CESBA - Initiative Policy Paper
Towards a Common Sustainable Building Assessment in Europe
Buildings play a central role in our societies, providing places to live, work and enjoy leisure time. They are the core of our urban environment, impacting the social, economic and ecological aspects of our lives such as our health, comfort and safety. On average, we spend over 80% of our lives within buildings1 and the construction sector is nowadays a key component of our economy. Generating nearly 10% of the overall European GDP and sustaining 20 million jobs,2 its performance has a considerable impact on European growth and competitiveness. Furthermore, the construction sector has a significant influence on environment, energy consumption and climate change. Alone, it represents around 42% of final energy consumption and 36% of CO2 emissions throughout the EU, and is a major consumer of intermediate products (raw materials, chemicals, electrical and electronic equipment, etc.).3

Therefore, the building sector has been identified as a key sector where action is needed. It has become a cornerstone of the EU climate protection program and has a crucial role to play in the achievement of the long term 80-95% greenhouse gas emission reduction objective. In this perspective, the EU released a series of political and legislative initiatives in order to reduce the environmental impact of buildings by improving their overall resource efficiency and, as a consequence, enhancing the competitiveness of construction businesses and the quality of life of European citizen.

Meaningful progress has already been made by the construction sector in order to achieve better economic and environmental sustainability, but the gap with long-term European goals still remains substantial and will require significant changes in the way we think about buildings. We simply cannot continue to build in the same way as we did previously. Buildings must be viewed holistically and examined in the context of their impact on their whole environment and across their life-cycle. There are large-scale challenges (such as investment, human capital, environmental requirements, regulation and access to markets)4 that the construction sector will have to address to be able to contribute substantially to the competitiveness of Europe and the adaptation to climate change.

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1 Report The distinctive benefits of glazing; the social and economic contributions of glazed areas to sustainability in the built environment, David Strong Consulting, November 2012
2 Official Figures of the EU Commission in Communication from the Commission to the European parliament and the Council “Strategy for the sustainable competitiveness of the construction sector and its enterprises” COM/2012/0433 final
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However, these challenges could also lead to new economic, environmental and social opportunities.

Within this strategic context, building assessment systems are crucial tools in driving the built environment towards sustainability, but the plethora and mismatch of buildings regulations at regional, national and EU level leads to considerable administrative burdens. They increase compliance costs for businesses, create confusion among the actors and lead to a very fragmented sustainable construction market. There are currently more than 60 building assessment systems in Europe. Consequently, a comparison of building assessment results is nearly impossible and the application of such tools is limited.

As pointed out by the European Commission in its recent Communications “Resource efficiency opportunities in the building sector” (COM (2014) 445 final) and “Strategy for the sustainable competitiveness of the construction sector and its enterprises” (COM/2012/0433 final) one of the main issues in the building sector remains the lack of comparable and accessible data and assessment methodologies.

Therefore, a harmonization of building assessment systems is needed in order to make the quality of the built environment comparable and enable policymakers to better steer the development of the sector. Furthermore, it will also enhance knowledge diffusion among companies and thus improve the control of the quality of buildings and eliminate export burdens for SMEs.

In order to overcome this challenge and to be in line with European Commission objectives, the Common European Sustainable Building Assessment (CESBA) is a collective European initiative which will allow businesses, governments and users to be more conscious of the opportunities and environmental improvement promises related to sustainable buildings.

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5 Results of the Open House project survey - http://www.openhouse-fp7.eu/assets/files/D.1.2.1_120227.pdf
The need for an integrated and harmonized approach

CESBA stands for Common European Sustainable Building Assessment and represents a bottom-up initiative towards promoting a harmonization of sustainable building assessment throughout Europe.

As underlined by the European Commission „Communication on Resource efficiency opportunities in the building sector“ (COM (2014) 445 final): „There is a risk that the indicators they [Member States] eventually develop will differ, leading to an unnecessarily complex business environment.“

In order to tackle this issue and ensure the effectiveness of certification labels, CESBA proposes to create a common and integrated approach promoting a harmonization of sustainable building assessments throughout Europe.

However, CESBA is not a new assessment scheme and is not in competition with other certification systems but promotes low-cost, mass-oriented, operable certification processes.

The importance of the local context in sustainable building environment (strengths of local economy, natural resources for eco-materials, climate, local building culture...) does not allow the use of one common assessment tool all over Europe, but speaks in favour of regional ones.

In order to be able to compare buildings and to share experiences between public and private stakeholders in Europe, CESBA promotes a harmonized and integrated approach, which is flexible enough to consider regional needs and circumstances, and to provide an open source framework with minimum requirements to ensure the quality of certification processes.

Actually, CESBA is more than a European assessment tool and will allow taking existing assessment building schemes and upcoming ones into account.
CESBA wants to reach 100% certified buildings in 2030
The goal of CESBA is to facilitate the diffusion and adoption of sustainable built environment principles among all the stakeholders of the building sector through the use of harmonized assessment systems in the whole life cycle of the built environment. CESBA is a meeting point between top-down and bottom-up approaches.

But CESBA is more than the assessment of sustainable buildings; it is also a process towards new building and neighbourhood standards in Europe.

Target users

At the crossroads of economic, social and environmental needs, CESBA aims at a wide range of users including:

- End-users of buildings
- Architects and designers of buildings and their surroundings
- Construction-related SMEs and workers
- Builders and developers of existing and new buildings
- Regional and national legislative bodies and policy-makers
- Public administration at local, regional and national levels dealing with incentive systems and technical aspects of sustainable buildings
- Energy institutes and energy providers
- Universities and research institutions...

Tools and services

To help authorities and users at the local level to move forward the sustainable building agenda, CESBA identified the stakeholder’s needs and addresses them through a concrete and efficient answer by providing tools and services.

Training  CESBA facilitates training measures to enhance the awareness on a sustainable built environment and provides education material, excursions, seminars and conducts public relation work.

Certification  Existing building assessment systems are very diverse. CESBA wants to compare different systems and harmonize them.

Services  CESBA services include assistance with organisation and coordination of sustainable building projects, information and communication channels, technical support and much more.

Knowledge hub  With the CESBA wiki (www.cesba.eu), CESBA offers a knowledge hub to collect and to disseminate outputs from EU projects related to Sustainable Building Assessment.
Nine Principles

The user first!
Sustainability
Regional contextualization
Comparability
Mass-oriented
Simple to use
Open source
Co-creation
Transparency

CESBA helps to harmonize assessment approaches through principles, methods and indicators:

Indicators

In the development of regional assessment tools harmonized by CESBA, the reference performance indicators come into play. The number and types of indicators depend on its scope but are organized in the following five issues covering the whole life-cycle of buildings.

Reference performance indicators

- Economic quality
- Environmental quality
- Social quality
- Process quality
- Location territory, Site

CESBA Cycles

The CESBA cycle conveys the concept of CESBA that is defined by harmonized indicators, tools and services usable during the whole building life cycle and an ongoing dialogue with society.
 CESBA is a European policy driver towards more sustainable buildings

The policy framework of the European Union related to buildings has been quickly evolving over the past years and the European Commission started recently to move from an energy efficiency focused approach to a holistic strategy looking at a wider range of resource use and environmental impacts, across the life-cycle of buildings.

Nevertheless, implementation and the authority to regulate mainly remain in the hands of national and regional governments and the lack of political awareness about the related benefits of sustainable buildings (economic, social and environmental) lead to a deep shortage of political actions in this field.

CESBA is working to help raising awareness and demand for better environmental performing buildings by improving knowledge and information regarding resource use and related environmental impacts in relation to buildings. Therefore, CESBA is the perfect approach to support decision making among the whole construction sector from the extraction of the resources to the final user.

### Why do we need to take actions?

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<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Need to increase significantly the number of buildings assessed in Europe (less than 1% are certified)</td>
<td>CESBA promotes an affordable, mass-oriented certification process that can be standardized</td>
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<td>Complex comparability between the actual assessment schemes</td>
<td>CESBA encourages a common approach to sustainable building strategies</td>
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<td>Low awareness and consideration of specific and regional needs (e.g. local industries, local building culture, climate ...)</td>
<td>CESBA promotes the use of regional assessment tools taking into account to local specificities</td>
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<td>Risk that the indicators developed independently of each other by few Member States will differ, leading to a complex business environment</td>
<td>CESBA calls for the selection of a European core of reliable indicators to assess the environmental performance of buildings throughout their life-cycle</td>
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<td>Lack of political awareness and incentives about the related benefits of sustainable buildings (economic but also social and environmental)</td>
<td>CESBA strengthens decision awareness of environmental issues in regional policy</td>
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<td>Lack of long-term sustainability for the building sector</td>
<td>CESBA participates in the growth of the sustainable building sector and reduces market fragmentation</td>
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As mentioned above, the European Union released a series of political and legislative initiatives related to building in order to achieve the EU2020 strategy goals on smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. These different policies have, as main objectives, to increase the competitiveness of the construction sector while ensuring the development of a resource-efficient building stock.

Launched with the involvement of more than 30 public and private organizations from all over Europe, CESBA is more than the assessment of sustainable buildings; CESBA is a process towards new building and neighbourhood standards in Europe. In accordance with the European objectives of territorial cohesion, resource efficiency and sustainable development, CESBA proposes a framework on a set of core indicators going along with a reference assessment method and a European signature concept.

While existing EU policy initiatives in the area of environmental performance of buildings have mainly targeted energy efficiency, CESBA proposes an innovative approach covering all aspects along the building cycle: from planning to construction, from tendering to monitoring. Furthermore, it integrates the certification processes and the need for training and communication.

In this perspective, CESBA welcomes the release of a recent Communication from the European Commission on “Resource efficiency opportunities in the building sector” as well as the launch of a building Eco-label within the near future. These initiatives will be very important for public authorities and will provide a significant tool to help public owners to steer energy and ecological performance in the process of the procurement. This Eco-label must not be fitted only on international certification standards, but it also needs to respect regional needs. CESBA wants to contribute to the debate and be one of the main interlocutors of the European Commission in order to achieve the ambitious EU goals regarding the sustainability of the built environment.

By 2020 the renovation and construction of buildings and infrastructure will be made to high resource efficiency levels. The Life-cycle approach will be widely applied; all new buildings will be nearly zero-energy and highly material efficient and policies for renovating the existing building stock will be in place so that it is cost-efficiently refurbished at a rate of 2% per year. 70% of non-hazardous construction and demolition waste will be recycled.

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1 Communication from the Commission to the European parliament and the Council; „Roadmap to a resource efficient Europe” (COM (2011) 571)
The use of harmonized buildings assessment systems can deliver important economic savings and carbon emission reductions resulting in multiple benefits such as job creation, economic growth, and independence from external fossil energy resources, sustainable and affordable energy services, improved public health and thermal comfort. It can provide local and regional authorities with adaptive capacities and resilience to climate change and represents a real opportunity for regional development thanks to the interaction between existing sectorial policies, funding bodies and institutions.

CESBA is based on cooperation between public authorities and scientific bodies to develop affordable and operable indicators.

Furthermore, new opportunities will arise resulting from the implementation of a holistic common certification procedure taking into account local specific priorities, cultures and construction practices. This approach will increase the cooperation among stakeholders and foster new policies along the CESBA principles and create therefore a unique opportunity for regional development.

Finally, the use of a common sustainable building assessment methodology like CESBA contributes to the adoption of eco-conditionality criteria in public building procurement which are essential to widely spread a sustainable building culture in Europe.
Policy recommendations on European building regulation

More than a common European approach to assess the environmental performance of buildings, CESBA also wants to promote a new culture of buildings in Europe – one that will be more likely to take into account the overall impact of construction on the European environment. In this perspective, the CESBA partners propose several concrete recommendations.

1. Promotion of a common open source approach towards EU building assessment
   - Adoption of affordable and operable key performance indicators at EU level
   - Necessity to coordinate diverging/different national approaches
   - Develop comparable assessments
   - Share best practices
   - Use online tools (social media, platforms) for networking and creating synergies
   - Avoid a complex business environment
   - Integration of regional and local specificities

2. Promotion of the use of assessment in public initiatives for the built environment
   - The EU Ecolabel for buildings currently under development could benefit from the CESBA methodology and key performance indicators
   - Introduce mandatory EU Green Public Procurement criteria based on the agreed EU Framework of common indicators
   - EU funding for public building projects must become conditional upon applying Green Public Procurement criteria
   - And also in incentives based policy, building codes, urban plans...

3. Consider the building in its local and regional context
   - Reach political and management support at regional and local levels
   - Achieve Regional sustainable building strategies and action plans
   - Monitor local needs and specificities
   - Favour local practices and resources in the building sector
   - Using EU Regional Funds to develop a long term sustainable building framework
   - Creation and stimulation of sustainable building clusters

On this base, CESBA calls on both the public and private sectors to gather their knowledge and power to move the sustainable building agenda forward. These joint efforts could lead to tremendous impacts that will benefit the people as well as the environment.
Conclusion

The respect of the Europe 2020 strategy goals for growth, employment and preservation of our environment is crucial for both the future of Europe and the credibility of the EU action to European citizens. The process recently launched by the European Commission to develop a European approach to assess the environmental performance of buildings illustrates the willingness of European institutions to be back on track and reach their political objectives.

However, as rightly advocated in the recent Communication from the Commission, the creation of a harmonized approach cannot afford to ignore the diversity of contexts and local issues and should be flexible enough to allow a territorial adaptation.

For this reason, CESBA calls local and regional authorities to seize the numerous opportunities offered by the new programming period (2014-2020) of EU regional funds and the current implementation of operational programs to adapt its principles in their own development strategies and action plans.

In order to promote its vision of a harmonized European high quality and sustainable built environment, CESBA is ready to share with European institutions, local governments, and stakeholders from the building sector, the experience and knowledge collected to support the establishment of an affordable and harmonized building assessment framework in Europe.
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The opinions expressed are those of the author(s) only and should not be considered as representative of the European Commission’s official position. Neither the European Commission nor any person acting on behalf of the Commission is responsible for the use which might be made of the following information.

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