Europe.

Through this, schemes will contribute to EU sustainability goals and keep up with other market leaders who are already aligning themselves with Level(s).
LIFE Level(s): Green Building Councils leading by example

Since 2019, the EU-funded LIFE Level(s) project has been supporting the alignment of assessment and certification schemes and public procurement criteria with Level(s).

Running until 2022, the project aims to mainstream building sustainability by raising awareness of Level(s) and promoting the use of its indicators. The partners also worked with building projects to provide recommendations during the Level(s) development and testing phase, helping to shape the framework's final form.

As well as running capacity-building activities, one of the project's key initiatives has been the development of a mapping tool and reporting template to help assessment and certification schemes align their work with Level(s) (see final page for more information).

Some of the project partners have already mapped their own schemes against Level(s) and now refer to the indicators in their certification criteria, as Anna Braune of the German Sustainable Building Council (DGNB) explains.

'We use and refer to all appropriate, recognised European standards in our schemes,' says Anna. 'This makes our schemes stable and applicable throughout Europe and even abroad.'

'The first mapping of our new construction scheme against Level(s) was done against the beta version, back in 2017,' Anna recalls. 'Deviations from the principles defined by the framework could therefore be prevented when we released our current version in 2018. The mapping of our new construction scheme against the final Level(s) framework, released in 2020, therefore showed high consistency.'

'Some aspects were new to us and inspired us to use Level(s) in the development of our new scheme for renovation, not only because we see Level(s) to be a central instrument of the EU’s Renovation Wave, but also because it contains new, very meaningful elements,' Anna adds.

Aside from certification, the DGNB draws on Level(s) in activities such as its DGNB Academy, a training and knowledge-sharing initiative for building professionals. It is also developing guidelines on the inclusion of whole life carbon, whole life cost and indoor air quality best practices in public planning and procurement processes.

The LIFE Level(s) project partners
- Green Building Council España (Spain)
- Alliance HQE-GBC (France)
- Croatia Green Building Council
- Dutch Green Building Council
- German Sustainable Building Council
- Green Building Council Finland
- Green Building Council Italia (Italy)
- Irish Green Building Council

Visit the LIFE Level(s) website: lifelevels.eu
Speaking from experience

Anna Braune and Remy Heijer have been closely involved in LIFE Level(s) and the Level(s) development and testing phase. Both of their organisations also manage certification schemes, so they are uniquely placed to share their experiences and insights.

On the role of certification schemes...

‘We use our certification scheme to develop clear, measurable and tangible methods and benchmarks for all market participants to avoid “greenwashing”. Market participants use certification to set project-specific targets, steer their processes and achieve high, externally verified quality. Whole life carbon reduction requires whole life carbon assessments and meaningful targets.’

‘The role of certification schemes is an important example and guideline which is already being recognised by the industry. […] BREEAM-NL [our scheme] helps the industry make circularity and whole life carbon measurable and concrete. […] Certification schemes are not just there to certify buildings, but also to inspire other buildings to be more sustainable.’

On the importance of cooperation across Member States...

‘We have four partner organisations across Europe (Austria, Denmark, Spain and Switzerland) using the DGNB scheme. For most of our partners, compliance with Level(s) was a main reason to enter the partnership with us and more countries have shown interest in partnering with us. If we all use our organisational instruments, we have very large and parallel impacts.’

‘I see and feel that everybody is looking for “one standard” in sustainability. […] I believe we do not need the same certification scheme in every country and for every building type, but it would be a major contribution to base the certification on the same indicators and measuring methods. This is where Level(s) sets the bar and helps create this alignment.’

On the impact of Level(s)...

‘It has aligned many stakeholders and helps to speak with one voice. […] In future, if all relevant European institutions were to use Level(s), or elements of it, consistently to drive sustainable building and management practices, we could save a lot of time spent on discussions on the “right methodology”, the “right measures” and the “right focal points”.’

‘I see the impact of Level(s) as a signal for the industry that the EU has taken a point of view on the sustainability goals. This will have a major impact on the industry as it gives definitions on sustainability internationally, as a lot of companies are searching for the way to go and how to prove and invest in sustainability.’
Useful tools

If you operate an assessment or certification scheme or are developing a new scheme, these tools may help you get used to working with Level(s).

The LIFE Level(s) project has developed a **mapping tool** to compare schemes against the Level(s) framework. According to Anna Braune, the tool can help schemes measure their conformity with the Level(s) indicators and identify areas where they might want to update their criteria.

‘I can only encourage all European scheme operators to use the mapping tool and to use the results for their next scheme update,’ recommends Anna.

LIFE Level(s) has also developed a **reporting template** that summarises the results of a Level(s) assessment in a single document. This tool can help demonstrate to clients how Level(s) works in practice.

‘I highly recommend for any certification scheme, especially when starting, to take the template as a starting point. This will help builders and manufacturers to trust in these indicators and invest in the way of measuring,’ says Remy Heijer.

The European Commission is also developing Level(s) **eLearning material** and a **calculation and assessment tool**, both of which will be made available on the Level(s) website. The calculation and assessment tool will enable users to collect and structure data to help report against the Level(s) indicators in a consistent manner.

The LIFE Level(s) mapping tool and reporting template are available here: lifelevels.eu/materials

Visit the Level(s) website: ec.europa.eu/environment/levels_en

Join the Level(s) LinkedIn group to engage with other built-environment professionals: linkedin.com/groups/12501037